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Andrew Huse (AH): Okay. Well, today is September 23rd, 2004. My name is Andrew Huse, program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today, we continue a series of interviews in our studio here in the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we'll be interviewing Joseph Ingrao, who came to USF in 1990 as a student, and he left as technical director of the Special Events Center in 2003. Good evening, Joe.

Joseph Ingrao (JI): Good evening.

AH: Thanks for being with us.

JI: Thanks for having me.

AH: Well, first, let's just get started about, you know, how did you get to USF? When did you first apply? What brought you here?

JI: I came to USF as a transfer student. I spent two years at St. Petersburg Junior College, which is what it was known as back then.¹ And, basically, I had plans of essentially coming to the Tampa Bay area after finishing high school, which was in New York City. And I came, applied, got in, and started getting the rest of my general distribution out of the way and basically applying for my major, which was mass communications. And I took the test, that was what they called a "limited access" course back then. I don't know what—I'm not sure what they're calling them now, but they may still be the same. But got into that and went through that program. It took me a while to actually graduate, but during the time I was working on my major I was also working heavily, both here on campus as a sound and light technician for the Marshall Center.

¹ St. Petersburg College was formerly known as St. Petersburg Junior College. It was founded in 1927 as a private, non-profit two-year junior college and has grown to become a four-year state college in Pinellas County with 11 campuses and centers.

So—and at nights, I was working at *The Tampa Tribune* as a pay-stub artist when they still had pay stubs.² It was just right at the tail end of that, and they went to a computerized system. But, basically, by that time I was working on graduating and working at the Marshall Center full-time. And I left *The Tribune*, and that's basically when I went—I got a USPS position with the Marshall Center, and became a senior audio-visual technician. Look out behind you.

AH: Yeah.

Ji: So once I was a senior audio-visual technician, that was basically when I really came close to graduating and was really becoming involved with a lot of the things that were going on on campus.

AH: Okay. So before we pick that thread up, let's take care of the academic thread and get that out of the way.

Ji: Okay.

AH: Are there any professors that stand out in your mind? Any classes that had a big impact?

Ji: Yes. There are many instances throughout my academic career here at the university. Especially in mass comm, I'm probably not the only one to mention—how shall I say? I want to say something but—Manny Lucoff. Dr. Manny Lucoff, who is actually a great guy, and he actually did have a profound impact on things that were to come, as my experience dealing with him. But boy, along—me and many of my colleagues were just waiting for him to retire. We were just hoping he would retire before we got to the next class that he taught, because he was a tough teacher.

AH: He was a tough grader, huh?

Ji: Yeah. Yeah. He was legendary, I guess you could say, in certain student environments, for just being very difficult and having very high standards. Which a lot of us didn't understand at the time, which I guess he knew, and I think that's why he reveled in it. So yeah, that was the Manny Lucoff experience. I know they used to call him “the gatekeeper” because you would take Intro to Broadcasting with him, and then at the end it was broadcast law. And he was the teacher, so it was like—I thought in the beginning when I first took him, I was like, “Oh no, I'm not listening to any of those rumors. I give everybody the benefit of the doubt,” and all this kind of stuff. So I went in and I actually did well, so there was no problem. So I don't know if he took note of that or whatever, but by the time I got to the senior course, that's when things started to turn around. But, you know, I did what I had to do and ultimately graduated. And I had a great experience.

² *The Tampa Tribune*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1966, was a daily newspaper for the Tampa Bay area. In 2016, the *Tribune* ceased publishing when it was sold to the *Tampa Bay Times*, marking the end of its 121st year as a newspaper.

AH: I remember seeing—he wrote a letter to the *Oracle*³, I believe, claiming there was grade inflation—

JJ: Yes.

AH: —in the mass comm department.

JJ: Yes.

AH: And I think that may have snowballed to where—that's when they were put on probation, I think. Wasn't the mass comm department put on academic probation? Was that during your time there or not?

JJ: Probably. There was issues and remnants of it. I will say this as an interesting fact, now that I think about it and I remember it: When I started out in mass comm it was still in Cooper Hall, so when I was taking, like, English for Broadcasting and those types of classes, they were all in Cooper Hall. So when I first got in, like, I think it was one of the 1000-level courses in the—or whatever—I guess it would be a 3000-level course. One of the lower classes, one of the very first classes, which I can't remember what it was called, but Issues in Media or something like that. It was, like, some people would take it just to fill a requirement or whatever, but for us it was the first step in our broadcasting technology and methodology experience. But it was all Cooper 103, the little auditorium there.

And so the building—mass comm building—was being built. So I was like one of the last students to actually be doing the mass comm thing in Cooper, and one of the very first students, like, we really, sort of like, took the window sticker off that building, because it was brand new and we got there and they were all, Oh, please be careful with our building, and stuff like that. Which we did, we were all pretty good students, I guess you could say. So there you have it, that was an interesting tidbit. I'm not sure if that directly answers the focus of the question.

AH: No, no, absolutely. Any other professors stand out for you?

JJ: I guess I would just like to say, shouts out to—I can't even remember her last name, but her first name was Meredith. She was like a student teacher who really helped us. She had a background in, like, recording spots for radio and doing carts and things like that, because that's what we were using. We were kind of at the end of that also, getting rid of carts and tapes of that nature, and moving more into, like, computerized types of systems. She was cool. I wish I could remember her last name, but I can't. And then there was Professor Dan Bailey. It's funny, I'm trying to remember back, and I have—

AH: It's fine.

