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Lance Rowland: Okay. Please begin. Give us your name and where and when you were born, please.

Vicki Santa: My name is Vicki Santa, and I was born in Chicago, Illinois, April 5, 1952.

LR: And can you talk about growing up in Chicago, what that was like?

VS: I grew up—I started in the city, on the Near North Side. My parents had an apartment in what was called a “four flat”: two apartments up, two apartments down. I attended public schools. We walked to school. My school did not have a lunchroom; schools didn’t have lunchrooms back then. We walked home for lunch and back to school in the afternoon. We didn’t have regular P.E., we had recess out in the schoolyard, a gravel schoolyard with a little bit of playground equipment. I loved school from a very early age. I was a very good student.

And when I was ready to go into the third grade, my parents moved out into the suburbs. They wanted me to have the best possible education. I had been in an experimental program in my city school: my principal was getting his Ph.D., I expect, and took ten of us with the highest IQ scores out of the first grade class and put us in a third grade class when we were six. His theory was that we would all catch up very quickly if just left to our own devices and be doing third grade work very quickly, and it turned out to be the case. Unfortunately, after third grade, the rest of my class moved on with the third graders and into fifth, sixth, and seventh grade; I went to the suburbs, where they put me into the third grade class ’cause I was eight. I was very bored for about two and a half years in

school, and it was very traumatic as a child, you know. I had done very, very well, and suddenly there was nothing for me to do in school. I already knew how to do all that. I was doing algebra, and they were trying to teach me multiplication tables. So we eventually worked through that, I guess, as a family.

I'm Jewish. I attended Hebrew school and Sunday school. I had a big grounding in religious education as well. I was a Brownie and a Girl Scout. I was never very good at those things. On the Girl Scout overnights, everybody else was learning camping skills; I was the one who was chosen to make the centerpiece for the table. (both laugh) Just never really had it in me. We had seasons up north. We went ice skating in the winter; we played outside in the summer; not a whole lot of organized activity outside of lessons for dance and piano, things like that.

LR: Well, being so young and moving out to the suburbs, was it a big change for you?

VS: Oh, it was huge.

LR: Yeah.

VS: Oh, it was just huge. I moved to a school where it was—I won't say predominantly white—almost exclusively white area. The city was much more—although I didn't think about it this way at the time; I had to become an adult and look back at that. The school was a full day school; you didn't come home for lunch. And they had gym class, which I had never encountered. There were all these new things, and I don't know if they do it any better now, but they sure as heck didn't do a good job of acculturating a new student to all these new ideas about how school should be.

LR: And so you finished high school in the suburbs?

VS: Yeah. Yeah, I attended New Trier Township High School, which at the time was, depending on the survey you looked at, either the number one or the number two school in the country in public high schools. School taxes where my parents lived were enormously high, and they spent the money actually on things like facilities and teachers. I had a superb high school education, equivalent to—I'd put it up against any private school in the country. I was very, very lucky to have come through school at that time. My parents sacrificed a lot for us to be in that school system. I have a younger sister; she's four years younger than I am. Yeah, the transition to the suburbs was abrupt and not entirely pleasant. Once we got the school thing worked out it was better. I really did a lot

of good schoolwork and found my little pathetic social niche that it was. (laugh) I wasn't good at that, either.

LR: After you finished high school, did you go immediately to college?

VS: Yeah. About 95 percent of my high school graduating class went on to college, more a function of the wealth of the area. The suburbs I lived in were—per capita income was huge compared to other places, so just about everybody went on to college. I went to the University of Rochester in upstate New York for almost two years. I kept getting pneumonia and spent most of my time sick and in the infirmary, and in the interim my parents had moved to Florida, so I just gave up and bagged it. U of R is an excellent, excellent school, just half a step below Ivy League.

LR: Is that a state school?

VS: No, it's a private university. Again, you know, costs were huge, but nothing like now. I was just talking with a friend of mine who's got a daughter at Boston University, and when I found out what he was paying a year for her to go there—and I applied to and was actually accepted at BU, and chose not to go there; I got a better scholarship deal from Rochester. But it's like eight times what I was paying, and that was hugely expensive back then. I graduated in 1970, which was at the height of the Vietnam conflict, so that was the other impetus, I think, for the high college enrollment rate from my graduating class, even people who might not otherwise have done so. Certainly the boys were enrolled in college whether they wanted to go or not, because otherwise they went to Vietnam. So that was—that whole political era colored my later high school and my entire college years. It was a big part of the world and how we viewed it, certainly I did.

LR: Where do you go after Rochester? You came to Florida?

VS: My parents were living in Miami. I came down there and ended up at the University of South Florida here in Tampa. I graduated from there in seventy-four [1974]. That was also a cultural shock, my college experience. When I was in high school I used to hang out at Northwestern University up in Evanston: a private university, very old, very stately, buildings dating back to the late 1800s. The University of Rochester dates back to the early 1800s; there are actually buildings that are just post Revolutionary War. But I got to USF and the bus dropped me off in the parking lot and I looked around, and it looked very different then than it does now. About a third of the buildings were there that are there now. Mostly it was big open space, very few trees. It was hot—it was July, it was hot. And I'm looking and going, "This is it?" (laughs)

But I found my way. They didn't have coursework in my major, so I had to create a major of my own in interdisciplinary—I was an urban studies major and there was no urban studies program at USF at the time, which is not what they told me when I submitted my application. But that's where I ended up, and I had a great advisor who worked with me on an interdisciplinary program, so I got to take all the courses I wanted and get 'A's in them and count them towards major credit. It was a wonderful thing.

LR: So what was your—when you initially got into urban studies, what you did you see in the future? How were you gonna apply that?

VS: I was going to law school, but I really had an interest in history and sociology and I guess what they call the “urban experience” at the time. I grew up in the city as much as I could, even when I was living out in the suburbs. We went back to the city for everything. You didn't do much in the suburbs except those kinds of organized activities. I was talking about this with someone last week. We went regularly to the Art Institute, went to the Museum of Science and Industry, the Natural History Museum, the Adler Planetarium, the Lincoln Park Zoo. It wasn't until I was in my twenties—actually, when I came here—that I realized that not every place was like that. Rochester, although it's a much smaller city, has a huge history of philanthropy and culture and some very high end industry: Eastman Kodak is up there, and there's a lot of money there all the time. So they had museums and planetariums. It wasn't until I got to Tampa in 1972 that I realized that that's not everywhere. It was quite a shock.

And we went back to the city—I'm a Cubs fan; I spent my summers at Wrigley. We went back to the city for ball games and all, all the other things that really make life pleasant. The suburbs had this—we wouldn't have described it that way at the time, but kind of a Disneyfied version of what life is all about: very white bread, very organized. The city—we liked to go hang out down on Rush Street in Old Town where all the hippies were, and then we were the hippies and we hung out in Old Town and waved at the tour buses that came through.

LR: So you graduated in seventy-four [1974] from USF. Did you apply your major—you applied to law school?

