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Joseph Guidry oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 6, 2004

Joseph Guidry (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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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Arrival at USF

Mr. Guidry came to USF as a student in 1969. He had lived in Tampa his entire life. His sister went to USF. Mr. Guidry most strongly considered the University of Florida because he was interested in going to school for journalism. His parents said that if he went to USF for his first two years then they would help him pay his way through UF after that. The journalism program was better than Mr. Guidry had thought it would be. He had his sights set on UF for a long time and UF had a “good reputation.” But, he liked USF when he arrived and he like he “got a good education” at USF. He also got to work at a local newspaper—the *Tampa Times*, and thought the job was a pretty good one. These things kept him at USF.

Working for Oracle and Tampa Times

He worked for the *Oracle* and the *Tampa Times* while a student.

Oracle

The school didn’t have the trappings of other universities, such as football, but working at the *Oracle* provided a social crowd and a social life. His junior and senior years he worked at the *Times* practically full-time and had to quit the *Oracle*. The *Oracle* was a lot of fun. It was a weekly at the time, although the paper became a daily right after he left. Most of the people he worked with there went on to careers in journalism. They were really hard working. With the Watergate hearings going on people at the paper were interested in pushing the limits. Mr. Guidry now appreciates the patience that the administration had with them. The *Oracle* won a national award when it transferred to a weekly. It was a good paper, a fun place to hang out and Mr. Guidry is proud to have been a part of it.

Tampa Times

Mr. Guidry had a friend whose sister worked for the *Times* and their father recommended that Mr. Guidry go to work for the *Times* because he had been at the *Oracle*. He told them he was interested in a job and they asked him to come for an interview. He was immediately hired as a copy boy. He was very excited to be getting paid, even if it was only minimum wage. He loved being the first one in Tampa to read the news stories.

He continued to work for the *Oracle*, starting at about four in the morning, and then he would go to class. Eventually the *Times* let him work on the wire desk Saturday mornings. He got to write headlines, edit stories and did sports page work on high school football games. There was a job opening for an outdoor sports writer and Mr. Guidry applied and got the job. It was only thirty-eight hours a week, so he didn't get benefits, but he did work there for his last two years of college. In some aspects it took away from his college experience because he was working, but he still spent time with his *Oracle* friends and it was nice to work and go right from graduation to a job. When he graduated, Mr. Guidry kept the job at the *Tampa Times*.

Post-undergraduate work

He came back for a master's degree in English and considered going into academia as a professor.

The Mass Communications Program—professors and their real life career experiences

Most of the professors were former journalists. The head of the department had worked at various newspapers and the *Oracle* advisor had been at *The Tampa Tribune*. Many of the teachers had worked at the *Tribune*, such as Al Hutchinson. The managing editor at the *Tampa Times* also taught classes. This is one of the ways that students knew they were getting information that applied to their future careers. Don Bishop was one of the photo instructors and Steve Yates taught magazine writing. All of the people in the department had a lot of real life experience in the business. Steve Yates also started the weekly Florida magazine in *The Tampa Tribune*, called *Florida Accent*. The staff was really good and had a lot of experience.

They opened Cooper Hall as the Mass Communications building and everyone was very excited by it. The people in the program all knew one another and many of them worked part time at newspapers, so the group was very tight-knit.

Former professors

Mr. Guidry does not believe any of his former professors are still teaching. Manny Lucoff was here for many years but he has since retired. Mr. Guidry was particularly close to Don Bishop and Leo Stalnaker, Jr., who passed away last year, and “was a really good man.”

Mindset of the student body

The students were “in a transition period.” Anti-war sentiment was really coming “to fruition.” There was a feeling of suspiciousness of the establishment in the student body and the *Oracle*. But at the same time it was a commuter school and still fairly traditional. He would say that about twenty-five percent were staunchly anti-war, and the rest were not necessarily for the war but were not dead-set against it either. They did have some protests on campus. There was one where traffic was blocked and many students were arrested. The *Oracle* staff “did not want to be co-opted by the administration.”

The student government was also transitioning from being “pro-administration” to more independent. During Mr. Guidry's time there they elected an anti-war/anti-establishment

SG president. So while they didn't have the protests and rebellion that some other campuses had, they did have some student protests. Members of the 'Chicago Seven' came and spoke on campus and there were many anti-war meetings. It was a "volatile" and "interesting time."

There was never a feeling of hatred for the campus itself, nor was there ever a movement to tear the campus down. USF was probably the most peaceful of all the major Florida universities. There was an FSU activist that they interviewed for the *Oracle* who wished to see the establishment destroyed, but at USF there was no movement to "burn the University down."

Kent State was also a big issue. He remembers going to class that day and there was an anti-war activist who left the room in anger because he didn't feel they should have class. The professor said that anyone who wishes to leave should be allowed to. At the time people were confused as to how to react to the issue. The Veterans Against the War were on campus, but "most people were not a part of that." The most vocal were a part of the minority.

