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Lucy Jones (LJ): Today is Monday, February 9th, 2004. My name is Lucy Jones, and I'm a graduate assistant for Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida. Today, I am continuing a series of interviews with USF faculty, student, staff, and alumni to commemorate 50 years of university history. This afternoon, I'm with Dr. Raymond Arsenault in the historic Snell house¹ on the USF St. Petersburg campus. Dr. Arsenault is the John Hope Franklin professor of Southern history and has a long list of accomplishments here at USF St. Pete, including director of the university Honor's College, and co-director and co-founder of the Florida Studies Program, the first program of its type in the state. Dr. Arsenault, thank you for talking with me today.

Raymond Arsenault (RA): My pleasure.

LJ: I'd like to start by asking you to describe circumstances that brought you to USF.

RA: I came here in—as a faculty member in the fall of 1980, August of 1980. I had been teaching at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. It was my first teaching job out of graduate school. I had taught there for four years, and I liked it very much at the University of Minnesota, had a terrific position there. Although it was bit exotic you might say, teaching Southern history and Civil Rights history in Minnesota.

But my wife, who—we had our first child in 1977, so she was two and one-half years old and my wife, who's a—we always debated about this— I think a seventh generation

¹The Snell House (built in 1904) was originally located at 106 2nd Avenue NE. It originally belonged to C. Perry Snell, a man of importance in the City of St. Petersburg, until his death in 1942. It was relocated to the University of South Florida, Bayboro Campus, in 1993.

Floridian. We had been living in Boston at graduate school for a number of years. I had lived in Princeton, New Jersey before that, but she had never encountered anything quite like Minnesota winters. She felt proud that she had survived four winters. But I was pretty sure she wasn't going to survive there indefinitely. She just really didn't take very much to the Midwest not only in terms of the climate but in terms of the culture.

So I had to promise her that we wouldn't necessarily be at Minnesota forever. And so when a job came open at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg campus—I don't really remember how I first heard of it. I saw it in what they call the EIB, which is the employment information bulletin that the American Historical Association publishes. I'm sure that's where I saw it. At first I didn't pay much attention to it. It was—this was in—I guess this would have been in the fall of 1979, maybe October or so, and I had just defended my dissertation, Brandeis University².

I was in a rather unusual situation in that I had gone to graduate school in 1971 at Brandeis, which was a very unusual graduate program. It was small, almost tutorial. They would only admit five or six students in American History each year. Virtually all the students were given what were called crowd fellowships, which at that time were probably the largest fellowships in the United States for history graduate students.

And, it was a wonderful place to go to graduate school. They treated you almost more like a colleague than a student. They tended to get more older students, I'd say, than normal. I had actually graduated from Princeton in 1969 and had planned to go to Yale for graduate school. C. Vann Woodward³ was the great figure in my field and I had been the research assistant as an undergraduate for Sheldon Hackney⁴, who was a young professor who had just graduated from Yale, had been one of Woodward's favorite students, and I became a protégé of Sheldon Hackney and worked as his research assistant my last two years. And I was married as an undergraduate, which at Princeton was very unusual. We got married after our sophomore year, lived off campus. There were only 55 married students there in the entire place and, but I had almost—I think almost graduate school experience as an undergraduate working as his research assistant on Civil Rights history and Southern history.

²Brandeis University is an American private research university in Waltham, Massachusetts, 9 miles west of Boston.

³Comer Vann Woodward (November 13, 1908 – December 17, 1999) was a Pulitzer-prize winning American historian who focused primarily on the American South and race relations.

⁴Francis Sheldon Hackney (December 5, 1933 – September 12, 2013) was a prominent U.S. educator and was a provost at Princeton from 1972 to 1975, the president of Tulane from 1975 to 1980, and the president of the University of Pennsylvania from 1981 to 1993. He was also the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) from 1993 to 1997, appointed by President Clinton.

But anyway, I graduated in the spring of 1969, which was sadly was—sort of coincided with an upsurge in the Vietnam War⁵, and I eventually, to make a long story short, I got my draft notice. I think if I remember this correctly, the same day that I got my graduate fellowships in the mail—wonderful fellowships—to Harvard, and Yale, and Stanford. And also, Uncle Sam needed me (LJ laughs). I was very, very much opposed to the war. Had not been—I wouldn't say I was really an activist at that point in the antiwar movement, but I certainly felt very strongly about it. Even though I had grown up as the son of a naval, a career naval—my father had been an enlisted man, a chief and then became an officer.

He was photographer, not particularly a military man, but I had grown up, you know, as a navy kid. So it was something of a change for me for to come, sort of, involved in the antiwar movement. But anyway, I ended up—after much soul searching and a very difficult situation, I went into the navy as an officer candidate for supposedly a noncombatant position in the fall of 1969. I knew it was a bad decision from the outset, but I just simply could not make the compromises that I needed to make. I was at New Port, Rhode Island in the fall of '69. And the—some of the promises that were made about being a noncombatant, being—I had a lot of computer training as an undergraduate actually. I had a secondary interest in math and computer science in addition to history. Sheldon Hackney had been one of the first quantitative historians, that's where I'd gotten it, Institution for Population Research at Princeton.

But, anyway I ended up in September of 1969, in New Port and it was a bad fit. Let's put it that way. Eventually they decided they were going to—there were 13 of us out of the 12 hundred [that] I think were in this supposedly special intelligence designation. But we—about halfway through they decided, well we would eventually be military attachés in embassies, but I had this notion that somehow I could bore from within and reform the navy. (LJ laughs) Pretty naive there. Anyway, 21 years old.

But in the middle of OCS [officer candidate school] when they told us that we were going to be combat information center officers on guided missile cruisers, we would push the button and the village would disappear, I resigned. Which you could do at that time. They then would try to get you drafted of course, which they did in my case. But I resigned and got out on Christmas Eve 1969 knowing that I probably had a couple of weeks before they would try to draft me. And amazingly, I was able get a job in a little high school, Chatham High School on Cape Cod, which was the next town to where I grew up. I was born in Hyannis, but by family has lived in Harwich on Cape Cod for centuries, practically or literally.

⁵The Vietnam War (1954- 75), known as the “Resistance War Against the Americans” in Vietnam, is considered a proxy war of Cold War era. North Vietnam wished to unify the country under communism and South Vietnam wished to remain non-communist. Communist countries aided and supported the war effort of the North while non-communist countries aided and supported the South

Anyway, I was able to get a job as the math teacher, actually the chair of math department. We only had two mathematicians. At Chatham High School, I started on my 22nd birthday, January 6th, 1970, and taught there for there basically a year and a half, teaching high school math, algebra, calculus, some computer science and—with the intention of being able to go back to graduate school as soon as I can, as I could.

My wife had dropped out of college. She had gone back to Agnes Scott College her first two years. She dropped out to get married. We always intended—she had been our high valedictorian. We had been valedictorian, salutatorian in the same high school. We promised her parents, who were not particularly pleased by our elopement at aged nineteen that (LJ laughs)—anyway she applied to Wellesley College and got a full scholarship. For a year while I was teaching on Cape Cod, she commuted to Boston for Wellesley, became a renaissance literature specialist because that's what was offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The spring of 1970, they did try to draft me actually, but I—I always loved to play basketball. I played a lot of basketball, and I broke my ankle in two places the day they sent me my draft notice.

And even though the lottery system had come in and my number was 221, they said that they needed me now. In fact, they needed me in marines not in the army, and they weren't going to wait for lottery system to kick in. They needed bodies. Well of course my ankle was broken, I couldn't report for the physical in Boston. And I made sure that it took a while the ankle to heal and by that time they could no longer make the argument that they hadn't had time to adjust to the lottery system in its first year. So I got time until I applied for a deferment as math teacher, got my deferment three days before all deferments were discontinued. So it was miraculous that I was able to escape.