VS: No, my first job after I graduated, actually, was selling flowers on the street corner at Nebraska [Avenue] and Fowler [Avenue], from a five gallon bucket full of carnations. (laughs) My parents were so proud. (both laugh) I was pretty burned out. I had worked my way through my last couple of years, and I just knocked around for a couple of years and then I applied to law school at the University of Florida and was accepted in seventy-six [1976]. It was quite obvious that there was nothing I could do with an

interdisciplinary social sciences major, except sell flowers or wash dishes. So I went to law school for two semesters—three semesters. I loved studying the law, but the idea of actually doing anything with it went away very quickly. The only thing I think I could possibly have done if I had stuck it out is teach, and I really didn't have the temperament for teaching. So I studied what I wanted to study, and then I left law school.

LR: And went back to Tampa?

VS: Well, I hung out in Gainesville for a while. Great place, Gainesville, wonderful place to hang out and have friends and lots of social activities. No jobs, absolutely none. There are 40,000 students—this was in the seventies [1970s]; it's probably more now. Forty thousand students and faculty, and everybody has at least a master's degree. I was waiting tables at this little dive diner, and everybody there had at least a master's degree, with the exception of one person, the manager. Even the busboys and the dishwashers were in graduate school or had completed their degrees. So there wasn't any future there, unless you wanted to just lay around and get loaded. (laughs)

I ended up back here in Tampa in seventy-nine [1979], I guess, just as the station was getting on the air, although I had no contact with it then. Came back and went to work in construction, which is what I'd done in my latter years of college. The guy I was dating was in the construction trade. He kept lamenting how stupid the people were that worked for him, so I thought, "Well, I'm smart. I can go do some of that." And I did, and I worked my way into a supervisory—project supervision level work. I did that for about fifteen years.

LR: All over Tampa, or certain areas?

VS: I started working in Tampa, and did a lot of different things through that time. I was a carpenter's helper, I was a laborer, I worked for a concrete crew for a day or two. (laughs) Not very good at that: too much physical labor. And then I took a job as a project clerk, which basically involved doing all the paperwork, on an apartment construction job. That was in about eighty-two [1982] or eighty-three [1983]. Worked my way up in that company until I was a project manager, and I got my license as a general contractor—I still hold a GC license, still do a little work now and then. Yeah, it was kind of an interesting time. It was not at all what I'd planned, and certainly not what my parents had planned for me when they were forking out all that money for schools and colleges. But that's where I ended up. I was quite good at it.

LR: How are you introduced to WMNF?

VS: A friend of mine—back when I first moved back to Tampa in seventy-nine [1979], I was broke and living out in the boonies in the northwest section of Hillsborough County. I had no car; I had a tiny little house. He came over with a radio one afternoon and said, “You’ve got to hear these guys on the radio.” It was Phil and Bill on the *Sixties Show*, and I was hooked. I had heard some of the early, early broadcasts, either just before or just as the station was going on the air. They were broadcasting at 88.5, “If you can hear us, call this phone number.” They were doing some testing. I heard a little bit of that but had no idea what was actually going on. My high school had a radio station and I worked there when I was in high school. I had no ambitions for radio; it was just something to do. But it was an actual FM station: it was 50 watts, and we had programs and I had a third-class engineering license. You had to sit for the federal exam and get the license in order to be trusted with the equipment. I used to write news, and I had a folk show.

LR: That was a nice high school.

VS: Oh, it was very nice. It was interesting. Last year or so, I googled my old radio station, high school radio station, to just see if there was anything there. And sure enough, they actually had a Web site and they were streaming, and I turned it on. No idea what that music was, (laughs) whatever high school kids were listening to. And I thought, “Well, this is kind of cool. I’m gonna call them up.” So I called up and I spoke to the station manager, and I introduced myself and I said, “I used to work at WNTH when I was in school; it was a lot of years ago. Now I’m managing a radio station, and I just thought I’d pick up the phone and call you.” He said, “Yeah?” Totally unimpressed. (laughs) Put me right in my place. It was totally meaningless to him, the fact that his station had had a history or a future. It was totally detached from him.

LR: Was this a student?

VS: Yeah, yeah. There was always a faculty advisor, but the manager was always a senior who had worked their way up.

LR: So you become a big fan early on, in the station’s early years. You continue to listen and, I assume, you become a volunteer at some point?

VS: No, I became a contributor. My first pledge was \$5, and I don’t think I paid it. (both laugh) And I remember gathering up change one year to pay a pledge. I kept listening, and I came down a couple of times. I didn’t have a car, and I lived way out the other side of Gunn Highway, which at the time was—it was like a day trip from the city. I didn’t have contact with the station at all while we were on South Boulevard. Once we moved

to the church, I'd come down a couple of times. One time I came down to pay a pledge during a Marathon, and they needed a phone answered so they say, "Answer that phone!" and I did and I took calls for a couple hours. I pledged enough times I knew what to do. (laughs) I didn't really start getting heavily involved until probably early eighties [1980s], probably eighty-three [1983], eighty-four [1984], somewhere in there. I came down and volunteered for a Marathon and I was just hooked. I came down for a phone training meeting, signed up for like eight shows, and been here really ever since.

LR: Is that right?

VS: Yeah.

LR: You were doing anything that needed to be done?

VS: Everything except going on air. I did not do on-air until long after I arrived here. I really had no desire to do it. I had, as I said, done a little as a teenager, but I was just really more into the mission of the station and the camaraderie. I was living out literally in the rural area of the county, and the people who lived out there were wonderful people, but they weren't a lot like me. They had farms and they raised animals and crops, and that certainly wasn't my experience; and politically, we were about as far apart as you can get and still be on the same planet. So coming to the station was like having, you know, this instant group of friends. Not that we all [were] a perfect fit, but I fit a lot better here than I did anywhere else. On the construction site, I was an anomaly, too: I was a woman at a time when women were not at all common on construction sites except as the cleaning crew, or occasionally as a runner or something, but you didn't see women in the trades back in the seventies [1970s] and the early eighties [1980s]. And so this was like coming home. This was a bunch of people who cared about the same kinds of things I cared about and felt the same way, and I found people who loved the Grateful Dead. I'd been all by myself on that for as long as I'd been in Tampa, except for the people I found through here. And my relationship with the station grew from that point.

LR: At what point do you become—do you work here as a paid employee?

VS: Well, that kind of grew, too. I was spending more and more time here. My job as a construction manager was very, very stressful and intensive, but I was very well paid and I had a lot of vacation time. I'd been with the company—when I left the company, I'd been with them fourteen years. So I had lots of vacation time racked up, and I would schedule my vacations during Marathon. I'd take at least a week off so I could work the Marathon. I'd come in and work the *Morning Show* every day and then hang out the rest of the day and make myself useful. The station had a manager back in the mid-nineties

[1990s] who decided that we needed a development director, and I talked my way into the job. I didn't even know I wanted it until just before they closed the application. I was talking with another volunteer, and she says, "Well, why don't you just apply and get the job?" (laughs) And I did, and I came to it with no experience at it other than what I'd done here.

LR: What year is that?

