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Andrew Huse (AH): —for the Florida Studies Center. Today, we continue a series of interviews in our studio in the Tampa campus library, with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni, in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Gerald Giglia, who came to USF in nineteen sixty—

Gerald Giglia (GG): Came in 1963 and graduated in 1968.

AH: Okay, wow, the halcyon days. And he was a student then. Today, you work with the alumni center?

GG: Yeah, I work with the Alumni Association, but I'm a CPA partner for a firm of Cherry Bekaert & Holland¹, a large regional CPA firm here in Tampa.

AH: Oh, okay. Well, thanks for being with us this morning. Let's just get you started. What brought you to USF in the first place? When did you apply? And when did you kind of weigh your options there?

GG: Yeah, I graduated from Hillsborough High School here in Tampa in June of 1963. In those days, there weren't a lot of options. There weren't a lot of universities available. And University of South Florida was a new school, and it was here. A lot of people from my high school graduating class were going to universities all over the place, and [I]

¹The firm, now called Cherry Bekaert LLP, is one of the largest certified public accounting firms in the United States.

primarily came here because it was going to be affordable. My parents didn't have a lot of money to put us through college, but yet they knew that it was important, and it would be significant in our lives. And so, the University of South Florida presented a good, economical option because I could come to school here and still have room and board at home.

AH: You know it's funny, the more people we talk to, the more we hear that college education might not have been possible if it wasn't for USF.

GG: Well, and it very well likely could've been with me. I've got a brother that's eight years younger than I am, and he eventually came to [University of] South Florida as well. So I mean, some of the stories that my mother tells, she still, I think has the ledger (AH laughs) where she would put the tuition she was paying for every trimester—I guess it was, or quarters—back in those days, and how much each book [cost] I had to buy, and whether it was a new book or a used book. She still has some of those. I can't remember some of the dollar amounts, but it was, like, phenomenal compared to what it would be to get a college education today. I mean, it was hardly anything. I'm sure back in those days they thought it was a lot of money. But, yeah, if it wasn't for [University of] South Florida, the fact that it was so economical, I may not have had a college education, and neither may my brother eight years later.

AH: Well, it's interesting to ask, too, your experience in economics; in real dollar value, it's still pretty darn low, right? Even if you take inflation into account?

GG: Oh, it is. It is. I'm not sure of today, the tuition may be like around 10,000 a year or something like that?

AH: I'm sure that's a safe bet, yeah.

GG: But, I mean, that would have probably paid more than four years, back in those days. I think it was primarily driven through economics that I came here. You were young, and you really weren't sure, back in those days, what the college experience was all about because, frankly, there weren't a lot of people around that had college educations. It's not as prolific as it is today to have a college degree.

AH: Yeah. By the way, if you're thirsty or you need to clear your throat—

GG: (inaudible)

AH: So, then, you weren't sure what the college experience was?

GG: Not at all.

AH: You were a commuter?

GG: Um-hm. Was a commuter, and I always tell some of the funny stories. You know, that you had to move your car around when you went from one building to the next because the buildings were far and few between. And we always used to joke about how we left home, not that far away—and we lived in Seminole Heights—and the weather could seem to be somewhat pleasant, and we came up to [University of] South Florida, and it was colder; in the summer time, it was hotter. If the wind was blowing at home, it seemed like it blew harder here. There wasn't a lot of grass, so you had that yellow sand all over your books and everywhere else because there weren't trees and grass. It just seemed like the wind was always whipping up the sand. You had to move your car from building to building, and, yeah, I commuted during that time as well.

AH: What was your academic experience like? Do any teachers or classes stick out in your mind?

GG: Well, when I first started at the University of South Florida in September of '63, somewhere in there, fall of '63, I thought I wanted to be an engineer because, at that point, the only person in my family, on both sides of my family, that had gotten a college degree was a cousin on my mother's side. And he had become an electrical engineer at the University of Florida. He was a football player and then got recruited by General Electric. Boy I was good in math. I had always been good at math, so I said, "Boy! Maybe an engineer is what I'm going to be as well." So, in those early years, in trying to get the undergraduate in the first couple of years, most of my classes were mathematics, chemistry, physics. I had the English and humanities and the behavioral sciences. But most of my classes were in science and in math. In those early years, I think there was a teacher by the name of [George] Michaelides, who I think was a math teacher. He was one of my favorites. Parker, a person that I know that a lot of people were acquainted with, Knocky Parker².