As a teacher on Cape Cod, I got very active in the antiwar movement. I was one of the local coordinators for Gerry Studds⁶, an antiwar congressman who ran for congress. And one summer, the summer of 1971, Kathy and I, my wife and I, we ran a coffee house in an outlying Methodist church, did drug counseling and had folk bands and [that] sort of thing. [We] did a lot of interesting things in those years, but to make a long story short, I—in the spring of 1971, I had gone through the year of the lottery so I now could—Kathy was senior, going her senior year at Wellesley, and so I reapplied to graduate school.

In the interim, there had been a real intensification of the market. The golden age was over in academic life for a lot of people, and they weren't admitting as many people, particularly in American history and a lot of the fellowships were being discontinued. So I was not at all sure that I could get these wonderful fellowships that I had gotten in 1969, so I—looking back on it, I don't know quite why we didn't consider commuting. She was

⁶Gerry Eastman Studds (May 12, 1937 – October 14, 2006) was an American Democratic Congressman from Massachusetts who served from 1973 until 1997. He was the first openly gay member of Congress.

at Wellesley. I could have gone to Yale. I knew I could get that scholarship back to work with Woodward, but we never considered it. Young love, hormones, I'm not sure (LJ laughs) combination of the two.

But anyway, so I was really between Harvard, who'd given me a wonderful fellowship that I wasn't sure at all that I would get it again. And applied to Brandeis as a back-up school, not knowing much about it. Again, I did get the fellowship to Harvard, but I was so taken with the interdisciplinary program at Brandeis, extraordinary faculty. Some [are] now considered some of the greatest historians in the country if not the world, David Hackett Fischer, John Demos, other people, Marvin Meyers, Geoffery Barraclough, extraordinary faculty, interdisciplinary. Anyway, I took an incredible gamble and turned Harvard down. I later got to know a number of people who were at Harvard at the same time who have gone on to good careers certainly, but really did not have a good experience in graduate school.

So I think intellectually I definitely made the right choice. So I selected Brandeis with this wonderful crowd fellowship. Broke my grandmother's heart, [she thought] I don't understand how you can turn Harvard down. But anyway, I took a flyer and went to Brandeis and absolutely loved it. My wife worked in the library first, in the science library and then after she got her master's in a Library Science degree at Simmons and became a cataloguer. We had a wonderful five years there and after—actually after a couple of years, they tried an experiment of putting one graduate student on the faculty. Well actually one [student] in European history and one [student] in American history as halftime instructors. It was called the stool; instead of a chair, it was the stool in American history and the stool in European history, we jokingly called it.

Anyway, I was given the stool in American history in 1974, '75. And that was a wonderful experience, and I went out on the job market. Actually in the first year, I got a couple of one-year offers: the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and Cal Poly [California Polytechnic State University], San Luis Obispo. But [I] decided that I had better stay around and finish my dissertation, and—but they renewed my fellowship for the year '75, '76. I did some teaching for them. I went out on the market in earnest in 1975, '76 and ended up doing—it was very bad year but, I was very fortunate, in part, because I had the quantitative training. I looked unusual and ended up getting a wonderful job at the University of Minnesota. Probably the best—that and Rutgers, which I—I would have been offered it if I had turned Minnesota down, with probably the best jobs in the country that year. And I felt very, very lucky.

[I had] never been in the Midwest before. We chose Minnesota because we thought it was exotic. We thought that the world ended in Pittsburg, and so off we went in the fall of 1976—bicentennial year too—in August, to University of Minnesota. I loved it from the outset. It was a wonderful history department, very big. The reason I am mentioning all

of this is because it's such a contrast to what happened here. I was in a department of 42 historians. I also taught in the American Studies program, which one of the great claims to fame of the University of Minnesota, that and Yale and University of Pennsylvania. That's where American Studies began. I also taught in the American Studies program there.

Anyway, I loved it. Great friends there. I was so busy, a young faculty member worrying about getting tenure, and I did not have my dissertation done. Another striking thing about this is that Minnesota had a system that if you came as an instructor—I had written a draft of my dissertation, which I was very unhappy with. In quantitative history, you sort of have a choice of doing either a thematically-oriented piece analytically structured or in more traditional narrative framework. I had done the analytical, and I just didn't think it was anything anybody would ever want to read. I thought that I would have to start over and rewrite it as a book anyways.

So, in Minnesota you had three years. If you were hired as an instructor, you were given three years to defend your thesis. If you didn't, you were gone. So I took the whole three years and essentially rewrote my dissertation from stem to stern as a narrative book. It was a study of Southern demagogues, it's called *The Wild Ass of the Ozarks*, published by Temple University Press in 1984. I mention this because, essentially I left in '76, was on the faculty, had my own PhD students. I think I sat on eight or nine PhD defense committees, directing my own students before I had my own PhD. I may be the last historian to have experienced this. I was really young. You know, I was only 28. I was the youngest by probably 10 years on the faculty and didn't really think of myself as being all that young—much younger. But I was the baby of the department, but I loved it from the beginning.

I had great friends. [There was] a lot of interdisciplinary work and probably would have stayed there forever, but Kathy was really unhappy there, particularly after we had our first child. I think her family looked at this as spousal abuse. [They didn't understand] why you'd make anybody live in such a cold place, and actually three of the coldest winters on record were those—three of the first four winters were brutal, 30 to 35 below zero some days. It was harder on her definitely. Even though we had good friends and it was nice in the summer, she's a real Florida girl. Her family is sort of a historic family in the state, lived in Florida since the 18th century.

So anyway, I had to promise her that we wouldn't necessarily be there forever. So anyway, I applied for the job at USF. It was a junior job, an entry level job, and so I knew that they would have to change it, which is not easy to do. Today it's almost impossible to do. [It is] much more formalistic now, but then you had more leeway. And so anyway, I came down. My interview in January—actually at first I defended my thesis in September of 1979 and still had a little work to do. I defended it before the deadline and in

celebration, Kathy gave me a trip to Mazatlán, Mexico. We went with Emelia our daughter, who was two and a half, for a week in Mazatlán, on the Pacific coast. And it was a wonderful time, except I—the last day there I made the mistake of chewing on some ice in a drink—or at least I think that’s what cause was—and I got Salmonella. And I—in those days the American Historical Association meeting, the annual convention is where you interviewed for jobs. So I think they probably had a dozen finalists they interviewed, the USF department interviewed in New York.

And so I was there in New York and with Salmonella. And I looked good: I had lost 19 pounds in two weeks. I hadn’t eaten. The only thing I could hold down was chocolate. Anyway I’ll never forget, before I had my interview for USF, I thought that this was not going to go anywhere because I literally could barely stand sometimes. And I have dear friend, Vernon Burton, who was also a candidate for the job. He grew up in Ninety Six, South Carolina⁷, and quite a character. And he got a job—he was Princeton graduate student that I knew, another student, another protégé of Sheldon Hackney’s. Vernon got a great job at the University of Illinois, where he’s still teaching now. But he never liked Illinois. He’s done wonderfully there, but he’s always wanted to get back to the South.

This was one of his early attempts to get back to the South. He’s still trying. And anyway, he was a candidate for the job. He—I remember he let me—he and his wife let me—before my interview for USF I went—they let me lie down on their bed for a few minutes. I was as just sick as a dog. Before I went in for my interview, and I obviously did fine, but—and when Vernon had his interview, my colleagues here later told me, and Vernon told me as well, that he spent most of his time trying to convince them why they should hire me. He’s a sweet, sweet guy, and he’s very eccentric but wonderful.