VS: Ninety-eight [1998]. I'd been a volunteer a really long time. I'd put in thousands of hours here, during Marathons, during special events. I was the decorations coordinator for Tropical Heatwave. I worked very closely with Linda Reisinger, our special events coordinator. I'm a very reliable person, and people came to rely on me for lots of different things, whether it was running the *Morning Show* back room or making sure that this, that or the other got done. And I just found the station a continual inspiration, especially in the milieu in which I was working, which were kind of draining both physically and emotionally since they were filled with people whose mindsets were very different from mine. So it was always comfortable for me to be here, and the job opened up and I took the opportunity. Two years later we were for the second time in three years without a station manager, and the board asked me to step in as interim manager and then asked me to stay on.

LR: Two thousand one you took—you were interim?

VS: Interim in 2000, and then in—let's see, she left in January, so I was interim until April of 2000, which was after right after the spring drive that they asked me to stay.

LR: And Janine Farver was the previous—?

VS: No, no, no. No, Janine was a long time ago. The manager just before me was a woman named Jean Palmquist, and before that, the manager who hired me was Richard Eiswerth. He had come to us from the public radio side, from—actually, I think he'd been consulting with CPB for a while. Good manager; he's up at Cincinnati Public Radio; talk to him now and then.

LR: So you're station manager. Can you just elaborate a little bit—obviously, looking around, your office here encompasses a lot of things. (VS laughs) Can you put it kind of in a nutshell a little bit, what you do, some of your responsibilities and duties?

VS: Let's see, how can I describe this? Herding cats, corralling Mercury? I don't know how old you are; I don't know if you remember the old *Ed Sullivan Show*, a variety show that used to be on. There used to be a guy that was on pretty regularly, one of the classic variety things: there was a long table with a bunch of plates lined up on it on big, tall sticks. He'd get the plates spinning on top of the sticks, and these little skinny sticks'd be standing all in a row along the table, and he'd have to run from one to the other and shake the stick a little bit to keep the plate spinning. That's my job. There's a variety of different kinds of plates. There's programming plates and fundraising plates, and nurturing the board and nurturing the volunteers and nurturing the staff, and growing the station and keeping us on the air: those are all the plates. There's probably more; there are special events plates, and nurturing the community and staying in touch with the community and all that. One way or another, it comes back here.

The staff is superb. Most of the staff has been here a lot longer than I have. Rob has been here, of course, from the very beginning, Rob Lorei, our news director. He was one of the founding members of the station, went door to door before there was a radio station to raise money to put the station on the air. We have several volunteers who are still here who arrived in that capacity. Our program director, Randy Wynne, has been here over twenty years. Our business manager has been here twenty years. So there's a continuity among the staff, the senior staff, that has stood the station in good stead. There were many times where the station was without a station manager, and the staff managed on a consensus basis and got the job done. So for me to step in when I did, we were in the midst of a capital campaign, just at the beginning stages of it. We needed to raise money for a new building. The board had made the commitment, but there'd been no real money raised at that point. And I was coming out of the development position; I had designed the campaign, so I just took one step up and ran it from the other chair.

What I do, basically, is I have the administrative side of my role, like any small business. We have a budget, we have expenses, we have revenue to generate, and that's the administrative side. Employee evaluations and making sure you're dotting all the I's and crossing all the T's for the legalities of not only the regular business sources but the FCC and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, all those kinds of thing. And then there's the whole people component, trying to mesh fifteen staff members and 200 volunteers and 100,000 listeners into a really, truly, organic, ever changing—the station's never the same two days in a role.

LR: Well, it sounds like the challenge is obviously keeping all those plates spinning at once. Which one of those areas do you think is the most challenging to you?

VS: I think it's trying to keep all the people kind of—not marching in step, but heading in the same direction, and judging what that direction is supposed to be on any given day at any given moment. We have a mission, and our actions are guided by that mission, but

that's open to pretty wide interpretation: 200 volunteers, 200 interpretations of the mission, plus the board, plus the staff, and the listeners. So trying to bring together all the wants and needs that the community expresses and all the wants and needs of the individuals here who are trying to satisfy those is—it's a kaleidoscope. It's always changing. The emphasis we put on something one day may change over the next two or three weeks to something else. Where we think we're going is hardly ever where we end up. You can do all the design models you want about planning, but this is a very people-driven operation.

And so, what we might have been planning to do in September went out the window when Hurricane Katrina came through, and we decided—everybody wanted to do *something*, everybody wants to do *something*. It was so terrible. And then the FCC waved its magic wand and said, "We're going to allow stations to fundraise on the air, to interrupt programming for other organizations." It's never been allowed before; it's against the rules; you're not supposed to do it. But our national organization, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters—so many stations were trying to come up with creative ways to get around that that the NFCB chair made an application to the FCC and said, "Look, we have stations down there that are off the air; they don't even know where their people are. We want to do something," and they said, "Go forth and do it." And so we had the opportunity for the first time to ask our listeners to support something besides the station.

We started out and we made a list in a staff meeting of some likely organizations. I did a lot of digging; I did a lot of research. Called the organizations, talked to the people there; we wanted to be able to assure the listeners that the money was going to the people who needed it, not into some administrative drain. And when we went on the air, we're looking at each other that morning going, "Well, I wonder if this is gonna work." We had no clue. We were in totally uncharted territory for us. We raised \$134,000 in seventeen hours, because the people in this community truly believe in this station. So for us—for me in particular—those fundraising times, the times when we go on the air and ask people to give, are so instructive. It's humbling. It's awe-inspiring. I am humbled every day I walk into this building that this community came together and built.

We started out trying to do the capital campaign the ordinary way: you go find people with big money and you ask them for big money. Well, first of all, we don't know anybody like that; and secondly, even if we did, they weren't giving it to us. So that wasn't working very well at all, so we went back to what we know best, which is to fundraise on the air from the people who know us and love us. And it worked.

LR: Now, when you did the hurricane-related, that's only weeks before—

VS: Four weeks. Four weeks to the day.

LR: —your fall fundraiser.

VS: Were we worried? You bet! (laughs) Everybody was. Everybody who has a fundraising cycle that starts with their fiscal year October 1 had the same set of concerns, all across the country. Radio stations, helping organizations: is the community tapped out? Is there any more to get? And there were stations that were scheduled to be in fund drive during that time that had to suspend their drives, and stations that did extra fundraisers, that “tack five bucks on your pledge for Katrina victims” kind of fundraising, to try and keep the momentum that they had going. Yeah, it was a major concern.

But as flush as we are, comparatively, to years ago, we still couldn’t go very far into this fiscal year without raising money. It costs us somewhere around \$100,000 a month to keep this place going; that’s what we lay out all the time. And so we had some money in the bank that we could go to near the end of the month, and we had planned a later drive anyway; we planned to miss the high holidays, Jewish high holidays and all those things, and school starts and anything that keeps people from being on their regular schedules. So we started it on October 21, and it was a little slow, but we were doing okay—weekends are never our biggest time—and then came Hurricane Wilma right in the middle of the drive. Big discussion on Sunday: should we shut it down? Should we go on the air? Should we keep going? Well, it’s not coming here, but will anybody be paying attention?