JJ: I have—

³ *The Oracle* is the University of South Florida's independent, student-run newspaper.

AH: Most people draw a blank.

JJ: Yeah. Well, you know what it is? I have visual memories, like, that it's coming to me, but it's like I don't remember exactly—

AH: Sure.

JJ: —the specifics of the environment. But, hey, it was good. The mass—the school of mass comm I thought was great, and I was really glad to graduate out of there, because I was looking at radio and doing voice-over work and stuff like that, because people always told me I had a good voice for that kind of thing. But it just seemed like you had to kind of know somebody or have some kind of input, like, if you were the super student, you know what I'm saying, and you were ordained by Manny Lucoff, then maybe—which that didn't happen for many students, but there were a few. So if you were in it like that, then they would sort of help you along with your career or whatever, which is great. I mean, that's what we came here for. But, for me, I had found my direction at the Marshall Center.

AH: Yeah. And you were fortunate, similar to me, that out of graduation you found something pretty much in your field. And so explain to me how you first got the gig over at the Marshall Center. How did it start?

JJ: Well, basically, when it all began it was still Phyllis, okay? Which is like another changing of the guard. I guess I was—I know all the time here is a dynamic time to have been here doing stuff, because obviously there's changes and new buildings and administrations changing and all of that. So it's always a dynamic time here. When I first got there, the building that the Phyllis Marshall Center was actually named after, ultimately, was the University Center. And so I was there under Phyllis, which is great because I guess there'll be plenty of tape generated on her, you know, of this type of thing. Because she was really a legendary force on this campus, I would have to say.

AH: Yeah, how so? Kind of summarize for us, what [were] your impressions?

JJ: My impressions of Phyllis Marshall?

AH: Yeah.

JJ: Phyllis was basically always here since the beginning, okay? So when you want to talk about people who were here for a stint of time, and contributed, and saw the changes taking place and the growth, she was one of the, like, original-original people on this campus as far as, like, serious long-timers. She worked here for—I believe she was a student here. I'm not a hundred percent sure about that, but she was, like, the—you know the Marshall Center, which the original part of it used to be the University Center, was also so many—it's one of the oldest buildings on campus. It really has done—served duty for a number of departments since the beginning. I know that the library was originally housed in there. I'm pretty sure that's true.

The girls' dormitory—first girls' dormitory, I believe, was in there. It's just, throughout the years, basically since 1956, when it was dedicated in 1960, I guess, when the first students—the first real students were here or whatever—there was a lot of sand out there. She was there and she was the director of the student union, I guess, or served in capacities, either advising what, ultimately, these days is known as the Campus Activities Board. When I first started, it—what my position ultimately came—at the very, very beginning. It was a few years before I got here. Basically, when the Special Events Center was built, which I believe was like '88 or something like that, and, prior to that, all the providing microphones and doing things like that for the student events was handled by student government, and it was SGP: Student Government Productions. And they had some small gear. Basically, what they were doing was—well, I know we're supposed to be talking about impressions of Phyllis, so I'll stick with Phyllis for right now, but we can get back to the—

AH: Okay. To SGP? Yeah.

JJ: —development of, yeah. And all those types of things.

AH: Okay.

JJ: So maybe you can reedit this.

AH: It's fine.

JJ: So Phyllis was great. She was there for a long time. She basically rose all the way to a very high stature on the campus, to the point where she wanted—they were going to name the building after her, because of all the time and service she spent there. And I remember that when she was the director there, things were a lot of fun for the students, and it was just a great thing. And I know that she was one of the main people, the key ingredients, let's say, towards ultimately getting the Special Events Center. Which, at the time, was something that the students really, really wanted. That was a time before we were a Research I university, you know what I'm saying? I know that our basketball team has had a fairly rich history, and now has a tradition and all that kind of stuff. But we weren't really associated with, like, the Big East Conference the way we are now, and some of the others that we've been in, Conference USA, and whatever it was that we were in.

AH: Sun Belt and all that.

JJ: Sun Belt. That's what I was thinking, because I think that's what—after I first got here, the Sun Belt was like where they were heading, and it was all part of this thing back then. So it was before being, like, a Research I institution or whatever, so it was like it was always a quality academic environment, but it was—it wasn't as—I don't know how to say it—as intense academically as, let's say, it is now.

AH: Well, it was more about instruction rather than research, too.

JJ: Yeah, exactly. It was more, like, coming to college, taking your classes, having the whole social interaction experience, which was good. So that's pretty much it on Phyllis, she was great. I did the sound for her retirement party there in the Special Events Center, and Jack Harris was there, and it was just a wonderful old time, and everyone had a great time, and I was really, really glad to have been part of that and to actually be able to say now that I was here when Phyllis was running the show. And she knows me, she'd recognize me if I still see her around. She's still kicking, thank God. But the whole Phyllis era was a great thing. I got—once again, I was at the tail end of it. But I was glad for the piece that I had.

AH: You're kind of there for the changing of the guard.

JJ: Yeah. Yeah. And it was great.

AH: So back to SGP then.