Anyway that was a strange opening for my beginning contact with USF. That was December of 1979. So they invited me for one of the three on campus interviews. They had three finalists: Bill Barry, who was a Princeton PhD, went on to be a college administrator in Georgia; Charles Reagan Wilson, who’s become a good friend of mine, now teaches at the University of Mississippi and who is one of the two people instrumental in doing the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Charles was one of the three finalists and I was. We were all brought down in January, and we interviewed essentially equally at both campuses.

It was ten below zero, I think, when I left Minneapolis. I’ll never forget flying into here, even though I had lived in Florida a good bit of my life [because] my father was in the navy. When I was seven years old, we moved to Pensacola and lived there for two and a half years. And then when I was 15, my last two years of high school, we moved to Jacksonville. But the schools were discredited in Jacksonville, and my grandmother,

⁷Ninety Six is a town in Greenwood County, South Carolina, United States.

my father's mother, French-Canadian paternal grandmother lived in Fernandina Beach on Amelia Island, just a few miles north. So I lived with her in high school. I went home every couple of weekends. [I] went to San Fernandina Beach high school, so I knew Florida.

I had been to two conferences down here. I went to a Tea Club conference in Tampa my junior year, I think, in high school. And then I went to Clearwater in the spring of 1965 to an honor's society convention, on Clearwater Beach. I remember it being very romantic and exotic and [I] loved it. But those are the only two times that I've ever been on the gulf—except for Pensacola of course—and the Tampa Bay area. So I had not been here since 1965. So it had been 15 years when I flew in in January of 1980. I'd never flown in. I'd never seen Tampa Bay, the broad expanses and blue sky. And Dave Carr⁸ was sort of my host. [He] picked me up at the airport in a VW microbus, in those years. He—[I'll] never forget going across the Howard "Frankenstein" Franklin bridge⁹. They treated me really well.

They put me up in the old Edgewater motel, which was owned by the city. It's gone now. It was surrounded on three sides. It was opposite really where the Vinoy Villas are now, very close between that and North Shore pool. It's now a park. But the motel was there many years, and they put me up there and I was completely surrounded by water. It was about 85 degrees. They took me to show me the pool here, where—I can't remember. I always remember that I actually saw people playing water volleyball, but I think they just told me about it. But the pool was glistening and then they—I remember they took me to Peppin restaurant and I had shrimp suprema and that wonderful pumpernickel bread. And then of course, on the Tampa side, when I went over there, they took me to Café Don Jose, same company, same menu. So I had shrimp suprema over there. So I—even gave me—Lou Perez, who was the chair of the department then, gave me as I getting on the—taking the little VW bug to take me to the airport, he stopped and got me a loaf of the bread to take back with me on the plane.

The interview went extremely well, and a good fit. I took to this place immediately. Although the—none of the permanent buildings were up. The—we were in the old, what we used to call the, A building, the old merchant marine building where the marine science is still housed, part of it. They were just building Bayboro hall, which didn't open until the following January, January of '81. It was about far from University of Minnesota as you could imagine. At that time, the University of Minnesota was the largest campus in the country. The system wasn't the largest but there were 52 thousand students on the

⁸An interview of David Carr is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection

⁹W. Howard Frankland Bridge opened in 1960, spanning Tampa and St. Petersburg. The original bridge design was dangerous with backups and accidents a common occurrence. Locals referred to bridge as the "Howard Frankenstein Bridge" and "the Car-Strangled Spanner." In 1992, the bridge was rehabilitated.

campus, and actually if you counted the extension students, I think it was 70 thousand, so it was gigantic. And this was big, solid buildings as far as the eye could see. I came here and it was sort of this “adjunctish” fishing village, these military-looking, barrack-type buildings and no library to speak of. So it was the most bizarre college campus that I had ever encountered.

But I suppose in some ways it’s akin the decision I made in going to Brandeis. I’m not sure what I thought initially. I mean, I was very taken with St. Petersburg. It was just like a fell in love with it right away. And I had never lived in one place for very long, being a navy kid. I’ve never lived in any place more than five years. When we lived in Waltham when I was in graduate school from ’71 to ’76 that was the longest I had ever lived in any one place. So I really had this kind of wanderlust.

Anyway they offered the job to me and I negotiated with them. And we—I kept demanding certain things, and they kept saying yes. (LJ laughs) And before I knew it, we were coming here. So I—and it was a shocking thing for my colleagues in Minnesota. I mean, professionally it looked like a crazy thing to do. I had one of the best jobs in the country and in one of the best departments, a very established position. I mean, I look back on it, and I think it was absolutely the right decision to make. But at the time, some people just didn’t understand what I was doing. It seemed crazy. Even if I had gone to the Tampa campus, but I was going to the regional campus of this developing university. And of course, if you think about it, my interests in Southern history and regional culture and race, it’s been a much more fertile environment here for me than ever would have been there. But that—I don’t think that was really the reason why I came. I suspect that I thought about those things, but they were secondary to the personal decision of my family.

And so, I flew down in June of 1980 to look for a house and Dave Carr helped me a—it was friend of his who was brand new to the real estate game. Nin McQuillan was his name. And Nin, I think—this house he sold to us was the only house he ever sold. He never sold another house. He got out of the game, but he showed me all around. Kathy was actually up with her family on Amelia Island for the week. So I basically scouted out, looked at a hundred houses and then picked the half a dozen that were possible and then she came down, and we chose the house, which we still live in, in the Allendale section. [It is] a 1926, Mediterranean revival house. It looks sort of like a Taco Bell restaurant. I was—it was very appealing to me to get a Florida boom house, coming to—coming back to Florida, and we immediately fell in love with the brick streets and the big trees at Allendale. We lived right across from Doc Webb’s old house and Jay Starkey lived next door there and then there were just—it had a nice feel to it.

So we went and stayed in the Don CeSar¹⁰ to celebrate, the last night. The was the only time we've ever stayed at the Don CeSar. I remember it was 40 dollars a night. It was very expensive, but we splurged and payed 40 dollars (LJ and RA laugh) to stay at the Don CeSar. And then of course went back to Minnesota for rest of the summer though I had just—one of the difficulties of making the decision to come was that I had gotten very active in the American studies department there and the Fulbright commission¹¹ of the Department of Education had come to us and asked us to take over their summer seminars for Fulbrighters from Europe, and Middle East, and Africa, and we had already planned this thing. Ed Griffin, who was a dear friend of mine, English professor, he and I did this together. That was the first year that we did it, in the summer of 1980. [It was] a summer institute, five-week institute on regional culture, and we took them on a two-week tour of the United States. Several days [were] in New Mexico and then in New Orleans and Boston, Washington.

So I had this wonderful experience that summer in 1980 of running the—Ed actually was the director and I was the associate director, but I did a lot of the teaching that summer. [I] got to go to New Mexico, to New Orleans. I think that was my first visit or one of my first visits to New Orleans. It was definitely one of my first visits to New Mexico and Santa Fe, and Acoma, Bandelier and all of that. Anyway, then in August 1980, we got a U-Haul truck, and [we were] towing our car behind with our three-year-old daughter. We couldn't fit everything—all of her stuff in the truck. She had a big bear. She had to sit in the front seat of the truck, the three of us. This big bear, she was grabbing on as a security blanket. [We] stayed with friends on the way down in Yellow Springs, Ohio. A friend of ours who's now a very distinguished—Fred Moxley, a professor of American Indian history at the University of Illinois. Then he was an assistant professor. He was a friend from graduate school. His wife was an artist who was later killed by a drunk driver in Chicago.

