

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

USF 50th (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: U23-00042
Interviewee: Jorge Fernandez
Interview by: Andrew T. Huse
Interview date: November 12th, 2003
Interview location: USF Tampa Library
Transcribed by: Renee Perez
Transcription date: May 23rd, 2017
Audit Edit by: Renee Perez
Audit Edit date: May 23rd, 2017 to May 24th, 2017
Final Edit by: Carla Butel
Final Edit date: March 21th, 2018

Andrew Huse (AH): Well, today is November 12th, 2003. My name is Andrew Huse, program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today, we continue a series of interviews in our studio here in Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni, in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Jorge Fernandez, who came to USF in 1964 as an engineering student. Currently, he is—

Jorge Fernandez (JF): An engineer.

AH: A career engineer, that's right. Well, good morning, Jorge.

JF: Good morning.

AH: I'm glad you could be here with us today. Well, first, I'd just like to ask you, how did you get introduced to the university? When did you first hear about it? When did you apply?

JF: Through one of my professors in high school, which was in Miami. At the time that I was a senior in high school, I really didn't have any serious plans for going to school, but this person took a great interest in helping me find a place to go and recommended the University of South Florida as a new place that was just beginning. And he thought that it had a good future and so on. Then, I guess I don't remember that much about it, but I

guess I was accepted. I sent my application or whatever, and I was accepted to start in the fall of 1964.

AH: Okay, so when did you first come to the campus? Did you come with your folks? Did you come alone?

JF: They had a requirement that everyone starting had to take a test, so my first trip here was sometime in the summer of 1964. We had to stay overnight in, uh, I think it was Alpha Hall. Then, the next day, we had a test for about half a day. It was quite an experience because I had never stayed in such a modern school. My high school didn't have air conditioning, as most schools didn't in the 1960s in Florida. So I thought this was a very nice place; it was very modern, and I didn't really know anything about the kind of education you would get here. But at least it looked very nice. Then I made another trip, several weeks later, for arranging financial help and all of this. So that was just one where I came in the morning and left in the afternoon. I was only here for a couple of hours.

AH: So what kind of financial aid did you apply for?

JF: They had a program for Cuban students that was very similar to what was called National Defense¹ at the time. I don't think that that's around anymore. But one of the large differences between back then and now is that this program had—the maximum amount of money you could borrow in this program was \$5,000 for the whole time you were in the university. And you had leftover money after you paid everything. You paid tuition, bought your books, paid the room and board and the school, and you still had some money left.

AH: So tell us a little bit about your background then. You were Cuban in Miami.

JF: Yeah, I came from Cuba in 1962, and I finished high school in Miami, and then I came here. My parents remained in Cuba, so I was here by myself.

AH: Oh, wow.

¹The National Defense Education Act (NDEA), signed into law in 1958, provided additional funding to United States schools with the goal of strengthening national defense. It also offered financial assistance to thousands of university and college students through the National Defense Student Loan program.

JF: Well, by myself, I should say because I don't have brothers or sisters. But, at that point, I didn't have my parents with me either. So, essentially, when I lived here, this was my home.

AH: Okay.

JF: And every time that I had a vacation or something, I had to take everything out of the dorm and move someplace else because this was my basic house until the first summer. At that point, then, I stayed that first summer working in a construction company in Lakeland and thereafter every summer.

AH: And you found a place to live in Lakeland, then?

JF: Yeah, which was also only my official mailing address during the year when I was at USF because, again, I had to bring everything over here for the duration of the school year.

AH: Okay.

JF: Back then, it was actually, I think, shorter than it is now because we were operating on trimesters. So there were only two trimesters a year, and that was, for a while, that way. Until, I think it was 1967, thereabouts, that they switched to quarters.

AH: Quarter system, yeah. We'll get into that later. I know students had strong opinions about that.

JF: Oh, I do too. Everyone who was here at the time will have a very strong opinion about it, particularly engineers.

AH: So tell us a little more about the campus. I mean, obviously, you were impressed with it. You thought it was pretty modern and everything. Your room in Alpha Hall, tell us about that.