Well, we kept going and the answer was no, nobody was paying any attention. The *Morning Show* had twelve phone calls, as opposed to 100 or 80. We raised almost \$600 instead of \$7,000 in three hours. It was pretty dismal. The question is, do you shut it down and try to start it back up again, or do you just keep going? The reality was, the storm was not here, although everything was closed in anticipation because they have to do those things a couple days in advance, and the weekend didn’t help. If it had been in the middle of the week, probably fewer things would have closed because they would have had until the day before to make the decision, but they had to make the decision on Friday. But we kept going, and it was slow and it felt much more challenging than any drive we’ve done. We’re used to being successful at fundraising; we’re very good at it as a station. We have a good process. We have people who are skilled at it. We have great programming the listeners are willing to support. And for it not to be performing at the top end was very frustrating.

We finally turned it around on Thursday: things started kicking back in. Of course, it was the last day of the drive, and we try really hard not to go past what we say we’re gonna

do. We went a few hours, which we thought was acceptable considering what happened on Monday, and we made the goal.

LR: And the goal was?

VS: Four hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Last year, we were still fundraising on the air; alongside our operations fundraising, we were still fundraising for the building. We had been doing that since 2000. They said, “You can’t do that.” All the experts said, “You can’t do that. You have to do your capital campaign off the air. You can’t do it on the air. Listeners will be confused. It’ll impact your operating funds. You’ll lose money. You won’t have enough money to run the station.”

Our listeners are smarter than that. Everybody got it that they could give to the capital campaign, but we fully expected and they understood that they had to keep giving to the operating fund or there wasn’t going to be a station to put in the new building. You know, there were some people who found that they couldn’t sustain both and kept up their building pledge, but for the most part people did both right along. They pledged to the building, made that \$1,000 gift at under 30 bucks a month, and then came in and pledged their \$75 or \$100 during the Marathons and kept us going. This was our first full year, really, without those building fundraising tactics that played into how we pitched the station and the legacy of the station, so the idea of that circle of friends that we’d been toying with, sustaining memberships—“MNFers forever.”

We had some oddball names going into this: “Forever Friends,” “Forever Members”; it kind of sounds like a Hallmark moment. (laughs) I can’t say that on the air. So we called up Cam Dille, who’s in the advertising/copywriting business; he’s a founding member of the station; he knows this stuff inside and out. I said, “I need a name for this, Cam. You got till tonight, ’cause I’m going on the air with it in the morning so you need to tell me.” And that’s how it got named, and it really kicked in. Three hundred people joined. That will bring the station about \$5,000 a month in ongoing revenue, and next year in the Marathon we expect to have the same kind of goals. They’re pretty high. People are pretty amazed that we can raise money that quickly. It’s a very efficient process that we have that’s designed to bring the money in the door and get done with it.

LR: So there’s two major on-air fundraisers per year?

VS: Fall and spring.

LR: Okay. And then, throughout the air, you have a number of concerts that are billed as WMNF benefits.

VS: Yes, and some of them actually make money. (laughs)

LR: I was going to say, 'cause concert promotion is—it can be an expensive business.

VS: Oh, yeah. Well, we net about—somewhere between \$85,000 and \$90,000 a year on our concert series. Most of that comes from Tropical Heatwave, probably close to half in any given year, a good year.

LR: But you're paying those artists, are you not?

VS: Yeah, we pay—everybody gets paid. Local bands that have been performing as part of our tribute series have worked for very little money or just exposure, \$50 or \$100. But we bring in—the Iguanas, we paid them money. We bring in Eliza Gilkyson; she gets paid money. We laid out—I don't remember what the concert was; probably about \$300,000 comes out of our pocket in order to make that \$80,000 or \$90,000. So it's a risky proposition, Heatwave, of course, being the riskiest 'cause we'll put out money for thirty bands all at the same time, hoping for good weather and no competition because we have to pick the date almost a year in advance.

LR: And you're not charging a whole lot to get in.

VS: No. No, people's pricing, always, always. It is very rare for us to get a ticket above \$20 for any reason; that's usually a special, special event—New Year's, our Birthday Bash, Heatwave. \$20 usually means it's a very expensive band, (laughs) or a couple times we've done it we did benefits for the building where we set the price at \$20 because it was special fundraising for the building. But mostly, our ticket prices are \$10, \$12, \$13, \$16 at the door. I don't know what people are paying for tickets to Bruce [Springsteen] last week, but I'm sure it was more than \$10 or \$12.

LR: It was.

VS: So for us, it's a tightrope walk between the mission of bringing the music to the community, of bringing a diversity of music to the community, some of which is just

plain not popular enough to generate 500 or 600 or 700 tickets. Sometimes things surprise us.

Last year when we brought Los Amigos Invisibles as part of Arte 2005, the Latino celebration the City of Tampa was trying to institute as an annual event; we were asked to participate, and we were asked to bring a band not so much that would appeal to the Latin community as would have a Latin appeal to the broader community, which is what Paul [Wilborn] and the folks at the city thought we could do well. It is what we do, to present some of those niche cultural activities in a context that works for more people than just the niche. And so we brought Los Amigos; they're a Venezuelan band. They were phenomenal. I don't know how other people found out about it outside of WMNF, but somebody's listserv made the circulation and some people who I guess were following the band around the state—we ended up with like 750 people that night at Skipper's. The dance floor was just, like, throbbing. You couldn't move. And all these people—South Americans and Central Americans and hippies and MNFers of all stripe—were all dancing together on this dance floor. That's the magic. That's what the concert series can do.

Or it can do something like bring together all the folks who value all those things that we started talking about back in the sixties [1960s], peace and social and economic justice, those things that are part of the station's mission, and so you get a tribute to Woody Guthrie done by Jimmy LaFave and Eliza Gilkyson and Slaid Cleaves, and we put 1,000 people in seats at the Palladium Theater and there wasn't a dry eye in the house the whole night, and people are still talking about that show. One of the biggest hits on our concert series CD is their ensemble version of Woody's song "This Train." As a matter of fact, they're doing another tour and they'll be coming back in—I think it's in February.

So the concerts give us a chance to try lots of new things. We bring people like Dave Carter and Tracy Grammer, just before he passed away. Nobody had ever seen or heard of them. All these people that would never get exposure—Kasey Chambers, the young woman from down under, showed up at Skipper's. There were 550 people there, all singing her song back to her. She'd never played for that many people at that point in her career. She was used to playing little bars with thirty or forty people. And not only were there all those people, but they all knew her music. And for the artist, this is just thrilling to be able to come to someplace that's not their hometown—they're used to getting that in their hometown, but not somewhere else, not in some pocket on the west coast of Florida.

So that's the value of that. And sometimes they make money; sometimes we lose our butts on it, and that's just part of the game. We have to guess right often enough so that we don't lose overall, and we have a revenue goal for that line in our budget, and the budget is very tightly done here, very carefully considered, conservative on the revenue,

and we estimate expenses as high as we think they're gonna go. We make it work. We have a zero balance budget. Gee, I wish the government could do that. But by the way, this year is just under \$1.4 million.