They lived in Yellow Springs, and he taught at Antioch. The reason that I mention that, when we got there, there was a change in all the FHA mortgage rates so the deal we had done for the house fell apart. We had to renegotiate it from a (RA laughs) Western Union office in Dayton, Ohio. But we did it. [We had to] take out second mortgage and do all this stuff, but it worked out. But, I'll never forget when we were walking around Yellow Springs. It was a tiny place. That's the kind of place that I always thought I would end up. The only other academic in my family was my, Uncle Don who was a very prominent physicist, who went Middlebury College in Vermont and then went to Amherst for his master's degree and then went to Cornell. And he—when I asked him where I should go to school— I always thought a couple of time in my life that he was so very important

¹⁰The Don CeSar opened in 1928 and became a favorite location for America's high society during the Gatsby Era. It is a member of Historic Hotels of America and is still a popular retreat for the wealthy

¹¹The Fulbright Commission was created by a signed treaty between the US and the UK. It is a nonprofit organization that, through educational exchange, fosters mutual cultural understanding.

person to me. He was my great uncle, my grandmother's brother, and he was at Texas A&M. He started the physics department there and taught there for most of his career.

Anyway, he told me to apply to places like Saint Olaf and Carlton and that's the kind of place I always thought I would end up, a small liberal arts college. I went to Princeton; I went to Brandeis, more that model. So Yellow Springs, Ohio, really appealed to me. You know, I'll never forget walking around thinking what beautiful old houses and very modest, but the college and everything in Yellow Springs. And I turned to Kathy and I said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to live here?" And she said something like, "If I had to live here for more than a week, I'd slit my throat (RA and LJ laugh) or slit my wrists." Anyway, she was very sincere.

I've always had, from the time I was a little kid, this deep connection with teaching, and history, and universities. I mean, I wanted to be a college professor when I was 11 years old. A lot of it was [because] my mother's mother lived with us. Margery Ospey was her name, and she was a little bit of a woman who sort of fancied herself as the last of the Boston brahmans. [She] lived with us a lot of times in South and she didn't like it. She was happy she was alive, that was the good news. The bad news was that she had to live in South. She was sort of this wonderful kind of brooding influence and a lovely woman, a bit of a snob. But she was the one who I think who always push—gave me this sort of image of you should aspire to go to an Ivy league college. And you should aspire these kind of—she'd been a—studied in the New England Conservatory of Music, but essentially been a housewife. An intellectual woman who never really got to use her talents. [She] married to a kind of crazy Norwegian photographer who died in the 1940s.

But she was great influence on me, sort of a connection to the abolitionists of 19th century. When we lived in Pensacola and she would take me downtown, she would insist on sitting in the back of the bus in 1956. [That was] probably the origins of my interests in Civil Rights. I can remember—I had no idea what was going on, eight-years-old, people looking at us strangely. This little, four foot eleven woman dragging me by the hand and everybody peering at us as the only whites in the back of bus. I'm very proud of her for that now. I didn't understand it then of course, but anyway for whatever reason I always have this deep affection for a kind of academic culture, and particularly of those small liberal arts colleges. And that may actually have been my—the origin of my initial openness to this campus in the sense that—it's of course since—often talked about the uniqueness of this campus and having the feel of a small liberal arts college in the midst of a major large research university. St. Petersburg has that feel to it of an overgrown village, a way of having the best of both worlds. I'm just psychoanalyzing myself here, but I think that there may be something to that connection.

And so anyway, we got here in August of 1980. And we—they told me that I would be the beginning of a new wave of faculty. It really wasn't even a trickle it turned out for a

long, long time. But there was one other new person that year, Sam Fustukjian¹², who was—came to be the director of the library. He was Lebanese/Armenian, larger-than-life character. In fact, when we—we were contracted after we got our jobs, we were sent letters telling us to get in touch with certain—actually it came from the real estate company was what it was. Well I got his and he got mine. And he was like, who is this Arsenault character. I couldn't even pronounce [his name]; Fustukjian means pistachio in Arabic. But anyway, so I knew Sam's name before I ever met him. He came to be the director of the library, and we became very close friends from the beginning. I think that we sort of saw that we wanted to make this place over to some degree.

So really we put our hearts and souls into it to—and of course we, Kathy got pregnant in the summer of 1980 and our second daughter Anne was born in March, March 12 of 1981. So she wasn't working then but in '82, she—Sam hired her as collection development librarian. Of course, we had an even closer relationship, but that first year was very close to him and very close to the history department, I must say. Dave Carr may have told you already about a lot of this, but he had a very troubled relationship with the department. The department tried to deny him tenure, and they were able to deny him promotion, so he—when he was given tenure he was not promoted to associate professor. It took his 13 years after that to get promoted and was an embittering experience.

He had had a colleague here, Steven Lawson, who came— Columbia PhD, New Yorker, very street smart— got here and sized up the power relationships and realized that the power was in Tampa. He lived in Tampa from the beginning, and he'd been here a couple of years. He got an offer from Howard University after his first book came out, and he parlayed that into some leverage and was able to transfer to the Tampa campus, which opened up the position for me. And that's—I technically replaced Steve Lawson. But when I got here, Dave was the only historian, a medievalist. There were no Americanists. Lawson had already moved, I guess, to Tampa the previous year.

There had been, actually at one point John Belohlavek¹³, who later became a dear friend, became the chair of the department, who is still in Tampa. John came here for one year and he was also a Nebraska PhD like Dave Carr. He came here in 1970. Dave came here in '71. After a year, John went over to the Tampa campus. Dave stayed and then I think Lawson came in 1973 or '74 and then [he] went over to Tampa in '79. By that point Dave had had a very embittering experience with the department, and he was fortunate that he had a job at all, but still he was—strange situation for me to walk into.

12Samuel "Sam" Y. Fustukjian assumed the role of Interim Dean for USF St. Petersburg Campus after Dean John Hinz stepped down from the position, until July 1986. A native of Lebanon, Fustukjian came to the U.S. in 1969. He served as St. Pete's library director before eventually transferring to USF Tampa to take over leadership duties for the system of USF libraries.

13An interview of John Belohlavek is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.

Steve Lawson had not supported him for tenure, so they were enemies at this point and not necessarily speaking. The department turned out—I didn't know any of this—[to be] a very factionalized department. Lou Perez, who is a very talented Cuban historian—he's Puerto Rican but he studies Cuba—was the chair of the department when I came. And he and Bob Ingles, [who] was an American Labor historian, and Steve Lawson were—we later called them the junta¹⁴. They controlled the department, and I think they had made a decision that USF was a mediocre university. They really, I think, wanted to make history department an excellent department, even if they had to drag it kicking and screaming into a more research orientation.

So it was, I think, a rather bottom-line rather brutal attitude, and there were those who were clearly on the inside and those who were on the outside of the channels of power. I look back on it now and I think that they, they really brought me in to be sort of the Fourth Horseman [of the Apocalypse]¹⁵. They were very—Lawson, and Ingles, and Perez were—very, very attentive and very nice to me that first year. You might call it a full court press. (RA laughs) [They were] taking me to dinner and whenever I—now we used to teach in Tampa every semester and we'd do exchanges. We'd go over there and someone from there would come over here. So I was teaching in Tampa almost as much as I was teaching over here.

We were on the quarter system that first year. That first semester we were still in the—my first office I share with Dave Carr and Cliff Holmes, maybe Harry Shaleman was in there too. We had the end office on the second floor. Beautiful view of the water but you know, you really couldn't get anything done in your office. But it was charming in its own way. And then in the old A building, and then of course Bayboro Hall, we called it then, opened up in January of '81 and we moved over to the new building.

