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Lucy Jones (LJ): Today is Tuesday, November 25th, 2003. My name is Lucy Jones. I'm a graduate assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today I'm continuing a series of interviews at the Nelson Poynter Library at the USF St. Pete Campus with USF faculty, students, staff and alumni to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today I'm with Ed Baird who, in addition to being a world-class sailor, is a USF St. Pete alumnus. And thank you for being here today.

Ed Baird (EB): Oh it's great. It's a fantastic place here.

LJ: Well, let's start with [an] explanation of how you came to USF.

EB: Well I was born and raised in St. Petersburg, so I've always loved it here and went away for a couple of years for my first two years of university and then was entwined in an Olympic sailing effort for the 1980 Olympics, which took a lot of my time and required that I was not able to go to school during the attempt at qualifying for the team. And when that was all over, I needed to go back to school again but at the same time, I had purchased a house here and just kind of looked around and said, "Gee, I can go to school here and live in the house that I own, or I can go back to some school that I would have to make completely new friends over again because all the people that I had gone to school with had graduated by now."

I just made the choice to go here. It seemed convenient, and simple, and easy, and I could stay in the town that I loved. So I did. It was a little complicated because the St. Pete campus didn't have all of the required subjects that I needed to take. So I had to take a

couple of classes at what was then called St. Pete Junior College¹, now it's St. Pete College. And then [I had to] transfer all my stuff from the other schools and then I was able to do everything that I needed here.

LJ: So what degree did you get from here?

EB: I got a general business degree. It was actually one of the few that was available, you know, without going to the Tampa campus, and I really didn't want to drive that much. I knew that whatever I did it wasn't going to be something that required that I had a particular specialty of a degree. Really my college education was a learning experience, a little different than I think a lot of people's. I wasn't worried about going to grad school or being a medical student or something like that. I knew that I'd get off into the sport of sailing somewhere, and my experience in the university would help, but it wasn't going to be the reason that I got a job.

LJ: When you say that your experience was different than other people's, how was it different? Just the fact that you were older, or sailing, or—

EB: Well not so much older. I was really only two years older than the class I graduated with, but I spent so much time traveling and organizing teams to go to these events. [I] spent time raising money and managing a budget for the Olympic program that I was with. Really just, school had to fit in around the other things that I was doing. I think there was a tremendous amount of people that went to school here who the campus provided that type of atmosphere for.

This was really a great mix of people at the time that were older business people or perhaps a mother, a housewife whose kids and grown up and she wanted to finish her university degree or something like that. There was a lot of people who weren't necessarily on the fast track of finishing up college. And yet, there were also about half as many people who were just doing a straight-up four-year degree and chose not to go somewhere else. So it was an interesting experience and interesting climate on the campus at the time.

LJ: So that was the early '80s, right?

EB: Right, '80, '81, '82.

¹St. 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.

LJ: What did the campus look like when you took classes here?

EB: Well I have fond memories of going to school in what I was told were old marine or army barracks next door where the USF or the marine research group is right now. The buildings that we were in had window mounted air conditioning that was inadequate and very old classes with typical chalkboards. But they had enthusiastic instructors and, you know, a great group of people going to school. So it was quite an interesting thing, especially since the most recent university I had gone to previous was Florida State, which had all the newest, latest, greatest everything. Coming here was like going back to an old one-room schoolhouse at the time, but it grew quickly, and they did have everything that we needed to learn the things that we were trying to learn.

LJ: Were you active in any groups on campus while going to—? You were busy off of campus.

EB: I was very busy off campus. I did a little bit with the fledgling sailing program that was going on but not really much. I worked almost full-time while I went to school here, so I didn't have a lot of time for extra activities here. But I did spend a tremendous amount of time in the library, and between, you know, watching the planes fly over the top of me when I was studying and looking out the window at the beautiful harbor, you know, I really enjoyed my time on campus.