AH: Yes, John Knocky.

²John "Knocky" Parker II was a celebrated jazz pianist and English professor who taught at USF in the 1960s.

GG: I think he taught the humanities. So he was always a very interesting teacher.

AH: Did he show you any silent films? I know that was one of his—

GG: Yeah, I think he did, and then he played the piano. But there was an interesting experience, and it's sad that I can't remember the gentleman's name. But in my freshman year, we took classes in the auditorium, so there were these huge classes, I think maybe one day a week and then you went into a smaller classroom in the other days. My name, even though it had six letters, not too many people have ever been able to pronounce it unless you sat there and told them. Okay, so, all through school, none of the teachers could ever pronounce my name correctly the first time. Well, I never forgot this because this gentleman did, and no one ever has since.

We were sitting in this huge auditorium, and he's going through the roster—I don't know, 100 people or so or more. And he's reading off the names, and he reads my name and says, "GEE-lee-ah." And I said, "How did he know that?" And from his last name, I didn't think he was Italian. So I thought, "Man, I've got to go up and tell this guy." So after the class, I went to the front of the auditorium and said, "You know, no one's ever pronounced my name correctly. How did you know that that second G was silent?" He said, "Well, I really didn't. I took a look at it and thought maybe it was, and so I pronounced it." And I said, "Well, you're the only person that's ever pronounced it correctly."

I guess, if I looked at my records, I could probably find out who he was, remember who he was. But that left an impression on me. But in those early days, you basically went to class, and there wasn't much going on out in this part of town. There wasn't much on campus. So if you weren't doing some kind of project in the library, you basically got in your car, and you went back home. And that's how those first couple of years were. I was taking, I guess it was a pre-engineering kind of thing. But, by the time I got to differential equations and I think I had taken my chemistry and my physics, I kept thinking this stuff is so abstract that it just did not interest me anymore. I wasn't doing that well in it. It wasn't interesting. I thought, "This is not what I want to do the rest of my life."

So it was during those first couple of years, is when I started trying to figure out what other major I wanted to switch off on. The other interesting thing that was going on in those days is that—and I don't know if they still do it now—but there were some classes in the administration building up here. I had an engineering graphics class on the second floor of that building. There were some classes in those days, but I don't think thereafter there were many more. So that's a vivid memory I have, going into that building. It was a neat looking building, and I guess it's still being used as administration today. The other thing I was telling the gentleman that's heading this up. He said one of the stories that he

had not heard of is that, on Fowler Avenue, from Fowler to Florida [Avenue]—which is how we came, we'd come up on Florida—there wasn't anything. But there was a University Restaurant, just a little beyond the University Mall, on the north side of Fowler.

AH: I believe there's a Walgreens there now.

GG: That's right. And so, if we didn't want to eat in the cafeteria here, which, in those days, we called it the UC Center; if we didn't want to eat there, we would go to the University Restaurant and eat lunch there. The story he said he had never heard is that, when we got through eating, we would all go into the one car that we all jumped into, and we would study. And he says, "What? I never heard that story before!" We would study there in the parking lot, studying for whatever our next class was, and then, when it was time to leave, we left and came right to class. So we studied in that parking lot of the University Restaurant. (both laugh)

AH: Well, there was much less facilities for just gathering on campus. The UC was smaller than the Marshall Center is now. The library was smaller.

GG: Yeah, that's right. The library was—probably was down here.

AH: Yeah, the student services building.

GG: That's correct. We thought it was—compared to what we had in high school—we thought that was a huge building. But compared to now. But that's where the classes were. We had some classes in those behavioral science, humanity buildings that were way on the other side of the campus. The—I think, is it the chemistry building?

AH: Yes.

GG: That's relatively new, that had the pendulum. That was relatively a new building. We were in there. Some of our classes were in the auditorium. That used to be right next to the UC. That auditorium, some of our large lecture classes were there. And then, I think some classes were in a group of behavioral science buildings, I think. On the corner—it would have been southwest corner of the campus, in those buildings there. There wasn't too much on the eastern part of the campus. The Sun Dome wasn't there. The athletic fields were in that general vicinity, and a lot of the intramurals were there.

AH: Yeah, and a couple of campus ministries, but they sprouted up slowly.

GG: That's right! Yeah, there were some campus ministries on—is that 30th Street? No that's um—

AH: Not Maple.

GG: Because 30th is over here.

