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William M. Brady oral history interview by Milly St. Julien, July 24, 1985

William M. Brady (Interviewee)

Milly St. Julien (Interviewer)

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St. Julien: Today we are talking with Mr. William Brady, the Television Program Manager for WUSF-TV in Tampa and also WFFP in Ft. Myers which is a television service for the University of South Florida. What was your first contact with USF, why did you choose to come here, and could you give us some of your impressions of the University?

Brady: My first contact with the University was in late 1962 when I saw an ad in a broadcast magazine. At that time I was in commercial radio in Illinois. This ad said something about that they needed someone down here to head up a broadcast operation on the University campus. I had been in commercial broadcasting for a great number of years and I was looking for something in the sun as it were. I was a little tired of the rat race. So taking a chance and knowing that I liked Florida based on early visits here on vacation, I contacted the University and was almost instantly contacted by a letter from the then Director of Educational Resources, which was the umbrella organization under which broadcasting functioned. His name was Dr. Gary Ickles. Dr. Ickles was to be the station manager for the new television and radio operations here on this campus. At that time he told me there were about 5 or 6 thousand students on campus and that it had just recently begun operations. It was in fact the newest major university in the country at the time. So he told me that he would be driving through Illinois on a recruiting mission shortly thereafter and would like to talk to me. So we arranged a meeting in the city in which I worked at the time. We met over lunch one day, and we were presumably suitably impressed by each other, and he invited me to come down to be interviewed on campus and to see the University and the community which I
did shortly thereafter. My impressions when I first came down here was that it was a little bit different from my early visits to Florida. I had come down on vacation and was accustomed to the beaches and that kind of thing. I wasn't ready for a larger city and more of the interior of the state. So I thought there were two different worlds in Florida. This is a little different, but it is at least close enough to the beaches and it's warm, so I will consider it. I was offered a position at the time. No stations were in operation. They had planned to open a radio station with TV somewhat in the future. They already had a coordinator for those two jobs on hand and that person had, for one reason or another, decided to leave. Then they decided they would split up the duties between radio and television. So I was asked if I would take over the operation and installation of the new radio station for the University beginning in July of 1963. Another person would do the same thing for television. So I came down in 1963 and, as a matter of fact, it's in the same building, which was the library for the University. There were only a few buildings on campus at the time. There was a lot of scrub oaks and sand dunes. It was almost like being in the Sahara Desert. There were very few trees and few parking lots. They had dormitories, the University Center, the Administration building, the Theater, and a few classroom buildings, but not a large faculty and certainly not a very large student population at the time. There were great promises ahead for the University, and it looked to me as if this would be a growing institution and a growing and prosperous community through the years. So I jumped at the chance because my wife and my daughter all loved Florida anyway and were tired of the winters up north. So we came down in July of that year and began operation then.
St. Julien: Did you remember any of the political activities in the University at that time?

Brady: Yes. One of the first questions that was asked of me on my first interview was, "How politically active are you?" Not quite knowing how to take that I just said that I voted regularly and that sort of thing. The question was really directed at me to find out whether or not I got involved in campus politics or state politics and these kinds of things or whether I was just here to do my job. I heard very quickly about the Johns Committee because it was certainly top news at that time or at least had been prior to my arrival. My assurances were that I didn't get involved in those kinds of things. That is none of my business. I may be interested in how they go about it, but I am not active in those areas. So I guess I was cleared.

St. Julien: How free were you to use political information on your radio program?

Brady: There was really no cause for that. We felt that these kinds of things were the proper role of commercial stations and those which have newscast and editorial activities. In non-commercial broadcasting our primary objective was to be a voice of the University as well as an instructional media for course work and to provide training facilities for students in the broadcast curriculum. It really wasn't our job to get into hard news, nor was it our job to editorialize. As a matter of fact, it was against the law for non-commercial stations funded by federal funds to editorialize. So that really didn't enter into the picture. Once they found out that I was non-political or an apolitical person, then nothing came of it, and I was simply assigned to the job of getting a radio
station on the air and to do that which is typical of non-commercial educational radio stations across the country and other institutions similar to this.