LJ: Now did the fact that the university is on a harbor with sailing play any part at all in your decision to go here?

EB: No it didn't. It was really proximity to where I lived. Now I would, if I were a graduating high school student at the moment and I loved to sail, I would seriously consider going here because it is a great sailing program and is starting to be nationally ranked in the, you know, top 20 on a consistent basis both for a men's and a women's group. They have such a fantastic facility and of course also the proximity to another university, which is Eckerd College. You know, another college campus that they can race against in the immediate waters, and people from all over the country want to come down here and race for the winter when it's too cold up north. So it's a lot different atmosphere and I would—yeah, I would recommend to a lot of young kids that it's a good place to go now.

LJ: Who were some of the faculty members that you remember from your years in school?

EB: Wow. You know, the only person I really think back on was Winston Bridges who went on to be the—I guess what you would call—temporary dean for a number of years. I knew Winston before I went to school here because of sailing. He used to race boats quite a bit and his—not really does any of it anymore, but you know, I see him around at some of the sailing events and things still. But beyond that, I—I mean—you know, again it was such—it was time in my life where the university had to fit into all the other things that I was in the middle in of. So I wasn't really focused on the people that I was meeting on campus. I was really just trying to get my work done and, you know, fill in the blanks on tests properly. So I'm sorry that I just don't remember anybody beyond Winston.

LJ: How about the students?

EB: Well you know, there's a lot of students that I still run across, people—friends of mine before I went to school here and some that I made while I was here. But probably the one that I remember most is Margo Fischer who's the—Mayor David Fischer's wife. David was the most recent mayor before Rick Baker. Margo went to school, in fact had a couple of classes with me. I remember especially one day that she to work—or came to school rather in a rather beat-up looking Camaro or maybe it was a Mustang, but it had a lot of primer paint on it. She found a place to park, and I was just walking by when she was getting out of her car, and she saw me looking at her. And she said, "It's not mine. It's my son's." (LJ and EB laugh) Because it really was a beaten up car, but there was an awful lot of folks that—I mean Margo is just one of many who I still run across and enjoy from the time here.

LJ: So you grew up in St. Petersburg, and you came back to St. Petersburg, and you've lived here since then. As a St. Petersburg resident, have you had any thoughts about the way that the university has changed since you were a student?

EB: Well, when we were going here in '80, '81, you know there were a lot plans for the future, a lot of foresight and vision that frankly as an early 20-year-old student without a lot of experience in how cities grow, I looked at these plans and visions and thought, Wow, that's really going to take a lot of time to make happen. But now when I look around down here, this is an impressive place. It's a beautiful campus. It's got fantastic facilities and proximity to so many great things like the arts, and the hospitals, and the water-front parks. Just to be able to go out and take a break from all this studies [is great]. You know, the airport being close by and marinas, it's a fantastic place unlike really any other university I've been to. So I'm pretty impressed with how it's all come together. And I must say, remembering all the old buildings that were here when I went to school, and the neighborhood that surrounded the school at the time, I would never have really imagined that it would come out looking and being so wonderful that it is now.

LJ: Do you still maintain any relationship with the university?

EB: I don't. I mean the short answer is no. The longer answer is that occasionally the friends that I have that are involved with the school will get me involved with something for an hour or two here or there. Certainly, I would love to see the sailing team prosper and flourish, so I try to lend a hand when I can, but I travel so much. I'm gone so often that, you know, even that becomes difficult to do. But I do think about the school a lot and I love driving by it. Every time I ever bring a visitor from—you know, whether it's another part of the states or somewhere overseas, to see our town, I make sure to tour them through the campus because it's really something that I'm very proud of in St. Petersburg.

LJ: I was wondering if you could just briefly announce—I know it's probably a very long answer—but briefly describe your career in sailing, just so that (LJ and EB laugh)—I know it's a long—

EB: Yeah, well it's been a—

LJ: —and illustrious career.