But the people that I became closest to in the department [were] Gary Mormino and John Belohlavek. Gary was actually in Italy my first year here. He was on a Fulbright. I think he may have been also teaching in the Florence program part of that time, but he was in Italy. John was in Russia in the spring of '81, and I saw him a little bit in the fall of '80, but the two people who became my best friends in the world, probably, really weren't here that first year. I was very busy getting acclimated and teaching new courses and the—it was a very good situation but I think I was a bit naïve about departmental politics.

¹⁴In English, this word predominantly refers to the government of an authoritarian state run by high ranking officers of a military.

¹⁵Each horseman embodies a different attribute or character in the end times according to the Christian Bible; the fourth horsemen is symbolic of death and devastation. “[...] before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him.”

Minnesota was famous within the historical profession of being of really an ultra-democratic department. When you came in as a first-year student, first-year faculty member, you taught graduate courses right off the bat. Everything was done by democratic votes and there was really very little hierarchy, and I was just spoiled. Everyone was encouraged to speak his or her mind. There was no kind of etiquette of deference and everybody was an independent operator and, as far as I knew anyway, although I'm sure there were factions of sorts, but it was—Clark Chambers was just wonderful. He was the chair of the department. Later Stuart Scharwitz became a good friend of mine. He was a prominent Brazilian historian now at Yale. Stuart replaced Clark as the chair up there.

And anyway, I was socialized into that Minnesota system, so I was probably stepping on landmines all the time here and didn't even know it. I just spoke my mind. I can remember one instance where somebody was going on leave and they needed a replacement for a year, and they had already arranged to have this guy Jim Dunn, who was a professor at Hillsborough Community College [and] who was a friend of theirs—of the junta—to do the replacement. Well in the meeting—and the decision had already been made, I didn't know that. We were supposedly making the decision in the department meeting, and I brought up, [I suggested] Well you know, I think we should give this to an unemployed PhD, someone who doesn't have a job. We shouldn't just move this person over for a year from Hillsborough Community College because we know him. We should do a search and hire one of these desperate, unemployed PhDs.

And I actually—that carried. I actually—in a sense I won but I lost. You know, I think they thought I was too independent. I think that was probably the first sign for them that I was not going to be the Fourth Horseman. When Gary Mormino came back the next year, we became instant friends. The people who controlled the department had already decided they were going to fire him, essentially. It appears to seem ridiculous now, but one faculty member used to refer to him as always Gary “Dead Man” Mormino. They would never say his name except for Dead Man. And, well I thought it was absurd, and we began to have a kind of organized opposition. I think we had seventeen members of the department in those days and the votes were often nine to eight. Gary and I were always among the eight. We always lost, but—so it became unpleasant in the department for several years.

Really there were members of the department who used the phrase “democratic centralism,” kind of a Cuban model where it's okay to have a debate and dissent but once the decision is made everybody gets on board, so you don't go to the dean or you don't mention this outside. You give up your right to the minority. Well, there was a number of us who didn't believe in that. We had a more democratic definition of deliberation, so it was—you know I—both Gary and I got tenure in 1982 and we liked it here. But it was a very embattled situation in the department, which maybe encouraged me to do more of my work here and to identify with St. Petersburg even though I always cared deeply

about the department, in part because I had been in such a wonderful department in Minnesota where you thought of yourself as a team player, and it was great tradition. I wanted that here and really cared deeply about the department but the—it was a difficult situation and I suspect if I had not been here, I would have left. I don't think I would have stayed.

Gary tried to leave for several years. He was not happy at USF and eventually things worked out. I went in 1984. [I] took a Fulbright professorship at University D'Anjou in Anjou, France. That was just a great, life changing experience. [It was a] spectacular year where the kids were three and seven. [We] lived in a little Greco-Roman village in the middle of a vineyard near the Loire Valley, Blaison-Gohier¹⁶. I had so many of the alumni of the summer institutes [visit], which I continued to run. The first one was in 1980. Every summer I would go back until 1987, with the exception of 1984—I mean '85. In 1985, I didn't do it because I just got back from France. But every other year I went to Minnesota for usually three or four weeks and ran those institutes.

I had all these teachers all over Europe. They invited me to speak, and so I ended up doing just dozens and dozens of speaking gigs all over France, Europe and Western Europe. We just had the most spectacular year imaginable in 1984 and '85. And that probably—and my dissertation was published in the summer of 1984. [It was] an article on air conditioning and Southern culture, which became a classic piece.

So a lot of good things were happening and that was great kind of compensation for some of the more unpleasant things that were going on in the department. I always consider myself to be something of a peacemaker and a bridge builder, and I tried best I could to be civil and get along with everyone, but I didn't like some of the things that were being done to certain people and [I] made that clear. But I felt very, felt loyal to department and to South Florida, but the St. Pete campus, I think in part, because we were a bit embattled. John Hinz¹⁷, who an English professor, kind of an eccentric character, was dean until 1985. He's the one who hired me and was dean the first five years I was here. He was—and Bill Garret¹⁸, was another English professor, was the associate dean. And they were kind of like Abbot and Costello¹⁹. They were just wonderful, eccentric characters.

¹⁶Blaison-Gohier is a former commune in the Maine-et-Loire department in western France. On 1 January 2016, it was merged into the new commune of Blaison-Saint-Sulpice.

¹⁷John Hinz was dean of USF St. Pete from 1979 until 1985, when he resumed teaching American Literature, making way for Samuel Fustukjian.

¹⁸An interview of William Garret is available as part of the USF 25th Anniversary Oral History Project collection

¹⁹Bud Abbot and Lou Costello were a popular comedy team in the 1940s and 1950s. In their acts, Abbot played the devious straight man and Costello the dimwitted comic.

John really fought hard for the campus, and sometimes maybe too hard and it backfired, but we had a very nice sense of community on the campus. There was smaller faculty. It was much smaller. But, you know, we have—John Hinz organized something called the Asparagus Club, which was a town and gown kind of thing where he'd have a faculty member—usually two—give a talk. In fact, he and I did them together. I did something on, I think it was on Southern demagogues, and he did one on Mark Twain. It was one of his great interests. They would invite people from the community to come in, and we would have like a reception. We'd do this maybe once every couple of months, and virtually every faculty member came. What was nice about it is that you didn't—you had a sense of obligation. And I think people really enjoyed it, but I think 80 percent of the faculty would come for this. And it wasn't—for most of them it wasn't in their field, but it was a way of getting them outside of those compartmentalized lines or divisions.

But that was nice, it really was. And there was something that was always expressed about what was best about the campus. And we'd have faculty—Danny Jorgensen used to be here, Greta Shidewell's program assistant's stepfather. He and his wife Lynn had a big old rambling house on the south side of St. Pete, and they would have [a] Halloween party. Steve Turner was over here then and also [the] sociology department is now in Tampa, and Regis Factor in political science, and Harry Shaleman, Joy Kleeman. [There was] a lot of socializing together. It had a really nice feel to it, and everyone knew each other well and cared for each other. It was a real community. I think it still is to a very large extent. It definitely had a special feel, and so you lived in two worlds. You lived in your department, which had a lot power I suppose, although, the budget was over here. You had to learn to live in the two worlds. I suppose most of my intellectual connections were either with Gary Mormino or John Belohlavek or some of my other colleagues in Tampa, or more actually in the national network.