JJ: Okay. Well, before the whole sound and light thing developed, which is the department that I had a lot to do with, Student Government Productions was, like, they didn't really have the whole production aspect of it down. They knew that there were microphones, and people spoke into them, and you would play it through the speakers. Well, the stuff that they were working on was like, Oh, we'll build our own crossover network and we'll build, you know, our own snake, and stuff like that. Because they were reading these manuals, which are basically technical kind of like repairman guide kind of stuff or whatever.

So the gear wasn't really solid. It wasn't really proper. And once they tried to start doing shows, like, where they would hire a band to come and play, but the school had to provide a PA. They'd be like, Oh, but we got the PA for them. And they would bring out what they had, and it just didn't go over very well with the professional acts. So that's when the impetus came to be like, Well, now we have the Special Events Center and we can do the real shows that we want to do that the students were asking for. So we're going to have to basically notch it up a little, as far as our technical capacity and, you know, the professionalism of the service. So I happened to be there right at the beginning of that, with a few of the legendary people like Laurie Woodward, who was the assistant director of student activities at the Marshall Center. She was actually, basically, the main person who hired me when I became full-time, and that was in '94.

AH: Okay.

JJ: So now we're talking about the time—prior to my arrival—with the whole building of the SEC and Student Government Productions. And right when that was finally established, that there would be a sound and light department that would be administered by a technical director, and then they would have online help—line position help people, and then a slew of OPS workers. They established that structure. And at the time, I was just the OPS guy, I was just pushing road cases and speakers and whatever it was that we had, doing the best we could. But I tell you what, we had a lot of fun back then. It was like the Empty Keg. We were doing shows at the Empty Keg, which I'm sure that you'll hear more of from other people. It was just a rocking good time.

And the students would come out in droves, and it was even up to a level where it was people from the surrounding community, like, people who were involved with the scene would come down. These days, they kind of shy away from that kind of thing, like, national-security style, Research I institution style. But back then, it was a popular thing, and the youth of the day, let's say, were into it. And we were doing the sound, and they had beer down there and stuff, so it—and then just everyone would have a good time and, you know. Eventually, they're like, We have to sort of add yet still a little more structure to this. Because everyone was getting along and everything was fine, there was nothing really wrong, but somehow, the—how would you say—the administration has to clamp down on the kids having fun sometimes. Whatever. You know, it's cool. But they hired a—they started interviewing nationally for someone to come in to be technical director, and that's when they hired this guy, Trent Downing, who was the first technical director. And he was basically hired July 1st of '91.

AH: Okay.

JJ: Okay. So that's where we're at, at this point. I started working in January of '90. I'm sorry, in January of '91, about six months before Trent got there. Okay, so for that six months, things were pretty freewheeling and free spirited. I mean, we did what we had to do, but if some dean or director of something or provost would come down, they might not—they might see—they would be like, What's with these children running amok? But it was fun. We were having a good time. We had bands playing, it was loud. But, hey, it was all good.

So Trent came down, and he really cleaned house. At [the] beginning, of course, we were like, Man, this guy's a dick. But once you started realizing that he was just cleaning house and instituting a structure that we were going to work by, and it was all because we had to do the right thing, and it was our job now and this kind of stuff, it was all good. And I really picked up on it, because he had the vision to start investing with the equipment, to get away from this homemade stuff, and this and that and the other thing, and start actually building a system that would last, you know what I'm saying? Like, we would get this piece of the puzzle one year, and then we'd get another piece of the puzzle, and after about four or five, six years, we were basically in the situation where we could seriously put on some quality acts.

AH: Yeah, well what—

JJ: Which we did for a while.

AH: And without having the entertainment kind of scoff at the equipment they're supposed to be playing on.

JJ: That's right. I mean, we were able to get a contract rider, see the requirements that were on it, say, "Okay." And in a situation where, let's say, we didn't have everything, we could rent it, but we were already established with the companies around here because Trent would do that. He would set up, so that when he needed something, he could meet the rider and represent the university properly. Which is really what we were trying to do. And along the way, we were teaching the students, which is the most important thing, man. And which is—I really think is—

because at that point, I had graduated, and I had had a few years now in the business. I'd coiled a lot of cable and moved a lot of boxes and—

AH: Yeah, what year did you graduate?

JJ: Well, I graduated in '96.

AH: Okay.

JJ: It actually took me eight years. I basically went half time—

AH: Okay.

JJ: —to college. You know, it took me eight years to graduate, but hey, I did it. And I graduated fairly well. I think I had a 3.0 average when I walked. And that's kind of getting back to the whole Research I kind of deal. Like, these days, a 3.0—you may not even—I don't even think you can get in with a 3.0 these days. So, for me, leaving out with a high B average, I thought was an accomplishment. Especially, since the fact that I was working and I had my child, that kind of stuff. Which is—I just felt like everything could be done. And I just wanted to make the balance between working in the sound and light field, doing a lot of shows, which in the beginning was all about the pursuit of rock and roll, and things like that. Just doing big shows, rocking shows, because that's what I'm into—still. But even more so back then.

And so I thought that it could all be done. I thought that I could graduate and raise my child and still be a rocking sound guy. So I did do it. It took a little extra time, but there it was. But the whole point of the matter is that by the time I did graduate, and we had been progressing with our department at the Marshall Center for all these years, by me working it out with Trent and just trying to be reliable, you know what I'm saying? Trent handled a lot of the political aspects of the job, which was—it was really needed. They needed a buffer there to be able to work with the students and the kids who were interested in doing real sound for, like, live music and things like that. So I just wanted to be sort of right up there. And eventually, the time came where I graduated.