EB: The funny thing is that, when I got out of USF, I did another two-year Olympic campaign for the 1984 Olympics. When that was finished, I was actually hired by a small boat dealership next door to the university that was trying to grow. And they hired me to help them with ideas of how to sail to racing sailors and do things that racing sailors needed. So I worked there for about three and one-half years, and during that time, the business grew very rapidly not only for the sales of boats and equipment and things that I was hired to help with, but they started to purchase a lot of the property around here. And eventually, I fell in as the manager of all those things and one of which is the marina next door. And when the Dali Museum² got put where it is, we started a process of developing this marina out of what used to be kind of a grubby, nasty commercial harbor that when you look out the window now next door to USF, there's this fantastic, beautiful marina called the Harborage at Bayboro.

So I worked there for about three and one-half years. At the end of that time, the company was beginning to grow even more, and I was being offered an option to work within the company but sail less and so forth. And I, my wife and I actually, made the

²The Salvador Dali Museum is located in St. Petersburg, Florida, and contains the largest collection of Dali's works out of Europe.

decision to stop working and to try to make a career in professional sailing, which was not really something that anybody else was doing at the time, but it looked like it might be possible.

So, in 1987, I left my job and started to go to try to make pro sailing working—to make it work. Now, at that time professional sailing was writing articles, teaching and coaching people, scrambling around trying to do any kind of project that I could and hopefully finding some way to pay the bills. Very quickly it became something where there was events that we could go to for prize money, like the tennis and golf tours. We also—we, the people who do this in the sport—started to be able to do things like the America's Cup³, which is the biggest, the most well-known even in the sport. But again, before '87, it wasn't really—it wasn't a professional side of the sport. You didn't get paid to go do the America's Cup. Now the people who are at the top of game and do that well get paid rather handsomely to be involved with projects that are successful in that event.

So all that sort of just started in '87 ,and it took a while, and it's just now really starting to be where people get compensated for what we feel, what we feel is fairly for their skills, and knowledge, and abilities within the sport. So it's been a real trick, you know, to make it work. And I must say that my wife Lisa, who is also an alumnus here, she was very supportive through the whole thing, and the two of us sort of scraped and clawed and somehow held it together to be able to say now that that's what I do, is I race boats, and I go all over the world doing these projects. Steering some boats, doing tactics on others, which is a supportive role to the helmsman, managing projects like the America's Cup, or the Volvo⁴, or Whitbread Around the World races and a number of different project types in between.

I do lot of coaching of Olympic level athletes in the sport. I do teaching and presentations for groups. I have sponsors that hire me to come and do team building talks and, you know, everything from there to endorsements and so forth. So it's a bit of a hodgepodge, but it is, in a more minor way, it is much like being a golf pro or a tennis pro. You've got to be out there on the circuit doing your thing all the time. The more successful you are at the events, the more successful you are in being able to sell your image and the rights to your image and so forth.

LJ: So how did you become interested in sailing in the first place?

³The America's Cup is the oldest international sailing competition. Sailing yachts compete for stewardship of the "Auld Mug": a sterling silver ewer crafted by Garrard & Company in 1848.

⁴Volvo Ocean Race (formerly known as Whitbread Around the World) is a yacht race around the world, held every three years.

EB: Well I learned how to sail when I was nine, and St. Petersburg has a great family sailing, teaching facility downtown that is managed by the St. Petersburg yacht club but the property is owned by the city. So it's open to anybody to walk in and say, I want to be a member of this sailing center and learn how to sail. That facility is still going down here. It's a little different looking that it was, but it's the same deal. And I learned how to sail there when I was nine and just sort of enjoyed it more than baseball, or tennis, or golf, or football, or any of the other things that I'd been exposed to. And I think, perhaps because the control of the vehicle and the complicated nature of the abstract race course that you have with shifting winds and currents and just a lot to think about, it was a really fun thing to do. Rather than just being the strongest, and being able to run the fastest in your sport, you had to be fairly athletic but really think and prepare and plan and deal with different conditions every day. So it was really interesting and fun, and I just grew up enjoying it was lucky enough to be able to keep after it.