St. Julien: Could you tell us something about the way the broadcasting department was set up?

Brady: Yes. When I came here, as I mentioned earlier, there was a broadcast coordinator. I believe his name was Bob Brown. He had already left before I got here. At the time there was nothing more than studio space and a tiny bit of equipment. All this was radio. There was essentially no television. This institution had set up a division of educational resources somewhat on the model of Ohio State's system in which a division is set up encompassing a lot of smaller services of the the University. They chose to call them "non-book services" and that included audio/visual, graphics, photography, radio, television, cinematography, learning lab, and these kinds of things. Over them all was a director who was, as I mentioned when I came here, Dr. Gary Ickles. It was my job and the job of the television coordinator, who was at that time not Dr. Manny Lukoff, but Manny Lukoff, who came to us from the University of Florida, to set up a radio station or a television station depending upon our area of interest and expertise. I was chosen to head up the radio operation. From that point on, in the middle of July of 1963, we got the radio station on the air by September of that year which meant we had to beg, borrow, and steal equipment. We had to drag students into working on the stations for no pay and in a voluntary capacity. We had few engineers on hand and as I said we had a very tiny little station which was very little more than required to cover the campus itself. We broadcast a rather
short distance off campus, but not a great deal farther than that. People with very sensitive FM radios, I suppose, could pick us up. Our hours of operation were very short and our funding was next to impossible to obtain. I can recall how strange it was to me coming out of the commercial field to find that when I wanted a record, microfilm, or a tape-recorder, I just couldn't go get it. It would take sometimes weeks and months to get things through the normal office procedures of the University and the state. I wasn't accustomed to working for a state government. In many cases people didn't understand what a radio station was suppose to do on campus or what its purpose was. Similarly, later, when the television station began operation and, although television was a more glamorous medium and I think got more attention than radio did, but I can recall occasions when I would want to purchase some record albums for use on the air and would send the proper paper work and receive a call from someone in some other department who had something to do with procurement of those things and would ask me why I wanted albums. My response would be to play on the air. They told me that they had records in the library and I should just go and borrow some. These are kinds of frustrations that are typical of a new institution and certainly one with radio and television, which has not normally been considered part of the academic process, so it takes a lot of people to get accustomed to it.

St. Julien: What was the financial situation? We have asked other people about the competition between Florida State and the University of Florida.

Brady: We were a new institution and we sat very low on the totem pole. In fact it was very difficult to get anybody to even know that we existed. Even in the state of Florida and even among the legislators when you would
mention the University of South Florida they thought it was the University of Tampa. For years this went on. I have always said that prior to just a few years ago the person who held the purse string in our state government were almost to a man or a woman graduates of University of Florida or Florida State University. So it was fairly natural of them to support and fund their alma mater as opposed to that new upstarting one in Tampa or wherever else the University may be in. So it was an alliance shared typically with those prestigious universities and those who have a long history of excellence and a great number of graduates in the legislature and other places of influence around the community. So we struggled very hard. As a matter of fact, I can remember Dr. Ickles telling me that there would not have been a radio or television on this campus had he not campaigned and lobbied very hard for it in both the legislature and with the faculty and administration of the campus.

St. Julien: What kind of support did you get from the administration and the faculty?

Brady: Well, it started out rather strangely. Dr. Ickles was called in to the Department of Administration one day under which the broadcast operation started. It is now under academics. At the time it was under administration. It was typical in a university community near the end of a fiscal year to have somebody say, "What could you do with ten thousand dollars?" Somebody found some extra money that they didn't know they had or had squirreled away somewhere I suppose. But at any rate, the first thing he said was to put up a radio station because he was accustomed to operating under the Ohio State plan where radio was quite active and volatile. So he got his ten thousand dollars and went about trying to
establish a radio station. Of course ten thousand dollars, even in those
days, was certainly not enough to start a radio station, much less a TV
station. It was through that tiny little start and his persistence and
indeed sometimes insistence that television and radio got the beginnings
on this campus.