AH: I always just think of it as church row. I can't—

GG: Yeah. It was some of those buildings that were there; some of the campus ministries were there, I think, at the time.

AH: Yeah, I think Episcopalian and Baptist.

GG: And Catholic (both talking at same time, inaudible), yeah.

AH: What about, you were talking about the University Restaurant. When you think back on recreational activities, whether it be on or off campus, what did you and other students do for fun?

GG: Well, there were a couple of things. On Friday nights, and then in later years—and I can tell you about that later, when we started getting involved with fraternities and how those are all evolved. But in those first couple of years, usually on weekends, there were dances in the university ballroom, is what we called it at the time, on the second floor on the eastern part of the building. So, there were always dances going on there. And we would tend to always go to those. The other interesting thing is that the breweries, at the time, that were here—I think Schlitz and, was it Budweiser here at the time? On Fridays, Friday afternoons, they used to have, like, an open house where I think the beer was free. I can't remember, but it was always a neat place to gather on the Friday afternoon. As a matter of fact, when the beginning of the trimester or quarter, when you were signing up for classes, you always wanted to make sure that you left Friday afternoons open because that's when everybody would congregate at the two breweries. They had, like, these hospitality houses. And I think the beer was free. I can't remember now, but I think it was.

AH: Yeah, like, at Busch Garden's, it still is³.

GG: Yeah, it still is. And these you could get to, you know, from the street. They had a parking lot, and you could go in there. So we'd do that on Fridays. Saturday nights we would come to the dances sometimes, here at the UC. There were a couple of other bars. If I'm not mistaken, there was one that was on Fowler here, a little bit further down on Fowler, east of the campus on the left-hand side. There was a little bar there that people used to gather. I think—

AH: Would that be the old Copper Top?

GG: No, it wasn't called the Copper Top.

AH: Just curious.

GG: I'm sure people that you've spoken to have probably mentioned that place because, like I said, there weren't many places around. So these kind of places like this, for a young person, was like a landmark. I think there was another one along Nebraska or Florida Avenue, towards Fowler. So, if you didn't do those kinds of things on the weekend, once you were a freshman [or] sophomore here, what you typically did is you sort of continued doing what you did when you were in high school. You went to some of those same places. It was just a little bit older crowd.

AH: Yeah.

GG: For the first couple of years at [University of] South Florida, that's what it was. But there was a significant event. You know, I'm going to be 60 years old tomorrow, so the old gray matter—

AH: Well, congratulations.

GG: Yeah, thank you. But there was, it was a serious note but actually a very significant note that, I think, all people will relate to in my generation. I started in September of 1963, so we all know what happened on November 22nd of 1963⁴. Well, I was a student here at [University of] South Florida. Politics—and yet, I think I always enjoyed history, but history and politics wasn't that big of a deal with me. Sports and math and science

³In 2009, Blackstone acquired the Busch Gardens amusement park, and the tradition of giving free beer samples to park guests was discontinued.

⁴President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas as his motorcade drove through downtown.

was more what I was into. But we all had to take our political science, our behavioral science courses. And I can't think of what this—there was another name for that political science course.

AH: American Idea?

GG: Yes. American Idea. And so, the paper that I was writing was that there was a thought about whether John Kennedy was going to run for reelection in '64. He probably was, and his opponent, probably, on the Republican side would've been Barry Goldwater. And so, I was writing a paper on whether I thought John Kennedy would run for reelection in '64, and—I think—how he would do in Florida, and whether he would win the election. So I wrote this paper and turned it in either the day or two before he was assassinated on that Friday, the 22nd.

But the other interesting thing is that three days prior to his assassination, he had visited—he visited Tampa. Of course, obviously, I was a student here, and I took the day off or something on the morning of. But my mother and my younger brother and myself went to Al Lopez Field, which is a baseball stadium that's around where Raymond James Stadium is today, in that vicinity. It was a baseball park. And so, I took off from classes, and my mother and brother went down there to see him. I had just got through writing that paper, and I had turned it in. I almost had really forgotten about it, but I turned it in, and we went to see him, and we were there. And we saw the three helicopters land. And it was just a magical kind of event. And when he left the stadium, he left on an open-top convertible, and he was standing up, and he was waving. He was, I don't know, maybe 20 [or] 30 feet from us when he drove off. Okay, so then later on that week—that Friday—he was in Dallas and was assassinated. I was going to classes here that Friday morning, and my classes, I think, were over at noontime, I think it was—sometime around midday.