LJ: Being at St. Petersburg was a sort of lucky happenstance for you.

EB: Well, you know, I think being born in St. Petersburg was a tremendously lucky thing. I can't—I've been literally to every other major metropolitan area on the planet that's near the water, and I just can't think of one that I'd prefer being in than this one. It's a fantastic place.

LJ: When you were running the, or managing the marina just to the south the campus, did you have any connections or exposure to or with the university? Were they expanding that way at that time?

EB: Well we had—we worked a lot with the university because remember, what I did was worked with the group that built the marina. We built it from not having anything there, and so it's a pretty big structure out there, and it impacted the whole neighborhood. It impacted the harbor and all the neighbors and users of the harbor had to be satisfied and comfortable with how the marina was going to be developed and how it was going to be managed after it was built. So, yeah we worked a lot with the university and had some very friendly, and helpful, and wonderful planning sessions with the university. And we had some heated and excited arguments with them about how to do things. We did a lot—we learned a lot about how other universities that are on the waterfront share their resources with the surrounding communities and ultimately built a facility out there that I'm very proud of, and, I hope that the area really enjoys it.

LJ: How does the university share the facilities and the harbor?

EB: Well, you know there was great concern when we were going to build the marina that there wouldn't be enough room for the research vessels to get in and out and that there might be constriction for other types of sailing and motor vessels that might come in and out of the university. And of course, the university was existing, and they wanted to continue to have the open field that they had experienced in the harbor. But what marina has done is to allow one, more visibility of the university because there's a huge amount of people who enjoy the marina both from here and from out of town, who suddenly see what a cool university we have here. And two, the university activities can be put together with and in conjunction with the things that are going on in the marina. There's an added safety by being able to have more eyes down here looking at the equipment if there's a storm that comes through. There's a safer haven for it. So there's a lot of things that go on that are shared, and we look after—you know everybody that uses the water has to look after each other because the water is much more powerful than any of the rest of us, and we have to be careful with it.

So, but also as the university expanded, the neighborhood had to be developed in a way that was comfortable and proper for the whole community. And I think that the group that I was with, Talcorn Corporation and Florida Progress that made this marina, always had in mind a very high quality facility down there. And I think that by putting it in, it made the whole neighborhood much nicer, which it made it that much easier to envision where the university was going and to purchase all these old properties down here with old decrepit houses on them and get rid of them and put up new buildings. And just make the whole area into a fantastic space.

LJ: So what changes to the harbor do you remember as a result of the university? But the university is right on the harbor, and they have a seawall and they must have been—

EB: Well, right now we're sitting in the library, which is on the northern edge of the harbor. I can very clearly remember, when I was a kid, that there were old wooden, decrepit shacks of buildings sitting here with hideous bunches of junk outside of them, whose backs went to the water and they claimed to be marine businesses. In fact, the entire Bayboro harbor was ringed by these businesses, which—many of which serviced the local fishing and commercial fishing groups and so forth but also the local sailors and boaters. The problem was, it was a very inexpensive area for rents, and the people who inhabited most of these businesses kept them up in a way that was consistent with the inexpensive nature of the surrounding facilities.

It wasn't very nice. Eventually those buildings, many of them got abandoned or condemned by the city and taken over because it was messy. And it was—it is now such a pleasure to see the quality of construction and the fine facilities that are all around the harbor. I am just really excited that it's happened like that because there's a lot of places in world where the junky old harbors are still junky old harbors.

LJ: Now there's not much of that around the harbor. So, they tore those businesses down when they built the library?