LR: Wow. So the budget has increased, I assume, gradually?

VS: Yeah.

LR: Every year?

VS: Every year. But we start with last year's budget and we look at—we're pretty good at it. The station had a good process long before I got here, and it was good enough so that when we went to get the bank loan to build the building, they looked at our annual budgets and our audited financials for each of the last four or five years before we went for the loan, and they actually asked if we did the budget after the year was over, that's how close we were in our expenses and revenue to what we projected for the year. Do the budget in the fall, and we live by it all year. Woe be unto anybody who steps too far outside it. We can take some risks, but they're considered risks.

LR: So with that budget, obviously you have a—it's really a small staff, is it not?

VS: Yeah.

LR: How many people are really full-time employees here?

VS: I think we have twelve full-time positions; eleven of them are filled at the moment. I never get the numbers right; it's really embarrassing. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—yeah, eleven full-time at the moment; and one, two, three part-time—four part-time.

LR: And are there plans to—you speak of growing the station.

VS: Mostly in terms of volunteers and listeners. We were talking about it this morning. We've gone from 8,000 to over 11,000 members. Right now we're talking about post-Marathon, you know, analysis. We're probably processing 12,000 pledge cards a year; that's up from 8,000, 9,000 a few years ago. Same couple of people do the processing,

with a couple of volunteers each to help them. That hasn't grown much. We grew our news department; that was a commitment we made.

We do strategic planning every year, every couple of years; we have a board staff retreat every year, and we're either writing a plan or reviewing the plan that we've done. And we work towards those overall goals. The board sets the mission and the overall goals, and the staff is expected to devise ways to meet it through programming, through fundraising, through whatever it is we need to do to get there.

And so we had a goal in our last five-year plan: at the time, our news department was down to just Rob. We had a couple of part-time people, but they were working themselves to death and it was very clear our listeners wanted more news, more public affairs. They wanted more opportunities to hear from people that don't get airtime elsewhere and to talk with each other as well. So we added two full-time positions to the news department, one in 2000 and one last year, which has resulted in our one-hour evening newscast at a time when every other organization who does news is shrinking theirs; we're growing ours, because we're responding to what we feel is a real listener-driven need. Certainly coming through the last two election cycles told us that, and the need continues to grow. So right now, news is about 25 percent of our programming; generally it's about 25 percent of the revenue. It works out pretty well. They work really hard at, they're really good at it.

We bring in a lot of volunteers, and that's where we grow. We hired a volunteer coordinator last year full-time for the first time; it had always been a part-time position tacked onto somebody else's job. Carrie Core is our volunteer coordinator, and she's able to work full-time not only at working with our existing volunteers but really doing a good job of bringing new people into the station and giving them meaningful ways to participate.

LR: Well, aside from the fundraisers that you do on-air, approximately how many volunteers are in and out of here in a week's time?

VS: Well, there's about seventy a week who are on-air each and every week, have air shifts ranging from one to three hours apiece.

LR: So most of the DJs are volunteers?

VS: Yeah, almost all our folks on-air are volunteers. News people are paid, but our news volunteers are not. They gather news and do stories and cover some of our headlines

newscast during the drive time. Our music programmers are all volunteers, with the exception of one the program director does. I want him on the air so he's in regular touch with regular listeners all the time. He does his own show every week and talks to listeners; people call directly into the studio and they talk, and on those days they're actually talking to the program director, so he's taking the pulse every week.

LR: That's Randy Wynne?

VS: Yeah. And the rest of the music programmers are all volunteers. They love what they do, they know what they're doing, and they bring enormous passion to the air. Our engineers are a consulting firm that we work with, and they love—they all have more than thirty years apiece in radio, and in some cases radio and television, and they love coming here to go to work because everybody here loves radio, and in all the other stations they work at it's just a business to generate money and all of the passion has gone out of it. They say the only place that the passion is left anymore in the other broadcasters is in sports.

LR: That's probably true. Do you think—you mentioned when you came here you really felt a sense of community when you first volunteered. Is that what the case is, do you think, even today?

VS: Even today. You bet. You bet. And if for some reason it's not there at a particular moment, people will let us know that, because that's the expectation that people have coming here. Whether it's the group that's selling raffle tickets at our concerts—they love to do that, they love the fact that they're helping the station and participating and get to be a part of the concert series—or the disc jockey that's introducing the band, the folks that come in and help one of our on-air folks—they may never take a microphone, but they're answering the phone and doing the playlist. And the idea that—well, I'll put it this way.

We do a volunteer recognition banquet every year, and the last few years we've had 130, 140 people there, and we give out awards for best new programmer of the year and best programmer of the year and volunteer of the year and new volunteer of the year and overnight programmer of the year and a lifetime achievement award, and everybody who receives one of those generally dissolves in tears. It's very, very meaningful to the people who participate. So during fundraisers—but you walk through here on any given day, and there's somebody back here slaving away over alphabetizing papers, but they know that it's a task that needs to happen in order for the machinery of the station to run.

On Mondays, our music director—a very part-time ten hour a week music director, Flea—sits in the office with Randy and has a whole slew of volunteers that work with him every single Monday, and they're in there entering the new CDs that are coming in into our database and categorizing them, labeling them, scrawling WMNF in Sharpie across the CD itself so that they can't be sold, and then going and filing them in the library, and there's a whole process for moving the music into the new section—into the new-new section, then the new section, then into the stacks. The people who are in there are just spending the day. They're doing the work, they're chatting with each other, it's a very comfortable environment, and people move in and out of it. People come in, they'll do something very intensively for several months, and then the schedule changes, life changes, they move on. But they feel free to come back or to do something else, if they get bored or tired of it. There's always something special.

LR: The music lineup is so diverse, and in talking to Rob Lorei, he mentioned that from early on, they wanted to have certain timeslots that were certain types of music so people would know if they liked blues, they could tune in at a certain time. Has anyone ever discussed among the staff about—what if you mixed up all the genres and get rid of the specific shows and make just a continual diverse playlist?

VS: That's been—that's actually been tried elsewhere, and it comes up from time to time. The reality is, most people are not gonna listen to that for very long. People's expectations—for people who are inside the station, that sounds really good. For people who are what we call core listeners who listen all the time and who have very eclectic tastes of their own and their eclecticism has grown from being in touch with WMNF, that's a very appealing prospect. For most people who listen to the radio—you gotta really take into account how people use radio in their lives. For most people, it's not the be-all, end-all of their existence. It's an accompaniment to what they're doing. Something special, you know, like I know I get calls every Tuesday on the *Freak Show*. "I'm so glad when I get to Tuesday night and come home and throw the kids out of the room and turn the radio on and I'm just doing this." That's not how people use radio most of the time.