AH: So you could make it to the brewery. (laughs)

GG: Yeah, that's right. And I was pulling out of [University of] South Florida's parking lot on the side that's 30th Street now, somewhere in there. And I had the radio on, and this news bulletin came on that President Kennedy had been shot. So people always say, "Where were you?" Everybody likes to say, Where were we on 9/11⁵? Where were you? Our generation before [asked the same thing about] Pearl Harbor⁶. Well the question

⁵On September 11th, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda coordinated a series of four attacks on the United States of America. Four passenger airliners were hijacked; two planes were crashed into the World Trade Center complex in New York City, a third plane was crashed into the Pentagon, and the fourth plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania after the passengers fought against the hijackers.

⁶On December 7th, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service launched a surprise attack against the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor. The attack came without a declaration of war and without explicit

always comes up, Where were you when John Kennedy was assassinated? And I'll always say that story. That I was leaving [University of] South Florida on a Friday, midday, when I heard the news. The other thing about it is that the funeral and all of that went on during that weekend, and Lee Harvey Oswald⁷ was assassinated as well. I had forgotten about that paper I turned in. And so, when I came back to class either Monday or Tuesday of that following week, the American Idea professor that I had had graded all the papers. And here he hands this paper back to me with this long, little annotation that he had written about how ironic it was that Kennedy was assassinated and that I had written this paper, and he gave me an A-plus. And I think, today, I still have kept that paper as one of my prized possessions.

AH: Wow.

GG: So that's the neat story. That's all part of the [University of] South Florida experience for me here, as well.

AH: Oh, definitely. So you, at some point, got into accounting, then?

GG: Yeah, when I started realizing that engineering wasn't what I was going to do, I didn't know what to do. Now I think, sometimes, in retrospect, I tease my wife because I'm a real history buff. And obviously, I'm getting close to retirement, so I keep telling her—I've been telling her this for years—one of these days, when I hang up my CPA, I may become a history teacher somewhere, at a high school or junior college or somewhere because I love history; I'm always reading history books. But I didn't know, at that time, what I wanted to do. And, you know, we had to be very pragmatic and practical. Whatever you did had to equate to a job. And so, I took an accounting course and did very well in it. It was a basic thing. I did very well in it. And so I thought, hmm, because it was math-oriented as well. So I thought, Boy, this is maybe what I ought to do. And that's what I did.

AH: Okay. So, what, it was relatively effortless for you, then? Compared to the engineering?

GG: Well, it wasn't effortless, but it made a lot more sense to me. Accounting was still difficult. And I can remember, with my fraternity brothers and other friends of mine, it appeared that they all had easier majors. They could go to class, and they could prepare for an exam the night before the exam. And, in accounting, that's one thing that

warning. The following day, December 8th, America declared war on Japan.

⁷Oswald was convicted for the assassination of JFK. While he being transferred to the county jail, he was fatally shot by Jack Ruby.

accounting that sort of carried over from engineering: you had to keep up every single day. Because if you didn't, you'd be in trouble. So it was a lot of work, and a lot of other people that were in the business college at the time with me—. People that were majoring in accounting were sort of held to high regards because they knew it was a difficult major. But I liked it because it just made more sense to me. Engineering, to some extent, became real hypothetical, theoretical—

AH: Yeah, theoretical.

GG: —to me. Accounting was more—. You could apply it, it was more pragmatic, you could understand that it was the language of business.

AH: There's a balance at the end. It's positive, or it's negative. That's it.

GG: Yeah, and you could see where it was applicable all over the place because you knew every business everywhere, whether it was small or large or General Motors or whatever, that accounting was going to be a fundamental part of that organization. So it became a real practical choice, I think, as well. Now, in those days, the university was starting to change. If I'm not mistaken, in my freshman year, I think the first graduating class was graduating in '63, or thereabout.

AH: Correct.

AH: I think it was. I'm not certain, but I think it was. So the university was evolving, but by the time I became a junior and senior and like that, the university had what they called local fraternities and sororities. And the fraternity that I eventually pledged with was called Delta Tau. But a lot of these local fraternities and sororities were basically clubs. They were people that may have known each other from high school because, I don't know the percentage, but a lot of the student body at the time was commuting.

AH: Oh, yeah.

GG: There was a gradual increase in the people that were coming from out of town, but these fraternities and sororities were primarily brought in by either people from high school clubs, or they knew people from high school, or they were people that came from out of town, junior colleges that brought their organizations here. They had all kinds of names. They primarily were Greek names, but none of them were affiliated with national organizations.