St. Julien: How did you use the students on the campus in the radio station?

Brady: They were used in a number of ways. We couldn't pay anybody. I was the
staff member. We had a secretary which we shared with everybody else, but
that was about it. We had to depend on student help and without that
budget, the student help, in most cases, had to be voluntary. We would
occasionally get some tiny little bit of funding for other personnel
services which they called OPS. That was small and the requirements for
person hours, in order to keep a radio station operating, were so huge
that even if you did begin to pay them even minimum wage, after a couple
of months the money would run out anyway. So we still wound up with alot
of volunteer effort on the part of the students, and it was done through
ads on bulletin boards, class rooms, and through the school newspaper. A
number of volunteers showed up, some of whom had perhaps minimum
experience in some radio station some place or some who had none. Some
were brand new students that perhaps had done a little work in drama or
had done similar kinds of things with homemade radio stations in their
high schools or something. We had maybe 20 or 30 people who would come in
at various times and take over the duties of the station. They would act
as music librarians, make out the daily logs, they would do the
announcing, the disc jockey work, and newscasts. They did all the kinds
of activities that normally staff members engage in on a radio station.
St. Julien: Did they receive any kind of radio courses or credit?

Brady: Yes. When I first came down here it was the understanding that it would be pretty much on a half-time basis. That is, we would work half time as coordinators of radio and/or television with the other half offered to the Department of Speech under which the broadcast courses were offered at that time. There were a number of courses and the Speech Department had a broadcast faculty person, Dr. Anthony Zates, at the time when I came down here. It so happens, he was on leave on a sabbatical at the time and they needed someone to teach the courses in his absence. So that meant half-time teaching and half-time working in radio or TV. Eventually Dr. Zates came back and so I could devote full-time to the operation of radio and television. Then finally when Dr. Zates left we went back again to the half-time teaching situation. Eventually Dr. Lukoff choose to go into the faculty aspect of it full-time. I continued to teach half time for awhile. When it got to be a little too burdensome, I had to make the choice between full-time one place or full-time in the other.

St. Julien: When you did the news show for the radio station, did you concentrate on campus activities?

Brady: We tried to do as much of that as we could. We had access to a news wire. We had the Associated Press radio news wire for a long time and got that at a very reasonable cost from the Associated Press. So we did world news, local news, national news, whatever happened to come about. We also had a number of reporters on campus who would bring in stories about things going on around campus. So we covered a wider expansive news than
anybody thought was possible at the time considering the lack of personnel and the lack of funding and facilities.

St. Julien: In your position in radio personnel and in working with news, did you notice anything on this campus, among the students or the faculty, of a political nature involving the Vietnam War or any of those periods during the '60s and '70s?

Brady: Yes. There was some of that. I must say that I don't think this campus was as involved as other campuses. It was alot calmer than many of them. There was the '60s syndrome, as I call it, that we all went through and there was alot of activism on campus. Luckily, most of it was non-violent. There were periodic activities going on. There were marches across campus, sit-ins, and demonstrations of one kind or another. Luckily they did not impact the broadcast operation to any great degree. We would occasionally have bomb threats on campus and classrooms and things like that and some buildings would shut down including the one in which the broadcast operations were. Of course they all proved to be unfounded. The students did not really involve broadcasting as they might have been expected to do. In many respects I attribute this to the fact that there were a pretty good number of very responsible students who were working at the stations at the time. I think in some ways that helped insulate broadcasting from these kinds of activities a little bit more. I think the chief effect of the demonstration was more on the administration than it was on any other area and the administration kept busy enough so they really didn't have the time or the inclination to involve broadcasting to any great extent.
St. Julien: What was the relationship between the faculty, staff, and students in the early days of the University? Was it a close relationship being such a small university?