JF: When I started school, I ended up in Alpha Hall again. And I think it was the nicest of the ones, even though they were all built at the same time, but each one of them was a

little different. I think Alpha had the most light and convenience. Of course, it wasn't like today that they have private bathrooms nearby. We had two bathrooms per floor.

AH: That would cramp the style of a lot of students today.

JF: Yeah, so if you had early classes, you had to get up pretty early, so you could get through the bathroom and have time to eat breakfast and then go to class. I had a lot of my classes at eight o'clock for whatever reason. Also, I guess the freshmen didn't have a lot of choices on when you took your classes. There were very few buildings then, and very big spaces in between them. It was nice, in a way. It was a very nice and uncrowded place. In the winter time, it was very cold, walking from one place to another with the wind blowing in all of those empty spaces.

And then, when it rained, (laughs). In the summertime, you had to get—or when the rain started, you had to carry an umbrella with you, if you really didn't want to get wet. The engineering school didn't have a building, not yet at that point. Most of our classes were in the basement of the physics building, and we even had some classes on the second floor of the administration building. The drafting class was there. I don't remember what else. But most of them were in the physics building.

AH: So upon arriving in Miami, what were your English skills like?

JF: I was able to pretty much read. I could understand about 50% of what people were saying, and I had a very difficult time speaking. So, by the time I got to USF, I was a little better at it. It was a little bit overwhelming, however, to be in a place where very few people actually spoke Spanish then. And most of the students who did were people from Tampa who lived at home. So as far as the population at the school at night, there were very few Spanish-speaking people here, which, in a way, I guess, was good because it was a big help to get better with English.

I did fairly well, I guess, in the first year that I was here, in spite of taking the usual, what was then called the basic studies curriculum that everybody had to take. We spent the first two years basically taking English, humanities, and things like that, and then very few courses in engineering, one or two courses in math. I think that, pretty much, the curriculum is a lot different now than it used to be.

AH: So tell us about some of your first classes, then. I mean, what was that like? You were probably reading predominantly English literature, first of all, which must've been different. Tell us about some of your first experiences in class, the professors.

JF: Well, for some reason, I ended up taking English, which I think was called CB 101 at the time. And another course that was called American Idea, which actually was more of a second year course, and I ended up taking those at the same time. Well, both of those had a very heavy load of reading. It was like seven or eight books on each class per trimester, so I had a fun time keeping up with reading all of those books. Sometimes you had to read a whole book in one week, or, actually, two books in one week. But it was fun, I think. I enjoyed it, actually. It was quite a challenge.

AH: What was the American Idea class like?

JF: It was sort of like a combination of a little bit of American history, discussion about what was going on in the world. I guess you could call it somewhat of civics in high school. But it was very unique. I think that class disappeared.

AH: Uh-huh. It did.

JF: It was very unique. The professor that we had was from South Africa, I remember that. And I think some people were sometimes offended with his frank way with speaking. I thought he was a very good professor.

AH: So were there many other Cuban refugees taking classes at the time? Do you remember running into many others?

JF: There was one other guy in engineering. We saw each other every now and then. He did not live here. Later on, we ended up working in two different companies together, so we continued the relationship until he died about 10 years ago. Eventually, both he and I had our own firms, so we did consulting work for other people on a number of projects together.

AH: So tell us, how did your background affect your point of view? Like, for example, in an American Idea class, it must have been different through your eyes than it was through most other students' who lived in America all their lives.

JF: Oh, yeah, it probably was, just like it was in American history in high school because most of my studies of history in Cuba had been European history. And I had never really had anything much to do with American history, so this was pretty interesting.

AH: So, once you started taking engineering classes, what was that like? What were your professors like? How did you feel? What kind of education did you feel like you were getting? What was the department like? Was it very big?