The administration, as we all know now, wasn't too keen on all of those extracurricular things. They weren't too keen on sports, and they weren't too keen on fraternities and sororities. Everything was basically academic, and that's it. So myself and a good friend of mine from high school, that has since passed away, he and I were pledging—or we were going to the smokers, I think is what they were called—where you went to these events to see whether they were going to select you and whether you selected them.

So we were chosen by Delta Tau, and it was really a neat experience for us because, of all of the organizations that were here on campus at the time, Delta Tau didn't have a lot of local commuters. That was an interesting twist. Most of the people that were in the fraternity were from out of town; a lot of them were from Miami. So I'm not sure how that all happened, but we got in—we were rushed. We were chosen, became pledges. And, at the time, the faculty advisor of the organization was a dear gentleman—but he just recently passed away—that had been the director of financial aid at the University of South Florida, Colonel Silverwood.

And he was a big fraternity advocate and had been even years after he had retired. He died a couple of months ago. He was way in his '90s. So he was a real strong advocate. He worked here, and he was director of financial aid. So he was a real proponent. And he was a faculty advisor for Delta Tau. He had been a Pike; he was a Pi Kappa Alpha man, had always been involved in his fraternity, even in his later years—the national fraternity. So, in those days, a lot of these national fraternities and sororities were now allowed to come to campus. And so, they took these various organizations, and the next phase of involvement was called colonization. So these fraternities that were local in nature became colonies of these national fraternities and sororities. And so, Delta Tau became a colony for Pi Kappa Alpha. So we became pledges, and I think I was the treasurer of our pledge class because I'm an accounting major.

And so, that started changing our experience here at [University of] South Florida because, then we started spending a lot more time on campus. A lot of the fraternity brothers were living in the dorms because more and more dorms were being built for these people from out of town. There were obviously no fraternity houses and whatever, but some of these dorm rooms almost became inherited as a fraternity room. Gradually, some of these people got apartments off campus. There were [a] few apartments that were starting to pop up on Fletcher and some of the other areas. And so, typically, what would happen is some of the fraternity people would try to get apartments in the same complex. So it became a gathering place. And then, our involvement with [University of] South Florida really started changing because of that. We were here a lot more; we were starting to identify with the university more. It was no longer an extension of the 13th and 14th grade of high school. Intramurals became really big because of the rivalry among the fraternities in the various sports. And you saw people with all their fraternity garbs. I think it was on Fridays or something like that, people started wearing their fraternity pins.

You had to wear it at the right spot on the shirt. And so, the university was becoming a university in those years.

A sad thing that happened is, in 1966, December of '66, my dad passed away. I was 21. And, obviously, it cost money to belong to fraternities and all of that. And so, I was wondering whether I was going to continue to go to the university because my dad had passed away, my brother was eight years younger. I thought that I was, maybe, going to have to quit school and go to work to help support my family: my mother and brother. This is another event that changed my life and was significant for me when I was a student here at [University of] South Florida.

Colonel Silverwood, the director of financial aid and a faculty advisor for our fraternity, shortly after my father died, had called us up and said could he come and visit with my mother and I? And he brought some fraternity brothers with him. Well, he came, and he told my mom, "Mrs. Giglia, whatever you do, don't let Gerry drop out of school because, if money is an issue or whatever, you just let us know. Somehow, someway, we'll make the finances work, but don't take him away from this college experience." And it just, you know, it sort of gets me emotional just thinking about it after all these years. But you don't forget those things, you know? You don't forget those events. So that was another significant event that your life could have gone this way, or it could've gone that way. And I attribute that turn in that right direction to the University of South Florida and the people that were here: Colonel Silverwood and fraternity brothers.

AH: Sounds like a special guy, yeah.

GG: Oh, yeah. And I kept in touch with him. I kept in touch with him until he went into a nursing home a few years ago and then he passed away. But even after I graduated—

I'll tell you another neat, funny story. But even after I graduated and came back from the service—I was in the Navy—I always kept in touch with him. And his dream was for [University of] South Florida to always university row—I'm sorry—a fraternity and sorority row. And so, he had recruited me to become part of the housing corporation; all of the fraternities and sororities had housing corporations of alumni that had graduated and that was the objective. It was to try to raise money, keep the fervor up, keep the interest going, so that, someday, once the university had approved that, the infrastructure would be there in these housing corporations to get these things going.