Trent had actually left because he got another bigger job at the UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas], being a technical director out there. So when he left, that's when I had the opportunity to just move up and be the technical director, and then I was part of the administration, which was great. I mean, I was a full-time employee since '94. I graduated in '96, and Trent left in '98.

AH: Okay.

JJ: So at that point, that's when I took over as technical director. And, honestly, that probably was the best time of my life. Definitely will always be one of the best times of my life, because I was running the ship. I was, like, the technical guy. Oh, well you know, we'll just talk to Joe. What do you think, Joe? And that was kind of new for me. And I got to work on my political game because I was now in meetings, like, homecoming. I mean, of course, I'm very proud of

the fact that I was involved with the production of homecoming for—I think I did 12 homecomings. So I knew what homecoming was all about. I just loved it.

So anyway, I was in on meetings like that. When the homecoming steering committee gets together, they bring in all these people, you get the university police, you get fire and safety, you get the—physical plant is involved. We were the support sector from the Marshall Center, because, of course, homecoming and student government and campus activities is all in the Marshall Center, under the director of the Marshall Center. So started getting in on some of that action, being with the administration, and just trying to do the best we could for the client.

AH: What was that transition like? Going from basically being a grunt and learning more and more about the sound, and then being thrust in this kind of—what you said, like, political situation?

JJ: Well, as for me, I thought it was great. Like I said, it was one of the best times of my life because I was just growing in so many directions. I was putting on better and better shows and dealing with higher and bigger people on the campus, so life was great. I mean, I was in a great position. Sometimes I'd have to dress up. Well, I'd dress up. Sometimes I would be working for 22 hours on homecoming, starting at 6:00 a.m. and not getting home till, like, 4:00 in the morning, because we had to load in stages and all that.

I mean, I probably didn't look that great at some of those events, but I felt like I was really doing my part to make homecoming successful. And I think the thing that's funny is I'm not your rah-rah kind of pom-poms, all crazy for the sports, and this and that. But, to me, it was a technical challenge, and that's what I got a big kick out of. And being able to holistically—to approach an event from a standpoint like that, to be able to bring all the people together that I needed to do on my crew, plus the technology, plus, there's transportation issues. We had to get trucks. Once again, sometimes we had to, like, rent out. A lot of times for the outdoor shows, we'd have a contractor come and put the lighting in there, but yet that still had to be all coordinated. And for me, that was the best part of any education that I got here, and it is really what has launched me now into—into my new situation in the lighting industry.

AH: Well, there's—I wanted to back up for once second. You had mentioned before that, really, what it's all about, in sound and light, is the fact that you're really training and educating all these young grunts—

JJ: Oh yeah.

AH: —the way you started out. Kind of elaborate on that a little bit. I mean, first of all, we know about your experience, kind of rising up through the ranks. But now that you're in this new position, you've got to work with the political folks, but then you've got to work with all the crew and everything. So tell us what it's like to supervise a bunch of grunts like that.

JJ: Well, it's—they're not really grunts.

AH: Uh huh.

JJ: I was really all about diversity. People talk diversity, you know?

AH: Sure.

JJ: But I still think they're exclusionary when they're trying to be diverse. It's not everyone, but I think you know what I'm saying. For me, I would take anyone who had an interest. Originally, things were—it was like if you were an engineering student or if you're a mass comm student or if you're a fine arts student. But I started basically doing shows on MLK Plaza, little setups and stuff. And I would sit out there when people walked by, I'd be like, "Hey, you know, what's up, man?" Someone looked like they could probably hang with it, like they wouldn't mind if a day took 10 or 12 hours that you actually had to work, to set up and do the sort of thing.

I mean, you're not constantly humping, there's a lot of waiting around, but yet you still got to be there. And I just found that I always had people from all over the world on the crew, which I loved so much. And it was important to me because I took it so seriously, that, if they were interested then they would have an opportunity to do this more. And my whole goal was that it's a side thing, an extra benefit, it's a bonus of having come to USF. That's really what I was trying to do, is have people say, You know, I got a good degree and, you know, all this academic stuff, you know? But if all else ever failed, they could actually go get a gig doing sound somewhere or whatever it takes—lighting, whatever. And a few of them did. A few guys got into different things, corporate AV, I mean, it's a really wide area. That, if you know what you're doing you can adapt to a lot of situations.

AH: Like what they call skill set.

JJ: Yeah.

AH: Take that skill set.

JJ: It's a skill set, exactly.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: And it was really important to me to get the kids to understand it. And some people would be like—a lot of—I had students that you don't typically think would be, like, sound and light guys. And that's what I like the most, because we had this little skinny guy. He was Indian. Him and a friend had just actually moved over from India, and they were into it, man.

AH: Yeah. Is this Ravi you're talking about?

JJ: No, not Ravi.

AH: Okay.

JJ: Not Ravi.

AH: Okay.