JF: No, the department was very small. I think that we had less than 10 professors. I don't think that any one of them is still around. Lionel Scott is still alive, I know, but I think he's retired now. He was one of my professors. Dr. Griffith, Dr. Lane, Dr. Twiggs—I think he died. It was probably a group of less than 10 professors. It was kind of strange because I kept thinking, "At some point, we're going to have to start talking about practical things that an engineering student is supposed to know," and I don't think that we ever got to that point. (laughs)

AH: What are some

JF: I had seen engineering students in my country drawing things and submitting drawings in order to pass courses and so on. We never did that. I don't think that we ever designed anything.

What finally became obvious to me was that the engineering program at USF was highly theoretical. Even though, in some ways, it presented a problem that you really didn't learn practical things very much as, for instance, you would have at Georgia Tech or something like that. What difference it made to me, and through the years I have been glad of the fact that I was here, is the fact that I got a very good theoretical background. Once you have that, then it becomes much easier for you to resolve new issues that come up. So it was, essentially, I think that you could best describe engineering in USF at that time as sophisticated and specialized mathematics and physics, but not engineering at the same level that was being taught at other schools. And actually, I think that we did better here.

AH: What size were the classes, typically? How many people were in a class?

JF: Ten or fifteen.

AH: Yeah, very small, huh?

JF: And also, there was a lot of disappearing of people from engineering after the first year. A lot of people that started out as engineering students didn't get to the second year because they would think that it was very difficult. It was.

AH: Yeah, you found the classes difficult, too?

JF: It was.

AH: What, in particular, was difficult? Was it the theory? Was there a heavy workload?

JF: A heavy workload combined with other things that you had to do at the same time. Yeah, it was difficult. A lot of problem-solving and complicated mathematics, and you add to that the fact that we had to take calculus and physics and chemistry, and those were the three major obstacles outside. Calculus, particularly, was a very difficult thing because it was taught, at the time, by the math department, and there were no concessions made for engineers. So everything was very highly theoretical. Engineers are always trying to find a way out of, let's say, try to find the practical way to do something instead of the difficult way. And the way calculus was taught was the difficult way. In a way, it was good. I think we all had a pretty good background in mathematics by the time we got out of here, but it was four or five courses in calculus.

AH: So what were some of the activities on campus like? Did you participate in many of the activities that were going on?

JF: No, not the official ones, I guess. By that, I mean sports; I never have had any great interest in sports. So that was one of the few things that were around, but even that, it wasn't like it is now. And they had intramural sports. There were several fraternities that were local because there was a prohibition on having foreign fraternities coming to the school, until the late '60s I guess, '66 or '67, I guess. And then, at that point, the local fraternities became all associated with national fraternities.

AH: What about dances, picnics, other activities?

JF: Yeah, that I did some. Also, you have to realize, I think there was a big difference between the people who lived here and the people who commuted every day. And USF, at that time, had a very large group of people who commuted. And I'm talking about people coming from Brandon, St. Petersburg, Tampa. It wasn't like now, that this a continuum of habitation all the way from here to downtown. There were big gaps in Tampa at the time.

And so, to come in from Brandon every day was a long ways, you know? For those of us who lived here, you felt like you were out in another country because there were only like four buses out of here every day, and it took about an hour to get to downtown Tampa.

And then, once you got there, then you had to figure out what you were going to do, unless you had a car. And very few of us had cars. I definitely didn't have one until, I think, my third year I finally had a car. But even some of the other kids that were here who had parents in this country didn't have cars because society was not as affluent as it is nowadays, I guess. Or parents were not willing to spend that much money at the time. Many of us were kind of trapped in here. And then, the guys that had cars were nice enough to invite you to go out whenever they were going to go eat pizza or (laughs). If you needed something from a store downtown, then you talked to somebody about giving you a ride and that kind of thing. Most people accommodated.

There was the deal about, around eleven o'clock, a lot of guys would go out to a sub shop that was here, near Busch Gardens, to get sandwiches. That was the big thing of the day, I guess. Another one was, every now and then, to go to either Busch Gardens or another place that had hospitality places here. Of course, not everybody could go there to drink. Fowler Avenue was a very narrow street at the time. I think the only other businesses around here were some kind of motel that was at the corner of 30th Street and Fowler, or close to it, and the University Restaurant. And then, there was nothing all the way to Nebraska Avenue.