Part of it was [that] technology was changing. It was easier to contact [colleagues], but it became important, I think, for me and lot of faculty members over here to—and we were given more travel money than they ever got in Tampa, and part of the justification was that we needed that kind of reinforcement. We didn't have such close contact with our departmental colleagues. So [it] became very important to go to conferences. Of course, I felt—I was struck by how interesting a lot of the students were here, particularly the older students. I taught—once I sort of figured out what was going on here, I taught more and more at night. I liked the older students. They brought more. I liked to teach the seminar level, and I would teach in Tampa.

For the first nine years, I taught every semester over there, but I loved the intergenerational mix here. I would get lots of senior citizens in my classes. I taught a seminar once on the great depression and half of the class had been there and would talk

about hearing William Jennings Bryan²⁰ speak in 1925, one of them I remember, and—I just loved the diversity of the students. I must say, the students were—there was no real fall off between my students in Minnesota and my students here. I think part of it was that they were self-selected in the sense that—one promise I made to myself is that I would lower my standards. And I was famous, or infamous you might say, at Minnesota for assigning enormous quantities of work, particularly of reading. I really put students through their paces and tried to get them—give them a taste of the reading culture: the life of the mind. I was determined not to water things down here, even though as soon as I got here, I did hear the sort of arguments, Well, these are working, people who have worked all day, and we can't push them too hard. They're first time in college students. For me [these were] all kinds of reasons not to give them their tuition money's worth, and I resisted those as much as possible.

And so, I think the more marginal students learned to—they would take one look at my syllabus, and they were out the door. But many of the best students, I think, I did get, and I would get them over and over again. I just had some, what I thought, were wonderful students and devoted students, both at the graduate and the undergraduate level, who—the classes were small and we would be friends with the students. Some of them were older than I am, I was, and I didn't think much of that. You know I miss not having PhD students, which I had had in Minnesota. Although I have served on PhD committees at various, as a visitor, at various institutions: Rutgers and George Washington University. Two of them.

But I remember always saying that I wanted us to get a PhD program—which we're still in the process of trying to get and may get soon—realizing it was difficult logistically to do, and there are negative sides [such as] the responsibility of finding jobs for your PhD students. They had made me the program office—kind of placement officer at Minnesota my third year there. Ugh, trying to help those graduate students at the bottom of the market was just a nightmare because I had just come through the market myself, and I felt for them so much. But, aside from not having PhD students, I just really felt very good here.

I was going to say for me, St. Pete was a revelation in the sense that it—oh the Tampa Bay area generally but particularly St. Petersburg, acting as sort of a funnel for people from all over the United States and all over the world. For someone interested in regional culture it was, for me, it was a perfect place. Not really being a Southerner, even though I lived in the South much of my life, I think I would have found great difficulty in teaching in Jackson, Mississippi; or Birmingham, [Alabama]; or Greenville, South Carolina. I'm sure I would have adapted, but I'm politically, very on the liberal, radical side and very much of an activist.

²⁰Wayne Jennings Bryan was an American orator and politician who opposed Darwinism, most famously at the Scopes Trial (also referred to as the Scopes Monkey Trial) in 1925. At the trial, John T. Scopes was accused of teaching human evolution in a state-funded school, a violation of Tennessee's Butler Act.

And that was the other thing where St. Pete gave me a great opportunity. I got involved with the American Civil Liberties Union after getting here just a few months. And I became involved with Historic Preservation, a lot of things I'd always said I wanted to do but never seemed to have time to do when I was at Minnesota. Even in Boston I hadn't done as much as I would have liked. Here I just threw myself into every kind of cause that I believed in, particularly the ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union, Civil Rights stuff and just—

I used to tell people in Boston, you could always make an excuse [that] if you don't go to the rally, there are 500 people just like you who will be there, so it wasn't a big deal. Here I had a sense that if I didn't go, there might be—maybe no one would go or—I used to be involved in a group protesting the death penalty, and we used to stand out with signs. Again, half a dozen people protesting. If I didn't go—dragging my daughters with me—half the group wasn't there. So really, for me it was just a wonderful trip to be here, community (inaudible) that I can make a difference.

Part of it I guess I had to rationalize. I had to live in Minnesota. I used to say that I loved Minnesota, but I probably could have been there for 50 years and been run over by a truck and then no one would know I'd been there. The best Minnesota could do was really maintain itself, a fine institution. If they could stay where they are, they'll be doing well. But nobody's really going to move that place one way or the other. And here, I feel like I've made a difference. I've tried at least to put my stamp on this place. I suppose that my most obnoxious—I think I sometimes see myself as a missionary in a sense, trying to bring more of a sense of an academic culture here, of standards.

But I think what I've discovered is that there's lots of talented people here, and well-meaning people, and really kind of interesting faculty. It's been a—not without a lot of effort—very good mix of an orientation towards close, sort of crafted, caring teaching and a real interest in research and writing. And you know, I've taught an enormous number of courses since I've been here. God, I can't—I've lost count. [I've taught] probably 25 different courses at least and everything from primal ooze to last week.

But that's—I deliberately did that to keep myself intellectually alive, to force myself to keep reading, to stretch myself a little bit, or a lot in some cases. And, I just don't like to do the same thing over and over again. That may well have lowered my total productivity. You'll probably look at me when I get to the end of my career, I could have written another book, or maybe two additional books, or more articles, or whatever. But, I don't think I could trade it. I think that's for me—that's been my kind of intellectual key, is to bring to all these different perspectives, truly interdisciplinary and intellectually curious, and I like that about the students here.

A lot of them don't bring, in some cases, a lot to the table in terms of intellectual preparation. They often bring curiosity and an openness, and they bring—a lot of them life experiences which make them interesting people. And I really think that if maybe you looked at the average GRE scores of our students, they might not be overwhelming impressive, but I think if you look at the quality of the honor's theses that the honors students have done—a program I've been directing since 1995—or the quality of some of the master's theses that people have done and some of the students [such as] Jack Davis, Chris Warren [or] any number of students who've gone on to academic careers, PhDs elsewhere, and just looking at the reaction that oftentimes [happens] when we bring guest lecturers here, who teach at prestigious universities, they're usually just knocked out by the quality of the questions. They just are not expecting what they find here. I think [there is] this image of Florida being kind of an intellectual wasteland and a place where you go to die.

I think that they're just stunned really at the level and, you know, part of it is this campus. It's just a great place to hold small conferences. We had that wonderful lecture series for years that Sudsy Tschiderer²¹ was the force behind, and Harry Shaleman, and Danny Jorgenson, and others really worked so hard on. I'd always prevail on everybody I knew around the country to come. At one time or another, everybody I know has been here to talk and many of them several times. And but, I think they—so many times I can remember this look of surprise on their faces. They were so proud of the students and the faculty many times.

So I think we've done something right, and I hope we don't lose it in the growth pattern. It's easier to talk about doing interdisciplinary work than to actually do it, and sometimes I think that you've got to be careful not move too far from a disciplinary base. I worry about that sometimes I'm spending too much time on the Honors Program and the Florida Studies Program. I don't want to neglect the history department here, but it's a constant balancing act because I live and breathe history. I believe in it as an ennobling discipline and a humbling discipline in many respects from bridging social sciences and humanities and caring about the literary quality as well as the analytical quality in the world. The complexity of the past I think is incredibly important for people developing healthy identities and follow that—but I used—I never expected to stay here forever when I came.

I think for a lot of us—I talked to a number of people about this. You know, there was a time when you thought you could expect to teach at an institution that was as good as the institution that you attended. Up to about 1968 or so you could do that. If you went to an Ivy League school, you could probably teach in an Ivy League school or big state

²¹An interview of J.M. Tschiderer is available as part of the USF 25th and 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.

university or whatever, but that's just not possible for the vast majority of people now. I think maybe some of us at times have felt sorry for ourselves, and we go back to our professors. You know, when I go back to Boston and I walk around Harvard yard, or I go back to Princeton, or Brandeis, and it's sort of bittersweet, and yet I think it's—on balance it's been very good for me and for people like me, and it's also been very good for American education. When it comes to democratization, there are good people, first-rate people everywhere now.