JJ: Ravi, he made it through. Those other two guys didn't actually make it through, because they kind of couldn't catch on to the flow of doing a sound and light event or doing a live event. And it actually is pressure. There's pressure associated, because you have a room full up with 200 or 300 people, and they're expecting a certain presentation in a certain style, and maybe they have—I did plenty of Board of Regents events, motivational speakers—maybe not so much motivational speakers, but, like, lecturers they would hire to come in. And they would rent the ballroom, and they'd put two or three hundred people in there, and it's like the director shows up, maybe. Maybe you've got a provost in the room. And you don't want the microphone to go [makes noises]. "Hello! Hello!" You just—you don't want that.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: So those guys, they basically couldn't rise to that challenge, to be able to confidently plug in a microphone and make sure it worked and hang out through the show.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: So anyway, but I gave them the shot. That's the point. I would never predetermine somebody, because a few of them surprised me, like Ravi. Ravi P. Maharaj, who actually in an OPS capacity has taken over my old position here at the university. He's not actually the technical director, but he is the biggest guy at sound and light basically, because—

AH: For lack of a better term, like, interim.

JJ: Yeah, I don't know, student supervisor.

AH: Yeah. Well, I think I should make a disclosure, that I was—I've done quite a few gigs. I was sound and light under your direction, and I can remember people from all different countries. There were women, which surprised a lot of the guys.

JJ: Yeah.

AH: Because they think of it as grunt work. And the women were grunting right along with everyone else. And the aspect of A, pressure, and B—I've done the 22-, 24-hour events.

JJ: Events. Yeah.

AH: Nightmare gigs and everything. Just for the amount of energy it took, if nothing else.

JJ: Yeah. Yeah.

AH: So it was kind of gratifying for you to watch some people rise to the occasion. Even if they didn't, they had the chance for—

JJ: Oh sure. I mean, I've had to fire people. I've let people go, let's say, guys that were just sort of, like, not really with it so they'd stop coming around. I couldn't just not say anything, so I'd be like, "Look man, you know, I'm going to let you off, you know, you don't have to come back, you know." There were some guys that came in, said they could do the job. Based on the experience that I had with them, like, in their training, [I] figured, Okay, you know, I'm going to let you do this event over here, you know? Because there comes a point in the training where you really can't get to the next level until it is just you. Like, you don't have me standing there to fix it if it goes wrong or whatever, which I would always do for all the students. So once the—like, I would stick with a student until a couple of things did go wrong, so I could show them what to do. I'd be like, "See how I handled this? Okay?"

Because it isn't really rocket science, it's an art form. So if you can feel out a situation and just know the technique, because it's not going to be applied the same every time. And I think that's when I really started getting closeness with the students, when they started realizing not only do I know my stuff, but I care that they fit in. And it's a different sort of learning process. I'm not sitting there with a blackboard, and I don't throw tests. I kind of—in the beginning, they wanted me to do that, but I never really found that to work, and ultimately, I didn't really have to, because I wasn't faculty and stuff like that. But I did have a training process and it was a program. Like, I would start them at the beginning, and if they made it all the way through, which usually it took about two years, two and a half years, not as long as your normal four-year college education. So, like, if you came to me as a sophomore, by the time you graduated, if you had been all the way through my program, chances are you could be making some decent money on the outside doing that, if that's what you wanted to do. Like, the gigs were there, and some of them did it.

AH: Yeah. We have at least one mutual friend who—

JJ: Yeah.

AH: —moved out to California, got himself a job, and—

JJ: Shane Smith?

AH: Shane Smith.

JJ: Shane Smith was awesome. He was actually working on his master's when he came to sound and light. So he was working his master's and doing his little gigs, and he'd had some prior experience and exposure—playing guitar and things like that in a band. And he was like, "Okay, well I guess I can plug some mikes in and do some little events and things like that." And even on the larger events, at least he had knowledge to where—we were running cables here and there, and he knew what they were for. Which was great. So yeah, he graduated with his master's degree, and I forget—you probably know better than I do, but he moved out to California, right?

AH: Yeah, he had a pickup truck and just over a grand.

JJ: Yeah.

AH: And figured he could make it out there for a few weeks, and he landed a job, like, right as he was about to run out of money.

JJ: Yeah. He hooked up with an AV company or something like that, right?

AH: Yeah. And as a matter of fact, he went out there late in the summer, and that next January he came back to Tampa to do the Super Bowl party, or the sound for the Super Bowl party.

JJ: That's right. Yeah, he had an awesome gig.

AH: So that tells you—

JJ: Flying around.

AH: —what you can do with that skill set, especially if you're as enthusiastic as someone like Shane did.

JJ: Yeah. I mean, we've had a number of guys. Like we were talking about Ravi, and now we got Shane, and we've all sort of like had little stage names and things like that over the years. And we had this one guy, Dark Horse. His name was Dark Horse. Anyway, he never even graduated. But he's a technician now touring with a band.

AH: Okay.

JJ: And he's—the artist that he's with most of the time is Gavin DeGraw. I don't know if anyone knows who that is, but he's done well for himself. And now, Dark Horse is with him on the road wherever he goes, making a living. It's not for everybody.

AH: Sure.

JJ: But for this particular guy, the chances of him graduating was—was not good.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: You know what I'm saying? It's pretty much—he wasn't the right style of student for college. But the fact that he came to USF, you know what I'm saying, and had the opportunity to get on the sound and light crew and work with somebody who cared to show him and sort of impose the structure that needed to be imposed, at least for him to learn what needed to be learned, got him the opportunity to actually go into a job that he wanted to do, that he's been doing for years now and is actually pretty cool.