AH: So, before we move on, we came to social activities. Was there anything else? You mentioned—

JF: Oh, let me go back to that. I got away from it. They had a lot of dances at the time, and this was '64, '65. Almost every weekend there was a dance. Sometimes, even during the week there would be some other dance. This was a time when there were a lot of local bands. And, in fact, several people that were students here had bands. In the university, there were four or five [bands], and I was in one of them because I started to play guitar when I came here and got in the band. This was my part-time entertainment. You didn't make any money doing it. I mean, you get paid, but you spent more money buying the equipment than you did, you know. But it was fun.

AH: What was the name of the band you were in?

JF: The one that I was in was called The Answers.

AH: The Answers.

JF: Don't ask me why that name came about. We were not really one of the better ones. There were several that were really good. They never really got anywhere, I don't think. There were too many.

AH: What were the names of those bands? Do you remember any?

JF: No.

AH: What kind of music did you play?

JF: Mostly rock and roll.

AH: What were some of the songs you played?

JF: Well, what was popular at the time, which was the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and some of the rhythm and blues things, American, Chuck Barry. I don't think that most of that is even known anymore.

AH: Well, certainly not to the younger people.

JF: Not to the students of today. But there was such a large group of talent in that regard around here that it was pretty easy to get dances going. Everybody actually participated, and that was one of the big social events, either at the University Center or more casual ones over at Argos on the second floor, which has a—or, at least at the time, it had a very large room above the dining room. And sometimes even just outdoors, around the street that used to go on the North side of the University Center. And then there was a little hill; there is some building on there now.

AH: Crescent Hill, yeah.

JF: Yeah, Crescent Hill. Also, then there were the folk singers, who didn't mix very much with the rock and roll guys because this was two different groups—two different types of music. And the folk singers usually gathered around the terraces of the University Center.

You could go there at night. Or sometimes on the ground between the dormitories. They would sit there and play at night mostly.

AH: So you were on the rock and roll side of that equation.

JF: I was on the rock and roll side of the group. As it turns out, later on, I got into playing folk music. But, you know, as you get older, you change. And now I mostly play classical and other things.

AH: So did you play at any dances, then?

JF: I think we played two or three dances here at the university.

AH: Did they go well?

JF: Mostly, we played in fraternity parties. Again, like I said, it was fun; we didn't do it as a way of living.

AH: Sure. Something fun.

JF: Can I, uh—?

AH: Oh, absolutely.

JF: (drinking water) Also, I don't remember there being that many trees around.

AH: Well, I know they had a massive tree-planting program over the years because there were so few.

JF: Yeah, when I came here, there were very few trees. It was like—well, this had been an airport, and I think that, whatever was left, they cut it down when they built the buildings. And now it looks a lot more human than it used to.

AH: Describe some of the other students that you interacted with. What was the student body like when you first arrived? And how did it change over the years? Over the course of the 1960s, the social norms and fashions and everything changed so much. Tell us a little bit about that. What did you find maybe unusual that you might not see in Cuba?

JF: What I found—I guess the most unusual thing I found was that I accustomed to the way things were in high school. It looked like this was very loose over here, as far as the rules. And if you didn't want to go to class, you didn't go to class. And there were some people that slept the whole day, some people who the nighttime activities were important to them, it seemed like, than daytime activities.

I thought that that was very weird because I was used to the fact that, in high school, you go to school from this time to that time, and you don't leave the room, and you eat what they tell you that you can eat. Also, I guess the big gathering time was at dinnertime. That's when you saw a lot of people because everybody went there for dinner from four o'clock until seven or something like that, I think it was. Lunch was not so well scheduled because you had to do that during your classes. You'd eat whenever you could. I had, I think, one day a week when I couldn't eat because I had—lunch that is—I had straight classes from, like, ten o'clock through three o'clock or something like that. There were so few people here that it was very easy to keep track of who was who, where everybody lived, what they were doing. I think it was nice.

AH: What about, tell us a little more about the food? Was there a culture shock there at all? I know you had already been in the public school system.