Mr. Guidry remembers the case of a young man who was shot by police when leaving the Collage Bar. He was "running across the street and shot in the back. It was a fairly big deal." A few years prior to that a Tampa Policeman had shot an African-American man in the back, which brought some racial tensions to the surface. As a result the city looked at some policies and engaged in some "self-scrutiny." The Tampa Police were "definitely not" very "well regarded." The Police Chief, Jack Prehle, was "universally respected by even the anti-war people" because he was a "fair" man.

Blacks on campus

USF did not have as much of a black liberation movement as it "probably should have" had. At that time there was one member of the administration, Troy Collier, who was the first black administrator. Now the lack of representation has "changed for the better; it's a much more diverse university." It was a different world back then and "not necessarily for the better in all respects." Mr. Guidry remembers the issue of an Afro-Studies program being discussed. It may have been implemented by the time he arrived, but these issues were drowned out by the anti-war sentiment.

Desire to do investigative reporting

They had some older students on the *Oracle*, including editor Grant Donaldson who worked for the *St. Petersburg Independent*. Another older student had a lot of experience at the *Tribune* and the *St. Petersburg Times*. So they had some older students who encouraged investigative reporting and knew "what good journalism was." This was also at a time when universities were used to making decisions without much scrutiny. Administrations didn't care very much for public and student input. The reporters looked into everything from hiring and firing to food services. It was "an interesting, fun time." There was also tension between the student reporters, their advisors and the departments. Many of the advisors did not want to offend the administration, but they also did not want to undermine the students' rights.

Was there censorship of reporters?

During one occasion *Oracle* reporters walked off the job because they had a cartoon censored. This happened right before Mr. Guidry started at the paper. He doesn't recall any points of contention or possible censorship. People liked the paper's advisor (Leo Stalnaker Jr.) and understood from where he was coming. There were things he disagreed with or didn't want to do, but everything tended to get worked out. The older people on the staff were able to handle things more maturely than the younger people. This probably alleviated many potential differences.

The atmosphere in the offices

People came in between classes and hung out. They might work on stories or just socialize. There was a lot of dating amongst the people who worked there and they had a lot of parties. Everything was "a lot of fun, very loose." It wasn't as professional as a regular work place.

Cecil Mackey

"The impression at the *Oracle* office [was] that he was very secretive and not open." Mr. Guidry is not sure if that is a fair interpretation, and President Mackey went on to a very distinguished career at Michigan State, but that was the impression they got of him. Mr. Guidry feels that Mackey helped the University in terms of growth and potential for future growth, but the feeling around the *Oracle* office was that "he was not particularly pro-student" and "wasn't accessible to students." This may have been a result of the feeling among young people at the time.

Mr. Guidry worked closely with Joe Howell, Vice President of Student Affairs. Howell was very "open" and accessible with the students. He left to become a university president. Carl Riggs came to the campus around this time. He was unapproachable, but respected. This image was not good for the relationship between students and administration. Mackey's arrival was supposed to be a "breath of fresh air." He was relatively young and a hot-air balloonist. Mr. Guidry feels that students felt he was "aloof" and "remote."

There was a time when Mackey wanted the *Oracle* to be moved off campus. There was a certain "authoritarian bent" to Mackey's involvement with students and at the time students were less receptive to administrative control than students had been in the past. Mackey was probably working under the assumptions of the old model of university administration where students had no voice, but at the time students were discovering their voice. Mr. Guidry would like to reiterate that USF was "fairly mild" compared to other campuses around the country.

They changed the radio station from the "Underground Railroad," which was a rock format to another format, which caused even more problems between the administration and students.

The end of newspapers

It was interesting to see which professors kept up with the new developments because Mr. Guidry could go from working at a newspaper to classes about newspaper writing. At the time newspapers were changing from typewriters to electric typewriters and then to computers. Many people wondered whether newspapers were going to die. Some thought people would get their news exclusively from cable television or the Internet. Many believed that eventually the paper form of newspaper would die, but this won't happen until the other outlets have the form of availability and low cost a regular printed newspaper has.

Lessons learned and influential people from time at USF

One professor who affected Mr. Guidry was Kenneth Kay, a retired Air Force Colonel. He was a "terrific writer and a terrific teacher." He would challenge the students and be extremely critical of their work, but he always encouraged students as well. Mr. Guidry stayed in contact with him until Mr. Kay's death. He was a "tremendous influence" on Mr. Guidry's life and career. Many people at the *Oracle* helped him learn the importance of calling both sides of a story no matter how unpleasant it may be. He also learned to be prepared, not waste people's time, and remember the importance of a follow-up. You can't be afraid that your question might be stupid. The story is what's important, not yourself.