You know, our best historians in our department are as good any historians in the country. And you know, our best courses are as good as any courses taught anywhere. I really believe that, and you couldn't say that 30 years ago. So people are—can't ride on the institutions the way they used to. And I think—there's also I think—just it's incredibly important to have—to give the students that we get here access to a first-rate, high-quality education, and to not talk down to them, and to not dumb it down for them, and to give them a chance to compete with the best students.

You know we obviously have a range of students and a range of faculty. It's wider than it's going to be at some institutions, but I think if you look at the people we've hired here last year, it's very encouraging. The last couple years, we got just some fabulous people who've been able to keep the balance between teaching and research and to keep that kind of research one orientation. You know, we could have gone to a kind of glorified community college when we faced the kind of corporate, hostile corporate takeover by Senator Sullivan²² and Carl Kuttler²³, and all the threats from the community college, and people talking about complete independence instead of autonomy within the university. I think that there are some people who wouldn't mind if this campus became a glorified community college and it was just teaching and the research one stuff happened over in Tampa. I've spent my whole career here fighting that, trying to fight for parity in research expectations, and I've served on every task force imaginable.

Again, probably administrate—my friends think I'm out of my mind for serving on as many committees as I do. But I am probably—maybe I am but—have been, but I think I detected early on that if, you know, I was going stay here, I wanted to have my say, have some impact and see that the place became as good as it could be. You know, in an institution that's forming, sometimes if you don't put your finger in the dike²⁴ nobody else is going to do it. I don't mean to suggest that I've put my finger in the dike or anything, but I've done my best I think to be an involved citizen at every level not just here but in Tampa.

²²Don Sullivan, in 2000, supported a bill to sever the St. Petersburg campus from USF. The bill failed.

²³Carl Kuttler served as president of USF, St. Petersburg, from 1978 to 2009.

²⁴This expression comes from a popular legend about a young Dutch boy who sees a crack in a dam, and is able to stop the leak by putting his finger in the crack.

And you, sometimes I get frustrated that all those reports we worked on get shelved in the back or get thrown away, and a lot of them never come to anything. But some of them have, some of them—when I served on the university planning commission for three and one half years, I went over to Tampa every week, one day a week for five or six hours. We really kind of reorganized the university. A lot of those things that happened, all the priorities, the new bookstore and the architectural changes and all that came out of our planning commission and various emphases. Not everything came true, but the liberal arts core and all those kinds of things—and obviously [there is] still a lot of work to be done. When I came to USF, I had few moments of real depression, disillusionment because I encountered people who—they thought of us as a second-rate place. And I'm not thinking just of this campus, I'm thinking more of USF generally.

I'd never encountered that before. People would ask me, why did you come here if you wanted to assign all that reading and if you wanted to do all these great things? Why did you come here? They sort had given up, some of them. And another theme that I ran into was people blaming the institution. They thought of themselves as failed academics and they blamed the institution. They had never been anywhere else, or maybe not since they had been very young, and so they had this image of the grass was green everywhere else but here. If they'd just been at the University of Maryland, they would have had hot and cold running research assistants, and all the time off, and not too many students, and they would win Pulitzer Prizes, and it was just that they'd gotten a raw deal kind of whining mentality, which I really don't like and resent.

And that was very disconcerting for me back in the 1980s when I heard that. I haven't heard it so much in the last ten years, but I remember it distinctly and I'd never encountered that before. That almost made me leave frankly. I've had couple of bouts over the years when I thought of leaving and almost left. It's hard to do. Kathy's so happy here and loves St. Petersburg, and I do too. I'm glad I didn't leave, but that's the one thing: there have been a few times that I've been a little disappointed in some of the general attitudes of the faculty. Not of the students, never of the students. I've never really had any complaints about students.

It's been very, very gratifying. You know, I think back [and] it's hard for me to imagine what my life was like before I came here because so many of the most important people of my life, students who've gone on to do great things and particularly in environmental history and just people that—and I can remember coming here and thinking I had such great friends in Minnesota. And many of them are still great friends of mine. And in graduate school I thought, I don't want start over. How am I going to do it? What if I can't find anybody like those people? And of course one the things that you discover I think is that—well, when I think back to the Minnesota department [of] 42 people, I really had probably eight or nine really good friends there. They were some people I

discovered that I probably didn't want to spend a lot of time with out of those 42, definitely I didn't.

And the same thing is true in any situation, and I think if you can find a few people that you really feel close to and respect, which I have found many here, certainly enough. But I have friends, one friend in particular who teaches in Washington DC; he's a very dear friend of mine from graduate—coming here in a couple of days actually. He's always saying the enemies, Gary Mormino and I and others here who—John. We have this very close—John Belohlavek²⁵—very close friendship and—both intellectual and personal—and he's never had that. I mean he has a million friends and a great life, but he doesn't spend any time with his colleagues. He's at George Washington University. There's just nobody he wants to spend any time with.

He has to go to the conferences really. And so, I think if you can find a few people that you really have that kind of connection with, it's—should be thankful for. And I think this institution has allowed that, and I'm very grateful for that. When I think back there's always moments of doubt and regret, but you—I mean I think USF, I think this campus can be very proud of what it's accomplished, that it's a far better institution than it has any right to expect to be in a sense of a new institution. When the national ranking comes out in the *US News and World Report*, I think they're really off base. I think within the state of Florida, we may well be the best institution.

I think what we do with our students, generally speaking is—we do more with them than what they do at Florida State and the University of Florida. Florida gets good students. They have a lot to work with but that oppressive culture of fraternities, and sororities, and drinking, and football, I think at least at the undergraduate level, is terrible innervating and diverting. I think until they get their priorities straight, those will never be great institutions. I had many, many students over the years who have been first to Florida State and UF who tell me that they work a lot harder here, got a lot more out of USF than the—I think we do more with less in a sense. I worry a bit about now that we have a football team—I suppose maybe we have to do that in the culture of Florida, against the Gators, and the Canes, and the Seminoles—I worry a bit that Southern state universities have made some terrible choices.

I teach a course once a year on sports and American culture, and I've done a lot of thinking about this and talking to students. My next book after I finish *The Freedom Rider* book is going to be on sports. My next two books probably will be on sports and race. And I think those questions about the power of popular culture, I think, are very important ones. I think this—we're very fortunate that we don't have sororities, fraternities on this campus and that there's not a huge kind of classic college sports

²⁵An interview of John Belohlavek is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.

orientation. As much as I love sports, I think that's been one of the secrets to our success. And of course part of it's been the connection with the community. We're so close physically, and it's such a beautiful location.

I mean I, again, I always thought I'd end up in a place with ivy-covered walls and gothic or red brick architecture in which—I'm the kind of person whenever I see a coll—when I'm traveling and I see a sign for a college campus that I haven't—I always go visit it. I drive my family crazy. I'm always driving off these things. I love college campuses and never thought I'd end up in one that looks like this. It's so quirky, so distinct that it has its own charm, it really does. The harbor and the shrimp boats, the coast guard cutters, and the Dali museum²⁶, and Poynter²⁷, even the wacky airport that I was hoping we'd be able to cut back on, it's part of the ambiance that I think is really special, particularly now that we've gotten newer buildings. And I think that's going happen in the next couple two years is just—I don't know if people fully appreciate what a remarkable place this complex, this cultural complex we have now around the harbor.