JF: I had been in the public school system. The students, particularly the American kids, which was 99.9% of the people here, complained a lot about the quality of the food and so on. I didn't think it was that bad. There was a company that provided this as a service to USE. It was Morrison's. The only complaint about it was that, when you went to Morrison's cafeteria, the food there was better and there were more choices than what they were giving us here. But, otherwise, I didn't think it was that bad, and it was pretty inexpensive. I think the whole food service, including seven days a week of three meals a day and housing, was less than \$300 a term or something like that. Yeah, it must have been because tuition was 100 and something. I had \$500 to pay for all of that and the books. So then the housing and food couldn't have been more than 200. Books were more reasonable than they are now, of course.

AH: What about dating? Were there many opportunities for that?

JF: I didn't do that much, really. Not in the first two years that I was here. I don't know why.

AH: Well, it's difficult, of course, when you don't have a car.

JF: I didn't have a car. Well, of course, you could have gone for walks around the empty spaces. There were movies and things like that, that you could go with somebody to see every now and then. But, also, I spent a lot of time studying, and whatever leftover time I had, I had the playing guitar. So that didn't leave me a lot of time for other things, too. And I found that, for one thing, in the engineering classes, there were no women then. So it was not so easy to meet people, as it is now, unless you went into the—you know, the folk singers, those were more integrated groups. The rock and roll bands were not because they were all only boys that played in rock and roll bands. Women were not interested in that or didn't think that they could do it. So it took a number of years before women started to sing in rock and roll bands.

AH: Well, and of course, some of the rock and roll boys later played folk, like yourself. So where did you go to study?

JF: Mostly in my room, and I was kind of lucky that I had pretty good roommates that were either studious or they had their own life, and we didn't bother each other. And other than that, at the library because, obviously, you couldn't afford to buy all the books you needed, so you had to spend a lot of time there. But I went to the library a lot, too. Back then, there were no computers, of course, and one of the problems was writing term papers; the library provided typewriters, but getting ahold of one was a whole different story. There were like five little rooms that had typewriters, and you had to get there at very strange hours when nobody else wanted to go, so you could get in and type your paper. I think that one of my roommates had a typewriter, and I borrowed that, but I don't remember that much. I remember going to the library a number of times and either waiting in line or going back to my room because there was none available at the time.

AH: Were there any professors that had a special impact on your life? Any that made a special impression?

JF: The professor I mentioned, whose name I can't remember, that taught American Idea, he made me think about some things that I hadn't thought about. I think he did, too, with some of the other students. In engineering, probably one of the ones that was most influential in my way of thinking was Dr. Scott because he taught a subject that was, like, common to all of the different engineering professions and highly mathematical. And he was a very dynamic person. From his class, I learned that most everything in science is

related to each other through mathematics. So, in a way, it was good for the profession, and, in a way, it was good as a philosophical thing too. So I did learn a lot from him.

AH: The South African professor you mentioned before, the American Idea, what were some of the specific things he kind of had you rethink?

JF: He was very old at the time, which probably means that he was over 40 because that's the way you look at things when you are a college student. But he—I don't know. It was his whole attitude about things. He was very independent in his way of thinking, I guess you could say, and didn't have any problem in being disrespectful of what everybody considered to be the appropriate way. He was, incidentally, a descendant of Dutch people, not English, not black. Anyway, he was one of many, and I wish I could remember others. But there were many. We had many good professors at the time that, basically, some of the things, when you first had them, were kind of shocking. And then, when you thought about it, you realized that these people were right in what they were saying. In high school, you are a little more sheltered from reality.

AH: Was there any way for you to communicate with your parents at all?

JF: Yeah, we wrote to each other.

AH: So what was their life like while you were going to school and college?

JF: What do you mean?

AH: Well, I was just curious. Eventually they came to the States, is that right?

JF: No, they never came.

AH: Oh, okay.

JF: They died in Cuba. They were teachers, and they continued with their professions, in spite of the fact that they were not communists, until they retired. They were kind of, I guess, happy about the fact that I got to go to college. My family wanted me to study engineering all along; I really wasn't that sure that I was going to do that.

