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Angie Brewer oral history interview by Andrew Huse, August 26, 2004

Angie Brewer (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Current Position: USF Alumna; Founder of
Angie Brewer & Associates
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Brewer came to USF as a student in 1963.

Background

Ms. Brewer was a student at Brandon High School when USF graduated its very first class. “It just didn’t occur to me to go to school anywhere else ... USF was always my first choice.” She recalls that, growing up in the area, all she and her fellow classmates talked about was going to college at South Florida. Though the campus had only four buildings in those years, she remembers favorably that, “It was such a delight [and] we had a great time.”

Vietnam

Because of the escalating conflict in Vietnam, Ms. Brewer remembers the early sixties at USF as “very unusual times.” Before then, she had never before heard mention of the country, and certainly could not have placed it on a map. While a student at USF, she met a couple of young men one day who had recently returned from the Southeast Asian nation, and were “trying to explain to [them] what it was and where it was.” As the men had explained it to them, they were sent overseas as “agricultural advisers,” but were actually Green Berets in the U.S. Army. “I have to be honest with you,” Ms. Brewer remarks candidly, “I think some of us just thought they were bragging and making up stories to impress the young ladies.” The men went on to explain that they had been providing support and training to the communist-resistance movement in southern Vietnam. “And no, they weren’t training them to plant rice, they were training them to use weapons ... Of course the rest, as they say, is history.” She remembers those years at USF as particularly memorable times in her life. The Vietnam War, Ms. Brewer reflects, “changed the lives of a whole generation.”

Academics

Since the age of fifteen years, Ms. Brewer remembers wanting to be a clinical psychologist; thus, when she began her undergraduate studies at USF, she had a very clear goal of what she wanted to accomplish. By her third trimester of college, she was not particularly pleased with the study of psychology. “No one had told me ... that there’s a lot of the physical body associated with learning psychology,” something which she did

not have a particularly strong stomach for. After speaking with her professor, she decided that perhaps that was not the discipline for her. She then started taking human behavior and organizational study courses, “And I think that’s really what led me to where I am now, because actually I ended up in business.”

Scholarship offer

When Ms. Brewer first began at USF, she was offered a full scholarship if willing to sign a contract agreeing to teach for at least five years after completing her degree. “To be honest with you, at eighteen years old, five years is an eternity,” so she decided to “do it the old fashioned way – to earn it myself.” As a result, while attending classes at USF she worked full time in an office where she learned that she had “an uncanny knack for numbers ... [and] bookkeeping and accounting sorts of things that were very interesting to me.”

Car accident; Move to Bradenton

After completing her first couple of years, Ms. Brewer was resigned to the fact that she was not going to be a psychologist, “but obviously [she] had to do something.” One unfortunate incident in 1965 changed the direction of her life, however, “and this is why it took me nineteen and a half years to complete my bachelor’s degree.” While she and her father were on their way to school one morning, they were both injured in a car accident. Because her father was not able to work at that point, she dropped out of school and went to work, becoming the main provider for her family. Though it took her several attempts to return to the University, she never gave up. “I always knew that I had to have a college degree. It was just something that I had to do.” After going to classes intermittently during the 1970s, she decided to move down to Manatee County and enroll at USF’s Sarasota campus. “It was four years later ... in 1982 ... [that] I finally received my bachelor’s degree.”

Working and studying in Manatee County

While living in Bradenton, Ms. Brewer worked sixty hours per week as the director of grants management for Manatee County while attending classes full time. “I just had to finish. I swore to myself that I would have my bachelor’s degree before I turned forty – which I did.” Encouraged by her husband, she enrolled in the master’s program the following fall. “It was a wonderful program ... It literally changed my life.” After completing her master’s degree, she “officially retired” and established her company, “Angie Brewer and Associates.”

President Kennedy’s assassination

Ms. Brewer remembers very vividly hearing on November 22, 1963, the day before her eighteenth birthday, that President Kennedy had been shot. “I was walking up to [the University Center] ... and people started running.” After asking what was going on, she learned that the president had been assassinated. “We ran – people literally dropped things and ran.” Somehow, the students managed to find a television in the UC which they “all crowded around – and the people who were up front and could see well were calling back to the rest of us ... I was standing in front of that T.V. when Walter Cronkite

said, 'The President is dead.' People fainted, people started sobbing ... it gives me chills to this day."

"Accent on Learning"

Ms. Brewer believes that USF has always attracted students from all over the world partly because of its high academic standards. As much as she loves and supports the new USF football program, she fully understands why the University could not have one in the earlier years. "We were a small, fledgling University, and if they had not focused on the academics, I'm not sure that we would be a Research I University today, and I'm not sure we'd be ranked as high as we are academically."