And so, there were a lot of false starts. I can remember they were going to—. There was a part of the campus—it would've been to the west of University Center, to the west of the auditorium, towards where the old bookstore was, back in that corner. They had, at one

point, allocated some land there. I even think they had a groundbreaking or something. And so, that was his dream. Of course, he lived long enough to be able to see this here. The ironic thing about it is that our fraternity wasn't one of the fraternity houses that were there. At that point, he had gotten too old, and he wasn't active anymore in it. I'm not sure why that happened, but those are some interesting stories about him and the fraternity and how that impacted and enlarged our experience here at the University of South Florida.

AH: Yeah, great stories. So, when you graduated, it was in '68, right?

GG: Yeah.

AH: How did that feel? What was that like for you and your family?

GG: Well, it was a strange time at the University of South Florida because, in June of 1968, when I graduated, it was probably the peak of the Vietnam war. There was unrest, and everything was very unsettled and disturbing, all over college campuses in the late '60s, all over. You know, we all remember Kent State⁸ and all of that. Well, [University of] South Florida wasn't as unrestful as some of the college campuses. But there were some here too. In those days, the military didn't have an ROTC arm here at the University of South Florida. I can remember that the branches of the military were going to have an event here that turned ugly. But they were going to have an event here—

AH: That's for recruiting, right?

GG: For recruiting. And, if I'm not mistaken, they had set up their tables and all of that right outside the UC on this side. So it would be the south side—that area there in front. I can't remember, now, how hostile things got. But it got a little weird. Because those—back in the days of the hippies, and the long hair, and the beads, and the peace children, and the flower children. And boy, the military was there that represented almost 180 degrees opposite of what some of the students represented here. And so boy, they were tough times. The other thing that I vividly remember about those days—and, boy, this was always a significant decision that everybody made when they were registering for classes every year—you had to make sure that you took enough hours to be full-time. I can't remember now if that was 12, 14, [or] 15 hours. I can't remember what that was. But you had to be full-time because you had a student deferment. And the minute you went below full-time, even if you were still a student, the registrar's office had to notify

⁸On May 4, 1970, twenty-eight Ohio National Guardsmen fired approximately 67 rounds at unarmed college students resulting in the death of four students and the wounding of nine others. The shooting was preceded by three days of protests. On the second day of protest, May 2, Mayor Satrom felt that local officials were incapable of dealing with future unrest and asked for the National Guards to be sent to Kent.

the draft wards. It was part of the federal law. And so, when they found out that you were now not a full-time student, (sound of fingers snapping) there were people getting drafted off campus here because they weren't a full-time student. They were being drafted. So it's really funny because when my kids then went to college, they would talk about maybe dropping a course. And you could drop classes then too, but no one did. No one hardly did.

AH: At least no men.

GG: And the thing about it is, is that people almost would compromise and get a grade that they knew they could do better with because you didn't want to drop the class and go off full-time. So that was a real significant judgment that you had to go through at the beginning of every registration period because you had to make sure—I can't imagine what it would be today when, maybe, a class that you're looking for is not available. In those days, this was the only campus, so I don't know how that would've happened today. But getting back to the graduation, our graduation—I'm trying to recall where it was. I think our graduation was, maybe, at the Bayfront Center⁹?

AH: Curtis Hixon Hall?

GG: Curtis Hixon. My brother later graduated at Bayfront. Yeah, Curtis Hixon is where we graduated, downtown. It was a big event. It was sort of sad because the fraternity was playing a bigger role in your lives, then. And that was about the—our senior year was about the year that the fraternities became national chapters. So that was a big deal. So these kids that were going to be coming in after us, they were going to sort of have it made. And our names, because we were part of that charter class, we were the charter members of our fraternity. I guess our names are still being repeated now to the kids that are coming into the fraternity. We were that charter class. But the graduation was sort of a sad event because the Vietnam War was still going strong, and a lot of us did not know where we were going to end up, where we were going to go. Because, when you graduated—unless you had some kind of a disability or some kind of a physical family deferment—you were going to be drafted or were going to be classified 1-A¹⁰, and we were going to be drafted. If you want me to get into some of that, I can tell you. But those were some of the events that were on your mind as you were walking down the aisle to get that diploma.

AH: I bet.

⁹The Bayfront Center was an indoor arena located in St. Petersburg; it was commonly used for concerts, ceremonies, sporting and other community events.