AH: What were some of the other things you had in mind?

JF: If I had stayed in Cuba, I probably would've studied architecture instead of engineering.

AH: You're interested a little more in the artistic aspect of it.

JF: Yeah and, in a way, after all of these years, I don't know if I chose the right thing or not. Because I do enjoy architecture, and I do work, you know, my clients are architects, so I do work for architects.

AH: So sometimes you feel a little envious that that might've been the best thing for you?

JF: But architecture is also more demanding on some of the other skills that I really don't have, like you had to deal with the general public rather than with other professionals. I'm kind of sheltered from having to deal with the general public in my profession. And that is good.

AH: Do you have any other interesting memories from USF? Anything odd that you remember? I'm thinking, anything that, looking back, seems a little unusual? Do you remember seeing much in the way of pranks?

JF: There were not that many of those, but there were some. Alpha Hall, at the time, had—this is the one that I remember most—a basement that was a nuclear shelter or something like that. Then, there was a first floor. And no one could ever go into that basement, of course. And there was a first floor; they had rooms where you could sit down to study or talk to a friend, and I think one had a television set, maybe. There weren't that many television sets here at the time. And one room had a large trash dump. Then there was a chute that went all the way to the last floor, which I think was five.

So you were supposed to empty your trashcan into this chute, and it would get collected. Every now and then, somebody would throw a match down the thing and set it on fire just to see the fire truck come over and the commotion and the alarm, and everybody had to leave the place. This happened several times in the first year that I was here. I thought it was pretty silly, particularly when it happened at 11 o'clock and you were ready to go to bed. But no, there weren't that many crazy things happening.

AH: What about political protests?

JF: USF had not really gotten into that until much later, I guess. In the '64, '65 timeframe, there wasn't much happening here. I don't even remember. I guess, in the early '70s, late '60s or early '70s, was when some of the things did happen. I wasn't here, then, living on campus anymore.

AH: When did you graduate?

JF: I got my degree in '72. I got married in '69 and then I think I had like three or four more courses to take, but I was already working. It was one of the things that I had a pretty good job with an engineering company without a degree, and I was having a very nice time doing the actual work. So I took the classes as part-time. For a while, I tried to do full-time work and full-time studying, and that doesn't work; you cannot do that. So I cut it back to full-time work and part-time studying and graduated in '72. But I was off the dorms from about 1967 or '68, even though, obviously, my life was surrounded around the university.

Actually, even after I got married, we continued to have a lot of friends here, so we sort of lived half of our time here, visiting people and doing activities with the university. But, by that time, we were in a different category because we were no longer in the same age group as the students over here; they looked to us very young. And we were, of course, more sophisticated because we were already married. I think I was 25 or something. Anyway.

AH: Did you meet your wife here?

JF: Yes. Well, my first wife. We got divorced several years ago.

AH: Okay. Just one moment.

pause in recording

AH: Okay, well, we just took a short break. But we were talking about the quarter system. Tell us about how that changed everything. When did that happen, about?

JF: I don't know what brought that about, but I guess what we had is that some people had questioned the fact that all of these buildings were empty for such a long period of time. So they were trying to be more efficient. And so, they came up with this formula that, in order to convert a 14-week trimester into a 10-week quarter, which would allow you to license the buildings 40 weeks a year—theoretically—you simply multiply the number of hours that you went to school every week by this magical formula.

And, for instance, most of the three-hour courses became four-hour courses, and the five-hour courses became seven-hour courses, and so on. Then you took the same number of classes or maybe one class less than before because the hours had already been adjusted that way. There was one little thing that nobody thought about it. This was the flaw, that the majority of the work that you do in college is work that you do on your own, outside of the classroom. Well if you take—the number of hours in a week remain fixed. The number of hours that you sleep remain fixed. The number of hours that you spend in class increased. Work all of that mathematics, and you'll find out that you have fewer hours to do your work. So everybody started finding out that, when we started in this program, that it was very easy to fall behind, and you just couldn't keep up with your assignments, and you started to get bad grades. I nearly failed that first term that we went to the quarter system. And this went on, I think, until after I graduated. It was still running that way. It was horrible.