Fondest memories from USF in the 1960s – John "Knocky" Parker

One of Ms. Brewer's favorite memories of her time at USF in the 1960s was the jazz pianist and university professor John "Knocky" Parker. She remembers that he would have his piano set up out in front of the University Center, where he would sit and play for the passers-by. "Just about as long as we would stay out there and applaud, he would play ... I thought, 'This is the neatest thing in the world.' And he was wonderful."

Registration

Registration on the Tampa campus, she remembers, "was not any fun. You would stand in line ... for literally hours sometimes, get to the front of the line ... only to be told the class is full. Then you'd have to ... start all over again." The process would easily take all day long, "and you would never get all the classes you wanted."

USF Sarasota

Ms. Brewer's experiences at USF were much different after returning to complete her studies in the 1980s, because she had grown personally while the times had changed and the University had evolved. It was her good fortune that most of the courses that she needed to complete her degree were being offered at night on the Sarasota campus, allowing her to continue working full time during the day. Because she was working and raising a family, it was very important for her to finish as quickly as she could." If you pay for it, you appreciate it - much more so than if someone else does."

Evening courses

When she attended night classes at USF Sarasota in 1982, she estimates that the average age of the students was forty-two years.

Professors

Ms. Brewer particularly appreciates those professors who made the drive down from Tampa in order to teach courses at the Sarasota campus. "They made it possible for me to get my bachelor's degree ... That was just a wonderful thing and I appreciate that ... They sure changed my life."

Advantages of being an older student

Ms. Brewer believes that she had an advantage as an older student because she could apply the practical experience of working in the business world to what she was learning

in the classroom. “Not only do you almost know what they are going to say next, you know how to take that knowledge and apply it, and you get a chance to try it out right away ... It does make a difference. It was a great experience for me.”

Supporting USF athletics

As an alumna, Ms. Brewer continues to be very involved with USF athletics. When the University began a football program, she immediately decided that it was something with which she wanted to become involved. “I had no expectations ... I didn’t even have any hopes ... Well, I can tell you – furthest from the truth.” Ms. Brewer has been to almost every single Bulls football game from the very first at old Tampa Stadium. “We knew as soon as we went to the first game ... this is something we just need to get involved in.” She believes that student athletes deserve particular admiration because of the numerous responsibilities they must maintain. “I was pretty busy ... and I know how busy they are. And when you see the dedication ... and the effort they put forth, it’s like, how can you not support this? You have to do something.” Ms. Brewer and her husband travel to every away game, flying on the chartered plane with the football team and their supporters. Over the years they have been involved with the team, they have developed close relationships with the coaches and players. “You can’t do that and not feel that you’re part of something, and we feel that we’re part of a family here.” She believes that athletics have been instrumental in helping to build a community spirit at a largely commuter school. She and her husband are not only supporters of football, but of all the athletic programs at USF. “I want all of [the student athletes] to know that we support all of them.”

Alumni Association

Ms. Brewer believes that the alumni program at USF has become “much more sophisticated” over the past six or seven years, and has developed a very effective outreach program.

Athletic facility

She and her husband were also major supporters and donors of the new athletic facility at USF. She believes that such a facility was necessary in order to advance USF to the next level of collegiate sports. “I am just thrilled ... The coaches and the students deserve it. I mean, goodness gracious, how much are people supposed to do working out of a trailer. That’s not good. I think it’s wonderful.”

USF Week at the Sarasota campus

Ms. Brewer has also continued to support further development at the USF Sarasota campus. In particular, she served as the chairman of USF Week, where she coordinated a week’s worth of activities and events at USF Sarasota and in the surrounding community. This year’s events are in commemoration of the campus’s thirtieth anniversary. “I’ve really had a lot of fun doing it ... it’s been very worthwhile.”

Birthday party at Raymond James Stadium

Ms. Brewer drives a gold-colored Lexus, while her husband drives a green Jaguar, both of which have USF license plates. She celebrated her birthday in 2003 at Raymond James Stadium where her friends, employees, and clients threw her a party during halftime at a Bulls football game. “Happy Birthday Angie” was flashed on the scoreboard, and Lee Roy Selmon and Mike Lewis paid her a special visit to wish her a happy birthday. “That was definitely a highlight for me.”

“Now it’s my turn to be the mentor, and it’s my turn to help them achieve some of what I have achieved. If we all ... reach out our hands ... then what a wonderful society we’ll have ... That’s the bottom line, and that’s what we’re trying to do, and we’re having a blast doing it!”

End of Interview