What drew him back to the MA Program?

Mr. Guidry had always enjoyed English and literature and he thought he might like to get into academics. He enjoyed working at the *Times*, but it was a small paper and the transition to working at the *Tribune* would have been very difficult. St. Petersburg was an option but he didn't want to move his family, so Mr. Guidry decided that at the very least he would do the program, improve his writing and continue working in the newspaper industry. He really enjoyed the work and had a different attitude because he was working full-time. He had less patience for unprepared professors, but luckily there were few of these.

The program was different because it was unlike what he worked with every day. He studied Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. These writings were very unrelated to his work at the newspaper, but it was still associated with writing so it was a good experience.

Mr. Guidry did start work on his Ph.D. at USF. He took one class but the professor babbled about something irrelevant to the coursework so he pulled out of the class.

Adjunct instructor

He did some adjunct instructing at Eckerd College, the University of Tampa and Saint Leo University. He didn't feel that he was "particularly gifted" at instructing, although it might have been because of the demands of working two jobs.

Working for The Tampa Tribune

While doing this instructing work, the *Times* folded and he moved to *The Tampa Tribune*. This really helped his career and he was eventually promoted. He decided to stick with news rather than academics.

Did he ever feel overwhelmed?

You always feel that way at times. Mr. Guidry still feels that way sometimes now. The newspaper business is always open for improvement. The time constraints are pretty tight and everything can be improved. He was never really into the business aspect of it, but liked to write. As a shy person it was difficult to do some of the phone calls and ask some of the questions, but as an editorial writer, you need to set up context where you are comfortable with the people to whom you are talking.

Alternative papers at USF

Mr. Guidry vaguely remembers some alternative papers at USF. There was so much counter culture stuff going on in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mr. Guidry feels that he was probably like many other students: he leaned towards the radical stuff but didn't want to do anything to make his parents "disown" him. He sympathized but did not "take that leap into that lifestyle." The *Oracle* may have been confrontational, but they were still establishment and in the mainstream.

Graduation

Graduating "felt good," but it wasn't quite the "life changing event it would have been" if he was moving on to do something else. He had been working at the *Tampa Times* and planned on continuing to do that. He did it more for his family than himself. He had gone fishing the day before at Fr. Pierce with Grant Donaldson. On Saturday they fished all day and night and drove back for graduation on Sunday. Graduation was nice, and Mr. Guidry is pretty sure that Sam Gibbons was the speaker.

Family and college

His family "valued education" but neither of his parents had gone to college. He doesn't recall anyone he is directly related to who went to college, although his uncle had gone to college and was a teacher. His father never finished high school. His father grew up in Louisiana; he was very smart, well read, and good at math. He father worked for a drug company selling drugs. His mother went to business school and ran an office, but the expectation was there for everyone to go to school. His sister (two years older) graduated from USF with a teaching degree and she still teaches. Most of his cousins went to college, although not all finished.

Going to USF versus UF

The close proximity of the campus made affordability much easier. He may have been able to save up some money and gone to UF.

Despite the great experience he had at USF, Mr. Guidry sometimes wishes that he had the experience with the football team and the attachment to other schools such as UF. He is

proud of the education he received, but USF at the time didn't have some of the trappings that other schools had which creates loyalty to the school.

Meeting his wife

Of course he never would have met his wife if he hadn't gone to USF. He met his wife in a mass communications class and they got along well. He graduated before her. When she was about to graduate she called to tell him she was going to work at *The Tampa Tribune* and he asked her out. She worked at the *Oracle* and she may have been the first female sports editor. Her name at the time was Lenora Lake.

Don Sullivan and separate campuses

He has written a lot about the campus as an editorial writer, especially when the school was under attack by Don Sullivan. Sullivan was a state senator at the time. Now he is a State Representative. Sullivan did a lot of good things related to education. He thought that Sullivan was engaging in bad policy. He wanted to break up the campuses and create new campuses out of St. Petersburg and Sarasota. He really seemed to want to attack the Tampa campus and being from Pinellas, he thought they were not paying enough attention to the Pinellas campus. The move was stopped, but they set up a "semi-autonomous structure" in St. Petersburg, which may not be the best solution, but it was the best considering the available alternatives.

Final Thoughts

Mr. Guidry has made a lot of friends that he has stayed close with including Grant Donladson and Ben Waksman (who was best man at Mr. Guidry's wedding). Many of the people who worked there have had distinguished careers, working for the city of Tampa, the *LA Times*, and the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center.

Advice to people looking to get into journalism

"Get clips," work for the college paper, and demonstrate that you can write well. Do whatever is necessary to get a foot in the door, no matter how far up the ladder the position is. You need to "show people you can write and show people you have desire." This is the best way to get move up because with this motivation and starting point you'll find a job.

End of Interview