Not everybody gets to fly around the country and ride in the tour bus and just do shows. For some people, it's very rewarding and very fun. So I'm glad for whatever I did. I mean, a lot of

the student's personal motivation and interest is at stake. I don't really take credit for anybody's success. I'm just very glad for whatever little part that I may have played to help them.

AH: Well, as long as we're talking about stage names, too, you have to explain—we don't have to mention the real name—but you have to explain what the Detractor is.

JJ: This is a small short story. We had a guy on the crew who was—he would always ingratiate himself to everybody, you know what I'm saying? He was kind of like a slacker, but he would use his personality. And he had, like, this strategic way of just walking the other direction or whatever. He was just the—so when we were doing—during the run of the big shows we were doing in the Special Events Center, the bands that were coming in had their rider, and on the rider, it would say, "We need 16 local hands." Which is basically people to load the boxes and road cases and instruments off of the trucks that would come and set them in their general area. Basically, do the heavy lifting. That was the grunt work, okay? They would order up 16 grunts.

Now, once I had refined my style—because in the beginning it wasn't like this, okay? But once I had refined my style, I would have a list of grunts, people that I would hire from the Sun Dome or just people that I knew that would do that kind of work and think it's great. As the profile of the university raised, it became harder and harder for me to find students that were, let's say, that earthy. It's true, it's true. That's all part of the changing dynamic. There are good aspects and not that great aspects.

And—but, anyway, I would have my crew and my guys, who were my normal students that I was working with in sound and light and doing Marshall Center things with, I would kind of keep them away from that. I would either tell them, "You're actually not on this call, but, you know, if you want to come see what's happening, you can come down," you know? Because I really wasn't into the backbreaking work aspect of it for them. I mean, I would—they would all get worked. Because you have to know. It's like boot camp, because if you can't do it, then you're not going to make it. Like the two guys that moved over from India, they just weren't expecting it. So you have to be able to make sure you got the kind of intestinal fortitude it takes to really put up a show. I mean, it's not always that heavy, but you have to be—you have to respect that. It can be that heavy. And also have the right attitude.

AH: Just like boot camp.

JJ: Yeah. Towards doing it. But what it would come down to is—I think I got a little off track.

AH: No, no. This is fine because we're filling in more information anyhow.

JJ: Okay, so when we would do these shows I—

Pause in recording.

JJ: Hi-yah! Anyway—

AH: So back to the Detractor.

JJ: So the Detractor was one of these guys we would put on the crew sometimes. But see, my little shtick or my story or whatever about it is when I was talking to the production manager of the band, I would be like, “Look, dude, you know? I can get you 15 guys that will work like 16 guys, okay? Or I can get you 16 guys, but he’s going to take somebody down with him, and you’re only going to get the work of 14 people.” And they were like, What the hell is this? We want 16 able-bodied people. And I was just like, “All right, all right, all right.” Anyway, so the Detractor was basically known as the extra 90 pounds. I was like, “I can get you 15, plus the Detractor, you know?” Extra 90 pounds to fill the call.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: Anyway.

AH: Let me see. Let’s talk about some of the shows you’ve done. [There’s] been a huge variety. I mean, from little shows in the Empty Keg to politicians speaking, et cetera.⁴ Give us a rundown. What are some of those you remember?

JJ: Well, some of the big highlights. One was when Billy Joel came, because he was on his lecture tour. So he wasn’t—it wasn’t like a fully staged production of a Billy Joel concert. I can’t lay claim to that, but he did come to the Special Events Center on his lecture tour, so that had to be handled just a certain way. And in the end, Trent was still there, and me and Trent got to take our picture with Billy Joel. So that was great, because he’s a big artist. Politically, we’ve had a lot of people through here that I’ve given a microphone to. I did Pat Buchanan, back in the early days—of me, not him.⁵

AH: Yeah, right?

JJ: But we did—I was actually at the university at the time, but I wasn’t part of that event because it was way back in the day, but we did Maya Angelou here.⁶ I wasn’t really involved with that, but that was a big name that came through. I did Carville and Matalin, the married couple.⁷ One’s a liberal campaign adviser, the other one’s a conservative adviser. They’re a married couple—they were pretty good, I like them. We had Al Sharpton here.⁸

AH: Okay.

JJ: We had Michael Moore here. To be honest with you, though, I couldn’t even sit through his thing. I had to leave.

⁴ The Empty Keg was a pub that operated in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁵ Pat Buchanan is an American journalist, right-wing activist, and politician who ran for president in 1992, 1996, and 2000.

⁶ Marguerite Annie Johnson Angelou (1928–2014), known as Maya Angelou, was an American author, actress, screenwriter, dancer, poet, and civil rights activist best known for her 1969 memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which made literary history as the first nonfiction bestseller by an African-American woman.

⁷ James Carville is an American political consultant who is a prominent figure in the Democratic Party, while his spouse, Mary Matalin, is an American political consultant known for her work in the Republican Party.

⁸ Alfred Sharpton Jr. is an American civil rights activist, minister, and talk show host. In 2004, Sharpton ran for the Democratic nomination for president.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: So I hope that doesn't offend anyone, but I couldn't—oh my God.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: But, anyway—

AH: Well, it's just interesting. Both of those characters, they had a huge profile in 2004.