I had this debate with a former board member, who told me that we were wrong about how people used radio and that we should be shifting our programming schedule according to what she thought was appropriate. I said, "Let me ask you something: What do you listen to on the station?" She said, "Oh, I listen to the *Morning Show*." I said, "And you listen to that. What are you doing when you do that?" "Well, the kids are getting up and going off to school, and I'm taking them to school and I'm listening in the car on the way to work." I said, "Do you listen between 9:00 and 12:00?" She said, "No, I come out at 12:00 and I come downstairs and listen to Amy Goodman." I said, "Uh-huh. Do you listen to the *Afternoon Show*?" She said, "Well, no, I'm at work, and so I listen —" And so I said, "And what about the evening programming?" And she's a board member. "How much of this do you listen to?" She said, "Well, actually, I don't listen in

the evening. Once I come home I don't turn the radio on." Bingo. You've just answered your own question.

So you program the daytime weekdays, which is to the vast majority of the population work and school; you try and find things that people do every day. All right, people get up, they go to work every day, so you want what you're doing to match that. You don't want them to have to think about what's gonna be happening on your radio, 'cause they're not gonna think about that. That's why weekday television programming goes this way and weeknight programming goes the other way, when people know that on Wednesday nights it's *Law & Order* at 8:00, but they don't want to think about that during the workday. And mixing it up generally pleases nobody, because the third song you hear is something you're not gonna like so you turn it off, or you swallow and try and get through it, but what if the next one is one you don't like?

And so you have to—we have to balance the need to be eclectic and the need to be diverse with the need to have people actually listen to the station enough to support it. If we didn't have to have supporters, we could do almost anything. But you want people to value what you do, otherwise there's not much point. You know, that's what the Marathon does beyond the money: it provides that validation for all of us that we're on the right track, that enough people are listening to this show at this time that this small proportion of them are willing to pay money to keep the station alive. And so if you spread that loyalty out too thin, then there's not much to be loyal to.

LR: Well, I'm sure it's—

VS: Major juggling act.

LR: Yeah, it's something that's working for you, and you really probably don't want to—obviously, you want to make improvements and evolve, but—

VS: That's been a big bone of contention at the station over the last seven or eight years, probably before that as well. You know, we have this hugely successful *Morning Show* strip that was based in folk and acoustic music, but some of the folks who have come along since that show's inception are younger and they have different musical sensibilities, and their likes and dislikes are different. So what do you do when the next generation or another whole group of people don't agree with what you're doing? Then Randy gets to play Solomon splitting the baby and divvy up that 168 hours in a way that the community that listens to and supports the station will continue to, but give some entry places for new things to come in and grow and develop, if they do.

And it's a huge balancing act, because you can't just take your core audience programming and toss it out the window, put something else on, and hope people like it enough to support because while you're waiting for that to happen, the bills are still coming in and the money is still necessary. The decisions can't be driven by money, but on the other hand, if the money's not there, there isn't a station. So somewhere in the middle there is where we make those final decisions.

LR: So the morning hours are the most listened to, have your biggest listenership?

VS: Actually, our biggest listenership right now is absolutely contrary to radio theory. Radio theory says you have temples: morning drive, afternoon drive, and it sort of goes like that. (gestures) Ours does this. (gestures)

LR: Is that right?

VS: Amy Goodman, that hour of listening is our highest hour.

LR: Twelve to one.

VS: Twelve to one.

LR: Any idea the number, approximate number, of people tuned in at that time?

VS: About 12,000.

LR: Okay.

VS: About 12,000.

LR: I noticed in your—I don't know if it's a quarterly publication—newsletter that you put out, a listener survey of 500 listeners.

VS: Yeah.

LR: And I might be wrong, but—

VS: The self-selecting 500, keep that in mind.

LR: Oh, people that volunteered?

VS: Well, we send them out, and whoever wants to sends it back.

LR: I see.

VS: So it's not a random survey.

LR: Well, do you think—it seemed to me that those who responded—it seemed to be white middle class.

VS: Yeah, absolutely.

LR: Is that accurate?

VS: Yes.

LR: Do you think that's an accurate picture of the people that listen to the station, the majority of?

VS: The majority of our listeners are white. They are in their mid-forties, college educated. We have a smaller black listening audience and an even smaller Hispanic listening audience. Our younger audience has grown a little bit, because our average audience age was climbing and has leveled out and actually started to drop a little bit. But the people who answered those surveys are definitely—we get almost no surveys from the black population, even among the black members. That survey goes to every member. Even when we sent it out—was it last year or the year before? Might have been last year. We didn't get it done in time to get it into the Program Guide, so we sent it out as a separate mailing with a return envelope, which you don't get in the Program Guide. We

got twice as many responses, almost three times as many responses, but the results looked exactly the same.

LR: Really?

VS: Same kind of people respond to those surveys, so to find out what our black audience wants to hear or what our Hispanic audience wants to hear or what younger audience wants to hear, we would have to go at them a different way, because they just don't respond. Putting the survey up on the Web the last couple of years has, I think, allowed some of the younger folks access who would not normally fill out a piece of paper anymore. But even so, it hasn't changed the dynamic of what shows up on the survey.

And we never—when we look at audience behavior, we look at three things. We look at the Marathons, both the amount of money a show can raise, some of which is a function of the demographic of the audience, some of it a function of the time, but we also look at the number of people who call. We look at Arbitrons; we do get Arbitron books. And we look at the listener survey. Look at any one of those or any single listener survey, any single Marathon, any single Arbitron book. We average two, three, or four together and look at trends. Here's the four-book average for Arbitron ending in spring 2005; here's the four-book ending in spring 2004. Is support for this trending up or trending down? Is the demographic trending this way or that way? Because our sample is so small on these things, even on the Marathons, that looking at any one doesn't give you—when we set our Marathon goals, we look back at three Marathons and see what that particular show has done, the average money that it's raised, the average number of calls it's received, the lowest and the highest, and we generally try and set the next Marathon's goal somewhere between the average and the high. We're trying to push all the time.

LR: A lot of its reaction here, I guess, to what your listeners are wanting and your programming and what have you. WMNF is certainly the essence of diversity, you know, in this community. Is there concern among the staff and donors or what have you that the listenership maybe doesn't—certainly it's an eclectic group that listens, but what do you do or what do you need to do to increase the black audience or Hispanic audience?

VS: It's interesting. Historically, when we started out the station—and this is way before my time and long before I certainly got involved in any decision making level—serving that black audience was a goal of the station. There weren't black radio station in 1979. Part of what we do when we look at these things is most people, when they look at the behavior of the station, look at the station, but you have to look at the station in the cultural landscape in which it exists, not just today but historically what's happened. So back in 1979 and the early eighties [1980s], there were no black FM stations, there just weren't. There was no radio for the black community. And so gospel was huge in our

programming on Saturday night and on Sunday morning. We had 10,000 people listening to gospel on Sunday morning.

LR: Wow.

VS: Okay. In between the Saturday night gospel and the Sunday morning gospel was a variety of programming that appealed to black audience here in the Tampa in 1979. A young woman came in a few years ago and applied for a position here, a job, and we asked her—she was quite young, probably in her very early twenties. We said, “Are you familiar with the station?” She said, “Oh, yes, ma’am. I grew up with this station”—making me feel old and gray. But what she told us was that her family listened to the station every single Saturday night and Sunday. And so Saturday at 6:30, the whole family is gathered around the radio listening to Brother Earl and Sister Pat do gospel.