Brady: I am sort of ambivalent about that. It was sort of the best and the worst of both worlds, however you want to look at it. Because it was a small student body and a small faculty, we had a tendency to know everyone. There was almost no one on campus that you couldn't call by his or her first name. That included a lot of students as well. So there was a kind of camaraderie involved. However, things were a lot stricter in those days and there were a lot of restrictions that were placed upon activities and the way one conducted oneself. Sometimes there were restrictions that were assumed more than were written. So in many respects it was kind of a quiet University. We had our share of rowdyism, carrying on as most universities and colleges do. Sometimes because of the closeness and because of the smallness of the institution where everything tended to be centralized, I think there was less of that kind of thing and less radicalism than you might have otherwise expected. Of course this is a fairly conservative community and state. At that time, most of our students came from this area or somewhere close. It was a commuting campus. It always has been a commuting campus. We didn't have a lot of out-of-state students, at least that was my impression. So we kind of got isolated in many respects from the so-called main stream of college life.

St. Julien: Over the years the University has had three different presidents and three interim presidents. How would you explain the difference between each president, and how would you describe their impact on your program?
Brady: Dr. Allen, who was the first president of the University, was very supportive of broadcasting, as supportive as Dr. Allen ever really seemed to be about almost anything. He was a wonderful person and a very nice individual, but he was very quiet and in some cases, almost withdrawn. He was a very formal individual particularly unless you really knew him very well. I think he had definite ideas about what he expected from radio and television. Sometimes I think he was kind of disappointed because it was a little difficult for him to understand the logistics and the dynamics of operating a radio and a television station on a college campus wherein you do not have the facilities and the funding to do a highly professional job and you are forced to rely upon students who are learning and who are not professionals and who are not experts. So standards were sometimes a little higher than we could achieve. He never really quite understood that kind of difference or that dichotomy. The next president who had any real connection with the station was Dr. Mackey who became very involved in the broadcast operation. That is he did not get involved to the extent of dictating program by program content or anything of that nature, but he was very instrumental in getting the color cameras for television. He was very public relations oriented and saw the radio and television operations as an opportunity to put USF on the map and to make it known to the community. He utilized it quite successfully to that end. At the same time, because he realized it was a function of the University and a voice to the community, especially in radio and hardly at all in television, he was very, very critical of the programming. By this time as I said we were in the turbulent '60s and the programming philosophy of radio changed. We had some shake-ups in the operation. We went more to
contemporary types of broadcasting and less to the traditional kinds of radio that had been pretty much the standard on college campuses for fifteen or twenty years. Contemporary radio included the overall title of "underground radio." At least in those times, especially on the campus, it was quite a radical departure from what one expected radio to be. We got lots of publicity. Some was good and some of it was bad, but certainly it was on the forefront of the news and people talked about it. Dr. Mackey was never happy with that and a number of people on the faculty and administration were not happy with that. Students were ecstatic. A number of people in the community were ecstatic about it, and I suppose an equal number hated it. So it was hard to be neutral because it was an almost overnight change in programming to this kind of contemporary activity and you either hated it or you loved it. So for that reason a number of upheavals took place in the operation. Dr. Ickles left and then we had a temporary new director of the division. Dr. Lukoff was appointed to that position and programming began to change. As I said there was alot of internal and external bickering and excitement and in some cases some pretty intemperate words, stories in the newspaper, students protests, all kinds of things went on during this period of time. It was really kind of an upheaval and almost entirely confined to radio. Television did not really get much involved in those kinds of things. Shortly thereafter, radio went back to sort of what it had been before, but as the years went on everything improved. We had better equipment, we got more space, we got more people, we got more funding, and radio eventually evolved into what we have now which is a highly respected and very organized and popular media.
St. Julien: Does Dr. Brown support . . .?

Brady: Dr. Brown has been quietly supportive of the broadcast operations, both in television and in radio. Again, he is an entirely different person than Dr. Mackey, but he has, to my knowledge, been very supportive of the operations as they now are.

St. Julien: Could you give us an example of some of the other radio programming?