AH: Well, and you knew how it was before that, with the trimesters, and then suddenly it's very difficult. So, obviously, other students, your roommate, other people were complaining about it too?

JF: Everybody was complaining about it. There was nothing we could do about it. I mean, what are you going to do about it? So we were hoping that it would go away, but it didn't. Not for quite a few years.

AH: Well, you can thank Gov. Haydon Burns² for that.

JF: Yes, everybody hated him.

AH: Well, the story goes that—

JF: I don't know if it was really his fault or his idea or if he just got blamed for it. But it was a totally stupid system, totally un-academic. If you wanted to ruin a university, that's the way to do it.

²William Haydon Burns was governor of Florida from 1965 to 1967.

AH: Well, the story went that his son had performed very poorly under the trimester system. And so, between that and the efficiency argument that you brought up, they thought the quarter system would work better.

JF: Well, actually, the efficiency went away because it used to be that, during the summertime, at least a few students were able to go to school for a full term, particularly the ones that wanted to finish early or something like that, or the ones who were behind already and were trying to catch up. After they changed, you were so burned out by the time that you finished the normal school year, that the last thing you could do was to go to school. So now, the utilization of the buildings was even less than it was before. It was totally absurd.

AH: Well, I think all students today should be thankful that that's no longer in place. Let's see, do you remember anything about race relations, in particular? I know it was an integrated student body to begin with. Do you remember anything?

JF: It was, but there were very few Black people here. And very few of them that lived in the dorms. That I don't know why. There were no, to my knowledge, there were no restrictions, official or unofficial, on who could live in the dorms. But like I said, there were very few. I think, in the engineering school, there were maybe one or two Black students at the time.

AH: How would you characterize the political climate at USF among the students and professors? Did it seem particularly conservative, liberal? Was it open? Was it kind of restrictive?

JF: Insofar as the civil rights issue?

AH: Not just civil rights, but just political issues in general, whether it be things about communism and the Cold War or?

JF: Well, I never have been too involved in politics to begin with, or not at all. But it seemed like different departments had different approaches to life. The geography department, for instance, was very conservative. There were certain things you didn't do if you were a geography major. Engineering was quite conservative, as well. Then you had the liberal arts group that were fairly the other way, fairly liberal. Some of the students did not mix very well. Like, for instance, the engineering students were

considered to be snobs because they kept to themselves. From what I remember, my friends were probably a mixed group of some engineers, some people from liberal arts. I don't think I can tell you much about that.

AH: Was there anything we missed? Any subject that maybe we should talk about that we didn't touch on yet? At least about your time at USF?

JF: No. From the point of view of what was going on, I think that that's—

AH: So just tell us, kind of, briefly just tell us a little bit about what happened after you got out of USF? Of course, you already had a good job before you graduated. But tell us a little bit about that, about how your career developed.

JF: First of all, the summer job that I had was kind of a haphazard thing that, am I getting the job? Because, during the first year that I was here, the rock and roll group played in a benefit concert one time, and it was sponsored by one of the civic organizations. I can't remember which one. But one of the people who was running this operation told us that, if we ever needed a job, to come talk to him. Well, needless to say, when I finished my first year here, I needed a job for the summer.

So two of us from the group went and talked to this man. He was the president of a construction company. And he remembered the promise, and he gave us jobs, and we started to work there. And the other guy, I think, worked one year. And then, the following summer, he went into something else. He wasn't interested in construction. I went back, and I was there, I think, three summers. And after being there for three summers, I pretty much decided that I might as well go into engineering as related to designing buildings. And, like I said before, I liked architecture, anyway, from the beginning.

So that's how I got into the path within engineering that I ended up in. I, then, went to work for a consulting engineering company here. Then, I guess, over the years, I worked in three or four different offices, a little bit more responsibility every time, until in the last one I had gotten to be head of the structural department in that company. Then, about 20 years ago, I started my own company with another guy I had worked with, another engineer that I had worked with before. He passed away about 10 years ago and I bought his [share], so I'm the only owner of a consulting company now.