LR: As if it were the 1930s.

VS: Yeah. At 7:00, Steve the Hitman came on. Was it 7:00, 6:30? The next show on was Steve the Hitman with his *Soul Party*. And everybody was up and dancing, the whole family’s up and dancing. Then—the grandparents’d go to bed after the gospel, and the parents and kids’d dance to the *Soul Party*. Then the parents would go to bed, and the kids’d stay up and Kenny K, who brought hip-hop to Tampa, had a rap show at midnight on Saturday, and from Saturday at midnight till six in the morning when the gospel show came on, there was raucous hip-hop music on the air. It was on everybody’s radio all through the neighborhood, big parties in the parking lot here with the music playing, and it served a huge need for the community. And at 6:00 in the morning, the gospel came back on and kind of brought everything to a close by 9:00 Sunday morning. It was extended with a show called *Community Speaks*, which was a locally produced black talk show. Twyla [Phillips]—a number of people did it: Mercedes [Skelton] and her husband did it, and several other people, and Twyla did it and then Mabili [Ogun] took it over, and then that morphed into what he does now in midday.

Over time, that black audience drifted away, not because we weren’t doing the right thing—we were doing what we’d been doing—but other stations came into being. We were no longer the exclusive place to hear soul music or hip-hop or gospel. And so if that’s what you want to hear and you can get it 24/7 or much more frequently than just Saturday night—people say, “Oh, the audience went away because you took the programming away.” If you look at the Arbitrons and you look at our program schedule and you look at the Marathons, the audience went away, and so in response we eliminated the programming little by little, and shifted it and changed it and tried to reignite different kinds of appeal within the community. But now there are dozens of radio stations that serve the needs of urban youth and black youth, and there’s—TMP does gospel all day on

Sunday, so you don't have to get up at 6:00 in the morning to listen to Sister Pat. She still has a good audience, but she doesn't have 10,000 people listening anymore. And so as the community changes, if we were still doing exactly what we'd been doing, we wouldn't be serving the community very well.

So in the early and mid-eighties [1980s], we had a very successful younger-oriented programming strip at 9:00 in the evening called the *Underground Circus*. This was true alternative music at a time when no radio station would touch this stuff. It's now what's called old wave, and there's twenty stations playing it, but at the time we were the only ones. And so that strip or programming was very, very successful for several years: successful for us in terms of people listened to it and supported it; successful for the community in that we were providing that programming that obviously there was a desire for. And then, all of a sudden, it just (makes sound effect) as other stations came to start playing that music.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

LR: You mentioned Arbitrons. Where does the station line up with the Clear Channels and entities like that?

VS: Oh, we're somewhere down. We're somewhere down.

LR: You don't think they feel threatened?

VS: Not a bit.

LR: They're not worried about you?

VS: No, not a bit, because their purpose in being is very different from ours. Their purpose is to attract enough ears to make enough hash marks on the Arbitron report to jack up their advertising prices four more cents per fifteen second spot in particular day parts to sell that advertising. Their stations exist to sell the advertising space to create revenue. We're not in competition with them, and they know that. USF might worry about us, but I don't think so.

LR: Do you have any idea on where the two of you stack up?

VS: Randy would know that. I'm not good at keeping relative numbers in my head. They have much more audience than we do; they're probably twice as much audience as we do. Their reach is further, and they have more of what you'd call singular appeal. They do one thing and they do it really well. In the daytime they do NPR programming, and in the evening and through the rest of the day they do classical and they do jazz. So you don't have to think about what you're gonna get. They fulfill a certain set of needs within the community, and the broader your appeal the more people you're going to reach.

That's our conundrum is that we want to do all this diversity, but it means people turn the radio off: when you have a polka show followed by a Caribbean show, you can hear the radios going "click" on both ends—click off, click on. We try and do as little of that hard scene transitions, but if you're going to serve many audiences, those do happen. And so even in our eclectic WMNF core audience, there are music listeners who don't listen to our news and public affairs block and vice versa. So at 10:00 AM when we move from music into *Fresh Air*, that's one of the gentler transitions we've made because *Fresh Air* has a cultural component that sometimes will draw the music listeners with them. But at 2:00 when we finish Rob's show, there is a chunk of audience that does not stay tuned for the blues and another chunk that tunes in who wasn't listening at all during the news and public affairs. So it's kind of interesting.

One of the things that's changed things is our audio stream on the Web. That listening is exactly diametrically opposite what standard radio listening is, which tends to be, as I told you, those tent poles in drive time. We have that weird little spike in the middle, but you don't have any Internet listening in drive time. They're generally not at their computers, or if they are, they're not doing that. And so where we used to—and it really showed up very clearly in our fundraising, where at the end of the *Morning Show* our fundraising used to do that as people got to work and they couldn't turn on a radio at work, so they weren't listening. Now we've got this little Internet listening thing kind of buoying up that, where it used to—it doesn't dip down as far. It also peaks in that 1:00 hour.

When we were in the old building I used to share my office with the IT director, and one of the things that we have—and I have it on here now, but I used to have it up all the time on his administrative computer—is how many people are listening at any given moment on the Internet.

LR: You can monitor that?

VS: Yeah. I can—I don't know where we are now. That one? Yeah. Right now we've got seventy people listening.

LR: Of course, it is after 4:00 in the afternoon.

VS: Yeah, and so it's starting to wind down. At 1:00, between 12:30 and 1:00, it'd be 150, 160 people. And during midday, mid-morning, we'll hit 90-100 people as we're coming out of the *Morning Show* and generally maintain that and it starts to climb, which is kind of exactly the opposite of what radio expects. So things are changing a lot, and we're scrambling as fast as we can to keep up. Streaming and podcasting—we have programmers that program their whole show on their iPod and come in and jack it into the board to play all their music. I'm over there on Tuesday nights blowing dust off the vinyl.

LR: So you still have records.

VS: Oh, tons. Tons. We still play them.

LR: Well, thanks for spending so much time with me today.

VS: You're welcome.

LR: One last question: Let's say you don't—well, let's say you don't volunteer at WMNF and get the fever and what have you. What do you think you'd be doing right now? What kind of work? Would you still be in the construction business?

VS: I'd probably still be building. I really loved what I did, and I was very good at it. I like doing things I'm good at (laughs) and I'm willing to acknowledge that. So, I would probably still be doing that. I found it very fulfilling on a lot of levels. Probably wouldn't be with the same company, I'd probably be doing something else; but there was something really fulfilling about building something. I mean, I can go back to things that I built fifteen years ago and they're still there. Not so much a legacy as just an accomplishment; most of the accomplishments we have nowadays are very fleeting. They're there, and you turn around and they're gone, whatever it is: the report that you wrote last week or the sales that you managed to do yesterday are yesterday's news, and you gotta do it all over again today.