Brady: I can only speak up until about the late 1960s, early 1970s, when I was active in radio. From that point on I moved totally into television so I can't really speak with much authority after the late 1960s. This was the period of time, the late '60s and early '70s, when the "underground radio" was the big thing. I must admit that it was not my idea and I did not support the concept. It has always been my idea that if you want that kind of an operation on campus it ought to be student operated and under student agis. My suggestion all along, along with that of several other persons on campus, was that we should set up a closed-circuit or carrier-current radio station on campus and let the students run it any way they see fit and keep this as an operation for the University. That was my contention all along. I did not feel that the change of format was wise. I anticipated that it would create a lot of friction and a lot of trouble. I was prepared to admit that it would get a lot of publicity which it did. We were on the map, and I can't fault anyone for that. I'm still not convinced that entire period was a wise one in terms of what it did for the University because it wound up making enemies, it wound up making people angry, and it didn't accomplish much of anything because while the concept itself may have had some merit in loosening up the approach to radios somewhat, as I predicted, it got out of hand and it got
to the point to where it was almost out of control. It was at this point that I nearly washed my hands of the whole thing. It was somebody else's idea so let them run it. Well about this time Dr. Lukoff became acting director of the division and changes began to be made. The format changed back again pretty much to what it had been before with some exceptions along the way. By that time, I was in television and no longer that closely associated with the operation.

St. Julien: What were some of the programming changes in the contemporary approach?

Brady: There were lots of programs. Instead of the typical concert or classical music as you might expect on college stations, that we nearly eliminated. As a matter of fact, I think there was a period of time when there wasn't any. They went to rock music, to long album cuts, to fast talking DJ's, to guests wandering in and out of the studio at will and getting time on the air to say whatever they wanted to about whatever they wanted to talk about. People with talent of one kind of another coming in being given a half hour to do their thing on the air. There were editorial comments on the Board of Regents. There was underground reports on variations on the news. There was such weird things as public service announcements for Satan cults. These sorts of things were a little off the wall, but it certainly got alot of attention from people.

St. Julien: I'm sure it did, especially with this community.

Brady: Alot of the kids loved it, and I must admit that alot of grown-ups did too because it was fast paced and indeed some of the people who did the work and did the shows were quite talented. I can't take that away from them. They really knew what they were doing.
St. Julien: How would you describe the relationship between the development of the radio programming and television programming in relationship with the University's mission?

Brady: At the beginning I think the goals that were set for the operation were a bit ambitious because they presupposed almost total faculty, staff, and student acceptance. Furthermore, they also presupposed adequate support in terms of money, facilities, equipment, and personnel. The idea was that radio at the outset and television later would become heavily oriented toward direct instruction, that is courses on television and courses on radio. This was demonstratively impossible in radio's case because by this time television had become the glamour media, and you just didn't find many people wanting to sit down for a half hour or any length of time to study via radio, although there was some of that that went on. Television had better luck along this line than did radio. At the beginning it was really a job of selling the campus, that is selling the faculty on the value of utilizing the media for direct instruction. To this day, there are many, many people on this campus and others across the country who scorn broadcasting as an instructional medium. It's less evident today than it was, but it was a real selling job that had to be done. Of course, at the beginning, there were one or two of us that had to do the job. Well, we simply didn't have the time or the opportunity to do that kind of thing properly. We really weren't equipped to do that which is why we now have an Open University Office which is geared precisely to do that kind of thing and full-time and to promote the use of the media and to work out arrangements with the faculty, deans, and vice presidents and all these kinds of things. So while the concept and the
idea had merit, it was a little before its time. It took awhile to develop. Today it's almost in full bloom, and this institution and this television station particularly and this Open University Office are probably if not at the top in the country, certainly in the top four or five in the nation in terms of utilization of television for teaching purposes.

St. Julien: How would you compare USF's program to the University of Florida or Florida State?