¹⁰1-A was an individual classification assigned to military draft registrants during the Vietnam War, which indicated that one was eligible for military service.

GG: Where am I going to be a year from now?

AH: So, for you, it was the Navy.

GG: It was the Navy. Now, I almost got drafted. When I came out of college, I was an accountant. And back in those days, you couldn't go into public accounting because a lot of the CPA firms didn't want people if you had a 1-A classification. You would end up—were going to get drafted and you were going to leave. So I had to go into private accounting and went to work in the internal audit control division of Maas Brothers¹¹. Maas Brothers was a high-end retail department store like a Dillard's and a Burdines in Tampa at the time that was a part of allied stores out of New York.

I went to work for them in the control division with internal audit and accounting. I went for my draft physical in Jacksonville, passed it and took a bus trips from downtown Tampa to Jacksonville. They gave you a bag lunch, [you] went through your physical, then you bussed back to Tampa the same day. I passed my physical, and they told me that I was probably going to get drafted. So I thought, I'm not sure if I want to go over there in the army, and [I] joined the Navy Reserves. Back in those days, the Navy Reserves was also active duty. I went into the Navy Reserves, went to boot camp in Orlando, went to "A" school in San Diego, California, because it took a while for them to get you all prepared. But I got orders where everybody—I was in Charleston, South Carolina, awaiting orders, and I would say nine out of ten people were getting orders to Vietnam while I was there, but I was one of those one out of ten. And I got orders to a naval communication station in Asmara, Ethiopia. And that's where I spent my two years of active duty.

AH: Okay. Now, we've got about 15 minutes left. I'm hoping that you can just quickly summarize for us those interim years. And then, I really want to get to when you were talking about your son at UF, and really how that's re-sparked your interest?

GG: Yeah, really, those interim years when I came back, I got married. I met this young lady that was working at Moss Brothers at that time. I had a military leave of absence, and we got married. In the years that followed, we were just real busy raising children, careers, buying houses, all of the things that you sort of worry about in those years of your life. And so, there wasn't a lot of involvement with [University of] South Florida in those days. I probably paid my alumni dues whenever I could remember, but there wasn't

¹¹Maas Brothers was a major department store founded in Tampa by brothers Abe and Isaac Maass in 1886. Before being consolidated into the Burdines brand in 1991, Maas Brothers had become an expansive franchise with 39 stores throughout Florida.

a lot going on. The basketball team was around, so I remember getting season tickets for that. My wife and I—and my kids were little—and we would come to the Sun Dome and come to the basketball games, but that was it.

Every time we came to the basketball games, I would drive the kids and my wife through campus. And I would say, “Well this was a building, and that was a building, look at that, and look at this.” I mean, I could tell that the pride was in me, but it hadn’t manifested itself in any kind of action yet. Until, like I said earlier, when my son went to the University of Florida. When he graduated from high school in ’93, he decided to go to the University of Florida. He wanted to move away. And my wife and I, with my younger son, and him got real active up there. We got season tickets to the University of Florida games because a game is an excuse to go visit him. We went to different parent days, different events that the alumni associations were doing for students, their parent days. So were up there a lot. I just saw the fervor that all of the alumni had up there, and I could see it developing with him as a young student. And I could see some of it really rubbing off on us, and we were not alumni of the University of Florida.

It was in those years that I said, “You know what? If this can happen up here, it can happen at the University of South Florida. I’m going to get involved, and I’m going to try to help it happen because I’m proud of my university. Look at all of the things that it enabled me to become, so it’s my turn to pay that thank-you back.” And the football was starting here at the time as well. I’ve been a season ticket holder of the football season from the very first year. I got involved in the alumni association through the Tampa chapter, and when the opportunity presented itself to be on the alumni board, I took it. And, boy, these past six or seven years have just been a wonderful experience for me because I’ve been able to tell—I think I’m usually the oldest person on the alumni board because we go around telling what year we graduated.

People can’t believe that I’m as old as I am. Sixty-eight? How can that be? You know, da-da-da-da. But these past six or seven years, I’ve repeated this story to a number of people at some of these meetings, and it’s just been just a wonderful, remarkable rekindling of those memories that I had here at [University of] South Florida. Just to be able to see how it’s evolved into the research university that it is today and all the beautiful, wonderful buildings and the medical school and all the wonderful plans that President Genshaft has with the university.