If I had not been working here, I probably would have volunteered to monitor our building construction here. We hired a construction manager, an engineer to be the owner's representative to work between the station and the architect and builder, and if I

had not been working here, I probably would have applied for that job and I would have done a darn good job of it, because I love the station. The guy who did it did a wonderful job.

LR: It's beautiful.

VS: Yeah, his name is Mark Donald, and he's an MNFer to the core. Army lifer, twenty-five years in the Army Corps of Engineers, and can't quite seem to retire, and loves the *Soul Man* on Friday nights and the *Freak Show* and the *Sixties Show*; he's done some guest host slots. He actually quit a job to come here and do that for us, took a huge cut in pay and came here to do this for us.

LR: How many square feet?

VS: Twelve thousand.

LR: Wow.

VS: Yeah, up from 3,000.

LR: May I ask the price tag?

VS: About \$2.4 million.

LR: Is that right?

VS: Yeah. And we ended up with a mortgage of about \$1 million, which means we paid for all the rest of it.

LR: Are you still getting some government funding?

VS: Yeah, we still get federal funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. We had to fight with them last year over getting our full funding, but we did; and we still get the state money, that elusive \$100,000 that Senator [John] Grant took away from us in

1997, which we got three-quarters of the following year and then finally got back to full funding about four years ago. We get those: they are about a little less than 21-22 percent of the budget. The rest of it—70 percent comes from listeners.

LR: Wow.

VS: Yeah. It's awesome.

LR: Well, this is—you know, you're building buildings, but now you've built or helped built this and continued to grow. It must give you the same or more satisfaction.

VS: Well, this was very special as a project, because it houses something that I'm very passionate about and that's a huge part of my life. The picture on the wall is our artwork from our first CD. We've been talking about it for years. I have the artwork for the others, but the first one is still special for me. It's actually my desktop underneath all those files that shouldn't be there. The work that gets done here is just so extraordinary, and people give so much. I am just over—when we did that Katrina thing, we cried the whole day. It was just incredible that people were so generous, and what we heard over and over from listeners all day long was, "Thank you for researching for this. Thank you for finding the organizations where we can put our money and know it will go to work." The trust that was expressed in what we do, that we've spent twenty-five years building—I sent an email to our internal everyone afterwards and talked a little about the responsibility of that trust that's placed in us. We have so far managed to live up to the expectations of this community; when we don't, they let us know pretty strongly. Usually it doesn't take much to do a minor course correction.

In twenty-six years, I think that the station has overall done a great job of reflecting the needs of the parts of the community that support the mission of the station. We're not—we can't be everything to everybody; that would just never work. That's not what this station was designed to do. There are other community stations that are trying to be everything to everybody, and that's their mission, but that was never ours. Ours was specifically around peace and social and economic justice, and giving voice to not necessarily particular people or particular kinds of people, but to the ideas and the sounds that have no other place: whether it's music that doesn't get heard or whether it's Noam Chomsky that doesn't get heard, our mission is to put that on the air. We do less counting of noses, I think, than most people who are engaged in activities which they claim to be diverse, because it's all about who it resonates with and how it resonates, more than where you put the little hash marks in the columns.

We put on a show like *Poetry Is...* with Lizz Straight, who does a show on Saturday night: a young black woman, attractive, she's a poet herself, she's an entertainer, she's all over the place. But her audience isn't solely black, and the show is not designed only for black people. Otis Anthony does a show on Sunday morning which considers local issues that have deep effect on the black community, but the audience isn't solely black. And the idea that there's radio for these people and radio for these people is counterintuitive to me in that, if your goal is to break down barriers, why would you create programming that stands them up? So the *Sunday Simcha*, for instance, our Jewish cultural show—we just lost our longtime host to the show, Mike Eisenstadt, a dear friend. His community rallied around him this past Sunday at the fundraiser and raised \$24,000. We're naming the live music studio for him. But that show's audience was predominantly Jewish, but not solely Jewish. It wasn't so focused on the community that other people could not listen and learn.

And every time we open one of those doors to someone, whether it's *True Talk*, our Arab and Muslim show that allows people who don't know much about the Arab culture or the Muslim religion to hear from people who are actually living it, how that intersects with our lives here: it is really what the mission of the station is. It's not about having an Arab show for Arabs; it's about having people who bring that perspective to the larger community and moving our community in the true direction of diversity, which is no longer caring about the columns. You know, that's where we should be ending up. That would be—the ultimate goal would be to not have to count noses anymore, not have to count people and decide whether we have enough of these or enough of those, but for the community to consider itself one community, and for the community to enjoy whatever of our programming appeals to them for whatever reasons it appeals to them, not because it's designed to do so.

A little different perspective, and it's hard for people who don't come to it from the mission side to kind of wrap their brains around, 'cause it all goes back to the mission, it all goes back to moving us into a space of a world where peace and justice and economic justice are the norm, that we're not having to look for them, that they're what we live. And so getting there, there's lots of paths, and this is the one we've chosen; it's certainly not the only one. The nice thing is that having this station means that there's exposure for people who've chosen other paths to get to the same places, so that the—I was invited to something yesterday. Let's see, I don't know if I can find it. It's Growing a Peaceful Community, and it's the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice is doing a thing in St. Pete Saturday. They are bringing together as many people as they can to talk about how we can grow a truly peaceful community. What's it gonna take? What can each of us individually bring to it? What can we bring back to our parts of the community, and how can we bring all that together? And so FCPJ has a place to come with that information and disseminate it. St. Pete for Peace has a place to come; PETA has a place to come and disseminate their information.

A lot of what has happened in the movement since back in the day is this kind of narrowing of perspective, as we've all chosen the different kinds of work to do coming out of the sixties [1960s] and since then, to try and bring the world to a better place. And so when you start concentrating your energy, other things fall off; and this is a place for me that creates a hub and kind of brings together all those other energies, and at least lets each of us know what the other is doing, if nothing else. We can't all do everything, and it's nice to know you got some company out there. It's nice to know, when you talk about the Veggie Van, that somebody knows what you're talking about. (laughs) And you look around at our events, and they're all different kinds of people.

I don't know if you came out for the Dixie Cups when we brought them a couple weeks ago. It was awesome. There were people there from, you know, that size to in their eighties, and everybody was dancing. It was gorgeous. I should look so good; they have about fifteen years on me, and boy, they can still strut it, let me tell you. You know, music that resonates with people. I'll bet I couldn't have told you, when I was ten or eleven and listening to them sing "Going to the Chapel," I probably couldn't have told you whether they were black or white. I had no consciousness of that as even a question; it was just good music. So, if we can get to the point where we forget to ask, we're probably in a good place. (laughs)

LR: Vicki Santa, thank you so much—

VS: You're welcome.

LR: —for speaking with me today. My name is Lance Rowland, on behalf of the University of South Florida History Department. I've spoken with Vicki Santa, the program director for—

VS: Station manager.

LR: I'm sorry. The station manager.

VS: (whispers) Randy would be upset.

LR: That's Randy Wynne, the program director. (VS laughs) Station manager for WMNF Community Radio, 88.5 in Tampa, Florida.

End of interview