JJ: Yeah.

AH: Sharpton running for president—

JJ: Yeah.

AH: —and then Moore with his blockbuster film.⁹

JJ: If Sharpton would have made it, I'd have voted for him. Just let me say that, okay?

AH: Yeah.

JJ: But, anyway, we've had a lot of people through. We did a lot of big hip-hop acts. And it's kind of funny, you wouldn't normally think that I would, like, have anything to do with the hip-hop scene or whatever, but I actually got a couple of really good opportunities through doing some of these hip-hop acts that we did.

AH: Good. Name a few for us.

JJ: We did [A] Tribe Called Quest, we did Busta Rhymes, we did—oh, so many of them. Goodie Mob, that has Cee-Lo in it, and a couple of the other guys I can't even remember. I remember I would pick up a few gigs here and there, not necessarily university-related. I was fortunate enough to be able to branch out, and it was basically only—I feel that it was basically only because my talent carried me in that area. I was—there was like this upwelling underneath me of all this progress and work that I had done with being a student here in broadcasting, and then becoming a team player at the Marshall Center, and then ultimately becoming a technical director.

[I] got to meet a lot of people, and people would come through and see the work that I did and be like, Man, you know, could you help me with something I got going on or whatever? So as long as it didn't conflict with the university, I would run out and go get it done. Some Saturdays here and there, and this and that, or whatever. But, anyway, we did Wu-Tang Clan.

AH: Yeah. So obviously you were steeped in some of the quality hip-hop early on, it sounds like.

⁹ Michael Moore is an American documentary filmmaker, left-wing activist, and author.

JJ: Yeah, we had great opportunities, you know what I mean? Back then, that's what the students wanted. And we would get 2,000 people in the Special Events Center. Granted, it wasn't all the time. But we would do it. And when I was working with Greg Jackson in the Marshall Center—he was the coordinator of public functions, he was my supervisor—he and I worked together to really work that room. And we had, you know community interest, we had promoters throughout the community that wanted to come in. We got involved with kickboxing events. But it was all, like, on the up and up. It wasn't like these—these were, like, a big promoter that—they would come in with a TV crew and they would put this thing out on the ESPN. And it was just like a big thing.

And that would bring people out. We'd be using the capacity of the room. One of the new things that Greg and I got into was—for the high schools, we had this twofold thing of where we would put on an outstanding show—which was what I was very motivated by and brought that aspect to the table—but the additional thing that we were trying to do was promote the university to the high school students. So that—we worked with a few—I'm not sure, counselors or whoever the people are who handle that at the high school level. I'm not really sure what their titles are. I know who they are because I dealt with them, but they would be like, We want to do our homecoming. We're thinking about doing it at the Special Events Center, you know? What can you do? You know, the students want to have a quality show that—the students these days, especially the younger the kids are, they want a lot of glitz.

They want—they can tell. The students can tell right away—excuse me—whether it's good or not. You can tell in five or 10 minutes whether this is going to be just like some, oh, kind of event that someone thought would be cool that would get a few students, you know what I'm saying? And then you can tell when the student organizations are with it. And they come and they, like, have a party and everyone's having a great time, it's such a beautiful thing. So we were trying to bring this or at least offer this or have the opportunity to utilize our building and serve the university's interest by catering to the high schools. So they would be like, We want our prom. We want our homecoming. Those were the two big ones. So we said, Sure, no problem. They arranged it with the finances or whatever, and we were on. And they would come in, and we would set up some awesome shows, and they just loved it. Once again, they were videotaping the whole thing and that kind of stuff, so yeah, that's that.

AH: What are some of the other shows? I know there's been a lot of rock acts to come through, too.

JJ: We've done a lot of rock bands. Especially more in the '90s.

AH: Yeah. Beck, Primus, Garbage.

JJ: Keep them coming, my dude.

AH: Those were three that I personally—

JJ: Yeah. We did Peter Murphy. We did the Pixies. We did Living Colour. We had Courtney Love and Hole. We did Drivin N Cryin. So many acts, I know I'm leaving a bunch of them off.

AH: Oh sure. Well, okay, instead of just listing off raps, we have a few minutes left here.

JJ: Okay.

AH: Worst show? Show that just went bad.

JJ: Well—

AH: I know, maybe you're loath to admit, but—

JJ: No, not so much that I'm loath to admit.

AH: Or at least a show that made you especially nervous. Maybe a—

JJ: You know you just try to—

AH: Well that's—

JJ: I'll be honest with you, there aren't very many.

AH: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's a testament to the quality of your work, I suppose.

JJ: Well, I guess. I guess. To be honest with you, I'm really not coming up with anything right now that was, like, a complete travesty.

AH: Yeah. Well how about—

JJ: Especially as it relates to my USF career.

AH: Were there any that made you especially nervous, but then turned out okay?

JJ: Well, I'll tell you what, it was like that every time we did the president.

AH: Okay.

JJ: And every time we did the Board of Regents, back when it was a Board of Regents. And then of course, it changed to the Board of Trustees, which we did too. And those were actually technically challenging shows, because they would want us to audiotape them, and they would be like, We need 24 microphones. But the thing is, is that's all they do, is they sit there and—Oh, yes, well, I agree, or I disagree. Some got a little mousy voice, and they wanted—they want to be able to hear it throughout the thing, because they've got their reporters there taking notes, and they have—once again, your provost and your deans and your directors [are] coming out, listening very intently to these pertinent issues.