EB: Well, as I say the library—I can remember facilities being here and all around where the Dali museum is, where the Harborage is, all of those had private ownership properties that were servicing the waterfront. But they were in pretty bad repair, and slowly they got moved out. But the Army Corps of Engineers, I guess, had the old army barracks next door to us where we ended up going to school for the first years that I was here. While we went to school in those barracks, the new buildings that we're sitting in over here now were beginning to take shape. This library was more modern than that, but the library next door which is now, I guess, the main part of the offices and things like that, that used to be the library when I went here. That stuff was all built while I went to school and literally the first year that I was here, that was all being finished up. And the second year that I was here, it was a comfortable, wonderful place to go and hang out.

LJ: Did the USF sailing team always use the harbor? They use it now for the smaller boats. I don't know.

EB: Well, I think the sailing team, like a lot the Southeastern US universities, started out as a club. And it was really people who just wanted to go sailing and learn how to sail and fool around in boats enjoy themselves. You know and of course when you're on the water, what a wonderful thing to be able to just take a boat out in the afternoon and go for a sail. But it grew from that and now it's a bona fide team that actually has practices on a regular basis and goes and travels to events and hosts events. There have national events hosted here as recently as just this past month. And you know, it's really great to see that level being reached because—for instance, in Northeast and in—out in California, southern California area, the universities for years, and years, and years have been fielding big, solid teams that go and train, just like any other team does at the schools. But for most schools in the Southeast, it's only a recent phenomenon that they've gone away from being clubs and becoming actual varsity teams.

LJ: Do you feel that your general business degree from USF actually helped you in your career? Was it a good choice?

EB: You know, it was. I always knew that business was important for me to understand, and what I did by getting a general degree, a general business degree, was to be able to touch on areas that I would later want to know more about in a lot of different parts of business, everything from statistics, to accounting, to business law. They are all things that I use every day. I've been involved now with two America's Cup teams, one as a

skipper, and when you're running a team like that, you've got incredible legal issues. You've got fantastic team building and processing challenges. You have to work with people from the billionaire status down to, you know, the very most poverty stricken, you know, starving on the street, fledgling sailors. It's an amazing system that you go through. And then you have to go and work with people from different countries. And therefore you get different ways of doing things and different climates of doing business. And you might even be working in a different country, where you have to understand enough about how the world works to wiggle your way through.

On top of that, you need to know how to resource things. What is out there. How can we figure out how to win the America's Cup, how to develop a better piece of equipment than anybody else has and come out on top on a timely schedule and be ready on race day? So yeah, I think a general degree was pretty helpful in getting a touch of many different things rather than focusing in on one particular area that might have left me a bit ignorant on something else. So for me, yeah it was an excellent way to go about getting my education.

LJ: So knowing that you were going to come and do this interview, did you have any stories that came to mind? (LJ and EB laugh) I'm sure something.

EB: Oh. You know, again the university experience here for me was commuter experience. It wasn't a living experience, so that in itself makes the time spent here a little shorter, a little less activity filled.

pause in recording

So yeah, the story wise—I probably don't have any great stories. You know I sat around and listened to a lot of great stories from around here. But really it was, it was a building time when I was here. There wasn't as much opportunity to spend a lot of time on the campus. Honestly, the first year that I was here, we went to school in those buildings to the east of everything that we have here now and it frankly—you didn't want to stay there. So we met friends. We went out for a beer after class or whatever it was, and it just—we had fun but it wasn't a long term sort of a day.

LJ: Do you have any final thoughts about where you'd like to see the university go in the future, or—

EB: Well, I realize that the St. Pete campus is a part of a bigger university which has always been impressive over in Tampa, but I am so excited to see the quality of what this school has done on the St. Petersburg property and to see that they've taken a part of

town that really was derelict and turned it into something that is the highest quality of anywhere around. I'm thrilled to see that. I hope it continues. And I know that we will have more and more great people graduating from the campus down here. And maybe one day the sailing team will be number one.

LJ: I'm sure they will. Well thank you for being here today with me and appreciate your help.

EB: My pleasure. Look forward to coming back.

End of interview