Brady: There are lots of differences. The University of Florida, for instance, has a non-commercial television station, just as we do here. But their non-commercial television station does little or no direct instruction on the air. That has come to be the trend across the country that very few television stations do direct instruction. Those who do concentrate primarily at the K-12 level. There are some, such as this one, who concentrate on adult level and college level instruction. At Florida State University, as in many institutions, little or no instruction at all is done for any level. Or if it is done, it is done in an informal manner. That is if you air Sesame Street they consider that to be educational, although it may not be direct instruction. Florida also has an AM radio station, but it is a commercial station. It is one of the few across the country in which a university has a commercial station. There are some. But it operates just like any commercial station. They have sales personnel and the whole business. So for all intent and purposes, it is not really a university-type of radio station. They have a non-commercial FM station, just as we do. You will find that at most universities or colleges. A great number of them have radio stations of
some kind, usually FM. Some few have AM or both. Fewer still have television. The number of those which can be considered even remotely instructional are very few. Much fewer than was anticipated by the early pioneers in the business.

St. Julien: Could you give us a little bit of an idea about community relations with radio and television stations especially in the beginning and the support?

Brady: Again, the promotion was difficult because you can not do promotion without spending money. Our complaint was the lack of money. We had not been successful in increasing our funding for that kind of thing a great deal. To be sure, we do alot more promotion than we did, but we have more to promote now and more funding to do it with. It is still small in terms of the requirements of promotion. Promotion is an expensive proposition. It takes alot of money to promote a medium and we thus far, even today, certainly don't have enough money to do that kind of thing, but we do the best we can with what we have and it has been pretty successful. In this market we have a kind of anomaly. It is a two station market, that is there are two non-commercial television stations in the market. There is WEDU, channel 3, and this station, channel 16. WEDU is a VHS station and this station is a UHF station which automatically gives it (WEDU) a commanding lead. It was one the early stations that was a pioneer in the public television sector and has many years of experience and prestige built behind it as a community station. Many of the citizens of this community grew up with Channel 3 and so they know it. It is kind of like a family. So it is always hard to break in to that kind of situation with a different station and a new station which in some respects carry some of
the same programming. While we try to avoid simulcasting with them, carrying the same program at the same time, we tape delay a lot of things because we have access to the same material. We had to carve out a different niche for ourselves and it is very difficult for people to accept the second station in the market, particularly one that is a UHF as opposed to the more popular VHF. It continues to amaze me. There are still people out there in the audience who do not know the difference between VHF and UHF, who can't tune a UHF, don't know how to get us or whose set is old enough that they can't get us regularly or they get us poorly. Then along comes cable, which will put us on a different channel and that confuses them even more and so it is a constant battle trying to get people to know that you are even there, let alone to support what you are doing.

St. Julien: Could you give us a summary about what you feel have been some of the best or worst trends that have developed in the past 25 years?

Brady: I think among the best trends have been the revitalization of radio into a powerful and a respected medium that it had all the potential for. I think television has increased in power, programming, scope, and in funding. All of these things have been a plus. I would also point to the fact that we are much more accepted on campus than we were before, particularly the instructional aspect of our mission. We sometimes carry as many as fifteen or eighteen courses per term now on television. We operate it as high as 40% of our daily broadcast in direct instruction, which is really what I think educational, non-commercial television is all about. We are known more in the community and are accepted more. We attracted and are continuing to attract more and more dedicated,
qualified, professional staff people to work for us. We have equally
dedicated and professional and easy to work with students. We are
thankfully able to pay them a little more now than we were able to, but it
is still not anywhere near what we ought to be able to do. All in all, I
think we have been recognized for what we really ought to be on campus.
We are a function of the University, but a servant of the community as
well. That is where sometimes we get into a bit of a discussion with
students. Students tend to think of, particularly radio, and in some
cases the television stations, as their own bailiwick. Whereas our
licensing at the outset was designed to serve the communities as opposed
to simply serving campus, student organizations, and students themselves,
particularly in view of the fact that this is a commuting campus. You
don't really have that many people on campus at any one time anyhow,
especially at night. So these are some of the good points I see. Some of
the bad points are expenses, demands, and expectations keep rising and the
where-with-all to make them come about keeps decreasing. That is the bad
aspect of it.

St. Julien: Thank you very much for talking with us today.