Sort of as a side note, and I think is one of the things that is probably best for this conversation, is that being the sound guy, I got to be in the room for so many wide and varied events that people just—I don't think they really understand. I was there for all those Board of Regents meetings, like, through the whole Sami Al-Arian case.¹⁰ When Betty Castor left and they were interviewing and ultimately decided on Judy Genshaft—the whole thing, all those meetings when—well, not all those meetings, but a number of larger-profile meetings where they would assemble a panel, thereby needing microphones, hence I was there. When—before we got the football team. I was in on a lot of that football team stuff, and the thing is, is that your normal, let's say, a lot of the students that maybe were there, maybe even a number of mine, but before me or whatever, they could care less about what was going on in those meetings.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: They just—whatever. But I would actually sit there and listen, so I felt like, overall, my education was there as well, because there was a lot of seminars that we did. I wouldn't be provided with the course materials or whatever, but those guys would be sitting there with their laser pointers, throwing their slides up, blah, blah, blah. And I would be taking all this in. Sometimes people were like, How do you know so much about this? They're like, You're a sound and mic guy, look at you. But, it's like—I took the time to sit there and realized, like, during some of those courses I was like, “There are people paying a thousand bucks for this.”

AH: Oh yeah.

JJ: I might as well just get whatever I can out of it for free. And when a lot of people go to those courses, man, you've got people—the thing is flashing. Is that all right?

AH: Yeah.

JJ: Is it running out of tape?

AH: Yeah.

JJ: Okay.

AH: We're not that close to—

JJ: Hey, man, I'm verbose.

AH: Yeah, we got a few minutes left. That's all right.

¹⁰ Sami Al-Arian was a professor of computer science at USF from 1986 to 2003, when he was indicted for racketeering by a federal grand jury. In 2006, he signed a plea agreement on a reduced charge after a jury did not convict him on the original charges.

JJ: Okay. I would be like—people pay money, and they still sleep through the course. But a lot of the times it's because they set that environment, they dim the lights down, and they got their laser pointer, and the next thing you know, you're just—

AH: Yeah, getting loose.

JJ: —all passed out. So I was of the mindset that, you know, I'm going to listen and I'm going to take away whatever I can from it.

AH: Sure.

JJ: And it was like that for so many of those things, like I said, all of these meetings with the regents, the president, the athletics directors, the UP. All of it. The College of Education had the SCATT program, which I think is still the SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program?¹¹ It's like the honors section for the education students, and they go through a lot of heavy-duty seminar action. And at the end of the year, they have their big sort of thing where they go through this intensive training. To drop another name, Dr. Joyce Swarzman was really doing that when I was really getting good, and she was great, and I loved her, and I think she liked me. But I would sit there and listen to her seminars, and to this day, I still remember things that she said and use them. For like, you get teachers with their classroom, you know? Things like how to handle situations with people, like, she had all these—I'm sure she'd be like [clapping noises], because I don't have this memorized, but I'm not—I wasn't in the program, you see. But yet I remember. So I was exposed to all that, and I think—I think that was just outstanding.

AH: Well, of course, the irony too is that most academics, people like that tend to think, Yeah, this is the sound guy. He's a grunt, just like all the other grunts.

JJ: Right. Exactly.

AH: Yeah, but it's not the case. There's—it's a complicated system just to put the sound and light together at all. But me working with audio-visual before, I got the exact same thing.

JJ: Right.

AH: It was like, "No. Well, I do have a master's degree, et cetera." Well, before we go, I usually ask people to leave a note, a little bit of advice, for students and future generations. What would you tell students coming in, just about to start their university experience?

JJ: Well, I'll tell you what I do tell them, okay? Or what I did tell them until the time that I ultimately separated from the university. Which—I'm not actually separated, I still am available and do get consulted with Greg Jackson and people all the time and the Sun Dome. But, anyway, what I would always tell my students is—and it really doesn't have anything to do with sound and light. But what I tell them is, "When it comes to doing your projects in college, just go ahead and start doing it early."

¹¹ The SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program (SCATT) was founded in 1981 at the USF College of Education.

It took me till I was in my very last year of college to figure that out. But, once I did, I enjoyed it so much more, and I got all straight A's, which was really like the best GPA I had. It was right at the end, that's what pulled me up. So that's basically it, because—and this you can apply to sound and light, and this you can apply to everything else, is, you can spend a lot of time procrastinating and coming up for reasons why not to do it, and then when you've run out of time, you just sort of like throw it together, instead of just saying "Okay, at least let me get started." And once you get into it, then you actually wind up enjoying it.

AH: Yeah.

JJ: And your projects come out so much better, because you didn't waste that time. It doesn't really take a whole hell of a lot more time, but the extra time that you did put in, you enjoyed putting in and you really enjoyed the grade when you got it back. And I think that you can apply that to a lot of things.

AH: Sure.

JJ: And I think that, I'm still guilty of it. I'm sure we all are more than we—

AH: Well, if anything, think of it that you didn't graduate late, you started early.

JJ: That's right.

AH: And thanks a lot for being with us tonight.

JJ: Well, I really appreciate you having me out, Andy. It's always a pleasure. Thank you so much.

End of interview.