I can see it. I can see with people on the alumni board; I can see it with different people on the faculty and the administration that come and give presentations to us at our board meetings and our committee meetings. It just, man, it’s just a great, great thing to be able to be involved with it at this stage of my life. And there’s a neat, neat anecdote to this story.

My oldest son, that graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in microbiology that thought he was going to go to medical school here at [University of] South Florida, when he came back from University of Florida in '97, after he graduated, he decided that he did not want to go into medicine. To make a long story short, he came to work at our accounting firm, he got interested in accounting, he was doing real well there, enrolled at University of South Florida, and this year he's going to graduate from the University of South Florida with his second degree, but now in accounting.

AH: Oh, wow, that's great.

GG: So here in '93, he had gone to [University of] Florida, and it rekindled my interest in becoming involved at the University of South Florida as an alumni. And here, after he graduates from the University of Florida, becomes now a student at the University of South Florida and is going to get a degree here!

AH: How about that?

GG: So that's how this whole story sort of culminates.

AH: Sure, yeah. Well now you have one more thing in common.

GG: Yeah, isn't that something?

AH: Yeah, that is something. Well, congratulations on his getting this degree too.

GG: Yeah, he's been doing it at night. He works full-time during the day, and he's been doing it at night. So it's been taking a long time. But he graduates either this August or this December, and he's going to sit for his CPA exam.

AH: All right.

GG: So I always keep teasing him. I say, "You may have two degrees, but the one that really got you your job (both laugh) is the one from the University of South Florida."

AH: Well, it's kind of funny too because there's another parallel, where you thought you would go in engineering, and he thought about medical school, but you had to reconsider.

GG: Yeah, there you go.

AH: Yeah, very interesting.

GG: There you go, exactly.

AH: Following in your footsteps in more ways than one.

GG: Yeah.

AH: As far as your involvement with the alumni association, you mentioned treasurer is always a shoo-in because of your experience. What kinds of things do you do?

GG: Well, one of the challenges that we've had with the alumni association, and it's a challenge that higher education has in Florida anyway right now, is finances and resources. One of the objectives that I've had—you know, the finance committee and them being on the board—is to continue to refine the accounting and finance policies of the alumni association. We've had some great people on our finance committee and on the alumni board. Together with me, we've formalized a lot of our policies and procedures that sort of control and direct the financial side of our alumni association.

Over the past three or four years, I would think that that's some of the most significant areas that we have developed. Now it's going to become even more critical as the finances become tougher for the university and for the alumni association because we're all part of those constraints as well. I'm really proud because my term is expiring. I think that this coming June, I'm finally retiring from the board after all these years. I really am proud at how we've been able to develop our financial policies for the alumni association to go into the future with. We're on really good, solid ground. I think we've got some good foundation there for the future, and I think, from just a selfish and personal standpoint, what a remarkable time for it to have rekindled my spirit with the University of South Florida. What a great culmination.

AH: Oh, yes, in so many ways.

GG: Here, it's the 50th anniversary—to have this all sort of happening now as well. It's a neat time. It's a neat time. That's why, when I heard about all of this, I said, "Maybe I could make a contribution, even this 50 year—" (inaudible, both talking at once)

AH: Oh, I think you have. You've got a great, great, sharp memory of a lot of those personal anecdotes that sometimes go missing.

GG: Yeah, sometimes I think some pieces still are missing, and maybe they are. I guess, the majority of it, I can still recollect.

AH: There's a few very important pieces, there, that you shared with us today. Any final thoughts before we move on? Any advice for students coming in?

GG: Well, I think, yes, I do. I think, students, when they graduate today, they shouldn't wait as long as I did. I know that, in those early years when you graduate, you're more preoccupied with earning a living and raising a family and your career. Obviously, those things are important. But don't lose touch with the university. Stay involved. You may not be able to spend as much time with it as I have now, in the later part of my life and career, but get involved. Don't let a lot of time pass. Get involved in the university because there are just wonderful things going on out here to be involved with. It's not the same university as it was when I was graduating. It's a totally different, totally different university; many, many things to get involved with. And so, my advice is to do it. Get involved because it's going to bring a component into your life that you're not going to really get, being involved in other things. The university life, and the vibrancy that goes on in universities, is something that you just don't find in other involvements that you can be involved with in your life. That's what I would recommend.

AH: Well, thank you. You've definitely followed your own example in that regard. Thank you for all your time and all the great stories.

GG: Thank you very much. Thank you. I've enjoyed it.

End of interview