AH: What's the name of that company?

JF: Cabana & Fernandez Structural Consultants. We have done some other work here as well. We did the expansion of what used to be the old library, which is now the student services building. But that's what it was at the time we did the expansion.

AH: Yes. When did you do that expansion?

JF: Probably 10 or 12 years ago. We added a building to the north of the old library and one that goes at an angle, sort of like a covered walkway or something like that. Plus, I have done some of the work back in what used to be the mental health area.

AH: Okay. So you've come back and made contributions to USF, physically?

JF: Some.

AH: What was the name of that construction company that you worked for over the summer?

JF: Prestressed Concrete, Inc.

AH: What was it called?

JF: Prestressed Concrete, Inc.

AH: Okay. So you mentioned that all of that background in mathematics and theory eventually served you well as an engineer. So you really think that ended up paying off? You got your practical experience on the job.

JF: A lot of it.

AH: And then the theory ended up filling in a lot of the cracks later on, I guess, huh?

JF: Yes, and I was very fortunate to work with some really brilliant engineers when I started to work. And from them I learned also a lot of things. These were not professors but practical guys that were very good and were older than I.

AH: Well, before we wrap this up, is there anything else that we missed? Anything that we might've overlooked?

JF: No, I think we covered all of the subjects very well, as well as what was going on then. One of the things that is probably the most outstanding here is the difference that there was in Tampa and in the university between the way things were 40 years ago and now. You cannot just describe the differences, physically and emotionally too. There was a very big separation between—physical and mental between what went on in the university and what went on outside.

AH: Try to describe that to us a little bit, especially, you say, the emotional space. What were the big differences between the community?

JF: I think that this was looked at as a separate group of people because there was a cultural type of thing—cultural life I guess you could say, here. Tampa was very backwards then as opposed to how it is now. Even though it was an uncomplicated, simple, and convenient place to live because you could get anywhere in 20 minutes if you had a car. I mean, well looking at before there were expressways and when Dale Mabry was a two-lane road and Fowler and Fletcher were two-lane roads. There were, like, three movies in downtown and one in one of the shopping centers; I think that was about all. No performing arts center. And, in fact, no performing arts, period. And the type of entertainment here was totally different from what we have now. So the university was totally out of place with the rest of the town, I think. Nowadays, I think it is integrated much better because Tampa has come a long way.

AH: Almost as if the city has grown into the university.

JF: Yes. This was agricultural land around here. That's one of the things that I, in a way, sort of regret: the change. Because the settings around here were very nice. I mean, the area that surrounded the university. I remember being very sad when they cut down all the trees to build the University Mall. But, you know, those are the things that happen, and you cannot very well stop them.

AH: Let's see, there's one more question before we wind up. What would you share with future scholars, maybe young people that are thinking about taking classes now, whether

they be young or working parents or refugees from Cuba or someplace else? What kind of advice would you offer young people today?

JF: Well, first of all, for those who want to go into engineering, you can make a lot more money for a lot less work in other professions like law, journalism, or whatever, selling real estate. I cannot complain about, financially, how well I am doing in engineering, but I can assure you that I have worked a lot for that. As far as in general, I think that, truly, the time that you spend in college are the best years of your life, the happiest, the least complicated, and you have an opportunity that you should not allow to go away. I think it is a very unique opportunity to do this.

It isn't just the career that you choose, it is what you learn by being in college. To me, the university made me a different person. Not in every respect, of course, but in many ways because of the fact that you meet many different types of persons, many different ideas. Some of which you don't agree with but at least you hear about them, which otherwise you wouldn't. I think it is a wonderful thing to do, and this is a good university. Well, I've been away for a number of years, so I don't know how things are now. But my experience was very good here.

AH: Well, I think our experience here, today, has been good too. Thank you for sitting down and talking to us and sharing.

JF: I enjoyed it.

AH: Thanks again.

End of Interview