With what's happening downtown is just, there can't be many examples like this in the entire United States. A campus like this where you could walk into it a downtown. It's still a European style walking city but a kind of human scale and with historic architecture. Now with the new Publix [Super Markets], you could live here without a car. You really could. Almost no other Sunbelt²⁸ city you could say that about. I have a friend who's a novelist from Manhattan who just moved here, never had a car. [My friend is] living in the Madison right here [and] loving it. And so I hope that people kind of develop a real appreciation for this place.

And I guess—I was in a meeting earlier today on the accreditation of the mass com program, and I made a statement in there that we fought for many years for parity with Tampa, at least parity, and we didn't want them to do us any favors, you know, water down the tenure requirements, expectations and that—I mean people should have a real sense of pride and accomplishment in what's happened here. If the politicians don't interfere too much, we should have a very, very rosy, rosy future.

You know, I just think about the programs of distinction. Gary Mormino and I are like kids in a candy shop. It's hard to believe that we have the opportunity to do what we're

²⁶Salvador Dali Museum located in St. Petersburg, Florida, contains the largest collection of Dali's works out of Europe.

²⁷The Poynter Institute was founded in 1975 by the owner and chairman of the St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) as a journalism school. It is now a non-profit school for journalism that, in addition to training journalists, offers training for educators, newsroom professionals and journalism entrepreneurs.

²⁸The Sun Belt states are those south of the 36th parallel, which are noted for mild winters, frequent sunny skies and economic opportunities.

going to do now, getting these wonderful students and having Jeff Klinkenberg²⁹ here as the writer-in-residence and what we're thinking about doing next year, just all the field trip possibilities. I mean we went canoeing yesterday on Hillsborough with my honors class. And I was—it's a privilege to be able to do those kinds of things. I think in general, being a university professor and academic, is that we're incredibly lucky and privileged to do what we do. I think it's particularly true here. I mean the salaries aren't high in relative terms, but the quality of life is amazing.

And there's so much going on in the metropolitan area that you only have yourself to blame if you don't take advantage of this tremendous amount of things in terms of music and—just people coming through. You know, Norman Mailer [is] here this week, and John Hope Franklin [is] here for three weeks. Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard, was at the Bok Tower³⁰ yesterday for the rededication. You just look at the people coming through here: Verlyn Klinkenborg of the *New York Times* giving a talk at the Writers Conference. The one thing about being in Minnesota was that no one ever really came to visit us there (LJ laughs). If they had reason to come there, they came, but no one just sort of casually slipped through.

Here, if you wait long enough everybody comes through here. Just the fascinating people who end up here. So many old lefties. Just all the old religious labor types and peace activists. That was one of the great revelations when I moved here. Don West, the old poet, who was one of the founders of the Highlander Folk School³¹ in 1932. Willard Uphaus, a famous religion professor at Vanderbilt [Divinity School] spent a year in jail during the McCarthy Period³². Hosea Hudson has come through, the old black communist from Alabama. Ruth Uphaus who's still here at Amnity house, and Ruth Hyde Paine who was Lee Harvey Oswald's landlady in 1963, and was an activist. Ray and Margo Yazell who [are] wonderful activists here and who published their newspaper *Community*, and Sid Getz who's a separation of church and state activist, and just—Elizabeth Holtzman's father, Congressman Holtzman's father used to come to all the events here. No matter what—we'd have the lecture series—no matter what the topic, he would get up and ask

29Jeff Klinkenberg worked for the South's largest newspaper, *Tampa Bay Times*, from 1977 to 2014. He has been the recipient of numerous awards throughout his career as was the first writer-in-residence for the University of South Florida's Florida studies graduate program.

30Bok Tower Gardens was created by Edward W. Bok as a gift to the community in 1929. This 250-acre garden with a 205-foot carillon tower is a national historic landmark and a bird sanctuary located near Lake Wales, Florida.

31The Highlander Research and Education Center (formerly known as Highlander Folk School) provides training and education for movement leaders throughout the South, Appalachia, and the world. Some of its trainees have included Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

32Years of heightened political repression and a fear campaign against communist influence, roughly from 1947 to 1956. The primary targets were government employees, educators, union labor activists, and members in the entertainment industry.

the first question. And the question would [be], “How are we going to stop nuclear proliferation?” I mean it could be a travelogue on India, or could be anything and he would get up and his big booming voice, he’s an ex-rabbi, retired rabbi.

Edna Ruth Johnson, a former dancer and a woman who’s donated some to the Franklin endowment here. We have a room named for her in back of the Snell house. [She] was the editor of the *Churchman’s Humanist Magazine* for so many years. And all the people associated with the *St. Pete Times*, you know, Eugene Patterson and uh—it’s just a remarkable energy, and yet there’s also a kind of quietness to the place, to St. Petersburg. It seems to me that there’s a balance between enterprise and leisure. It’s very healthy and for most part outside of the rat race. I’ve always said that this city, to some degree, has had this or to a large degree and needs to have the courage to be different, because it never went through the industrial stage and was simply place to live.

I do not look across the bay and envy the glass towers and the hustle and bustle of Tampa. I think now, in the last few years, is a downtown renaissance if we don’t kill the goose that laid the golden egg by putting up towers that are too tall, and if we are able to protect our historic buildings and keep the scale of the city, which I think we’ll be able to do because we’re on a peninsula and we’re sort of built out. We can have more density and make it more urban and more livable and end a lot of the urban sprawl, but I think part of the secret of the campus is its location.

For years I heard people say, oh well, why is it there. I’ve argued with Genny Littrell³³, who’s a former student who is on city council now, and I love Jenny to death but she’s always saying, “Oh the campus shouldn’t be there. It should be in Mid County.” Well maybe demographically we’d get more students if we were in Mid County, but we’d lose so much of the charm, the special nature of the campus. I think it would be a terrible loss. You can see the problems with USF Tampa, building it out in this sort of field, and I think it’s difficult for people to have deep affection for USF Tampa. It’s a multiversity. You know, it just doesn’t inspire that kind of loyalty and connection that this [campus] does. And most of our students here will do anything to stay on this campus, to not go to Tampa. I don’t think it’s just because they don’t want to drive across the bridge. I think there’s just a deep loyalty and sense of affection, which I think is growing actually. If we don’t spoil it that it’s—it has a lot of what you’d expect in a small liberal arts college.

I think that kids who go here, people who go here have a sense of place. This couldn’t be anywhere else. I mean you could not create this, this complex of buildings and this place, this crazy mix of pelicans flying in, and all the marine science stuff, and the Dali museum. I mean, how crazy is that? They’ve got Salvador Dali there, and geological survey people, and the Poynter Institute, and you know just all the old residential hotels a

³³An interview of Virginia Littrell is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection

few blocks away, and just the crazy cast of characters who have made up the city. And we've had a fairly crazy cast of characters who've been at the campus. I mean sometimes I start telling stories about my colleagues and people think I'm making them up. It's sort of like Carl Hiaasen³⁴ talks about his fishing, he doesn't have to make it up. He just looks at the headlines in the morning and does a little bit of embellishing but not much. It's true here. It's really a very distinctive place, and I think in all the good ways. So—. You didn't get to ask many questions did you? (RA laughs)

LJ: That's fine. Well thank you.

RA: Okay.

End of interview

³⁴A native Floridian, Hiaasen was graduate of the University of Florida and has been writing novels since the 1980's, including *Hoot*, which won a Newbery Honor. He is well known in the Tampa Bay area for his longstanding satirical column in The Miami Herald's opinion-and-editorial section.