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Harry Haigley oral history interview by Danielle Riley, April 27, 2004

Harry Haigley (Interviewee)

Danielle E. Riley (Interviewer)

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

Narrator: Harry Haigley
Current Position: USF Alumnus

Interviewer: Danielle E. Riley
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Haigley came to USF as a student in 1965. He served as the first editor for the USF Oracle.

Air Force

Mr. Haigley is a native Floridian. Immediately following his high-school graduation, he joined the Air Force, where he became a part of the USAF's Strategic Air Command, based out of Mississippi. Though he volunteered for duty in Vietnam on three occasions, he recalls, "They didn't take me. They didn't need me then."

USAF Newspaper editor

While in the Air Force, he served as the editor for a base newspaper for about a year. "We did everything – photography, layout, advertising. Every single piece of the newspaper we got involved in." Though he first got involved as a photographer, he soon began writing articles for them, working his way up to the position of editor.

College

He recalls that it was about two years into the Air Force that he began to think about his education and plans for the future. Not only was Mr. Haigley the first in his family to attend college, he jokes that he was quite possibly the very first person he ever knew who went. "It seemed like a good idea, so I applied all over the state ... got accepted here [at USF]."

First impressions of USF

"USF was ... unfinished ... everywhere you [now] see trees and plants it was just empty lot ... you could literally look for a quarter of a mile and not see anything." He remembers that USF was very much a commuter school at that time, perhaps as high as sixty to seventy percent of students lived at home as he did. "By a large measure the school was empty at 5:00 [pm]." Mr. Haigley feels that because the campus was so isolated and desolate, his experiences at USF more closely resembled that of a job than an authentic college.

Academics

Though his passion was journalism, Mr. Haigley decided to go into pre-law, which was housed in the Political Science department. “It was just a place where I showed up, got grades, [and] went home.”

USF Oracle

Because he was already experienced in working on a newspaper, Mr. Haigley naturally found a home at the USF *Oracle*, where he was made the editor. Because of his military history, he recalls, “I was a safe choice, because that was a time of radicalism on campuses ... they thought I’d be a pretty good choice.” Initially, USF administrators were particularly concerned about turning over the operation of a newspaper entirely to a young and relatively inexperienced staff of students. “They really looked over our shoulder a lot in the early years. We had no censorship ... but everything we put in the paper was read first by faculty advisors [who were] benign and helpful.”

Content of the Oracle

A lot of the initial decisions concerning the content and approach of the newspaper were made by Haigley and his staff, such as the inclusion of fraternities and sororities, intramural sports, and extensive coverage of student government activities. “Those were all deliberate decisions. We didn’t have to do any of that. We could have covered a zillion other things ... we deliberately chose areas of coverage that continue today, so I’m somewhat pleased with that.” At the time of its inception, the *Oracle* was published on a weekly basis.

Income

Mr. Haigley was paid ninety cents per hour in his position as the editor of the *Oracle*, a twenty-hour per week job that required forty hours of work. He also served as a police reporter for the Tampa Tribune on Friday and Saturday nights, which paid \$25 for the weekend. On top of that, he was also earning an income as a military veteran. “So I was earning more money than some kids I knew that were working full-time. So I did well.”

Typical day on campus

Typically, he would be on campus by 8:00 in the morning, and would leave by 5:30 in the evening. Often times, he would have to take a couple of hours off during the day to attend classes.

Oracle staff

The staff consisted of ten to fifteen paid students, though he often relied upon stories from journalism students who would work with the *Oracle* as part of their class requirements. He believes that because of the high quality and dedication of staff members, the paper “became a very good breeding ground for professional journalists.” “The journalism department trained people in the theory of journalism, but the *Oracle* practiced it, and as a consequence a lot of those people went on to very good jobs.”

News coverage

Despite the radical atmosphere of American society at the time, Mr. Haigley and his staff made a conscious decision to cover events specific to USF, focusing on the campus, students, and faculty. “This was not a radical campus at that time ... it was hard to get people together here.”

Accent on learning

Though the typical unifying element at universities is athletics, John Allen’s emphasis on learning stressed more academic and intellectual pursuits. “I don’t even remember t-shirts or hats or anything with logos on it in that era. There was some school pride but not a lot ... Presumably, it took a different type of student to be here, and they deliberately sought out those students.”

Campus activities

Outside of the classroom, there would be debates, provocative plays, lectures, and university-sponsored events like poetry readings and musical activities. As a result of the “code of journalism” and an emphasis on objectivity, Mr. Haigley did not participate in such events in order that he may better report them. “As a consequence, all of the people on the staff maintained independence from the University and from all of the events. We attended, but we usually didn’t participate.”

Vision for the paper

Because he was empowered to hire everyone on his staff, Mr. Haigley looked for people who were “extremely dedicated,” and shared his vision for a successful newspaper. “We produced a darn good newspaper, and by accident won two awards.”

Location of offices

At the time, the offices of the *Oracle* were housed on the second floor of the University Center. The newspaper included color pictures, and was printed by the St. Petersburg Times. Typically, the weekly issue would be completed by Wednesday night and circulated on Fridays, though the color pictures had to be done a week in advance.

Tenure at USF

Mr. Haigley recalls that because of his previous experience, running the USF *Oracle* was “not really difficult at all ... it was just a matter of getting good people in place ... somehow we attracted a darn good staff, and they really didn’t need much help from me.” He served as the editor during his two and a half year tenure at South Florida, and he graduated from the University in 1967.

After graduation

Academically, he recalls, “It was just a matter of getting through it. I didn’t really put a lot of energy into it – grades reflected that. I always knew I was going to be a journalist, and the *Oracle* was my means of doing that. As a consequence, when I was hired by the *St. Pete Times*, they didn’t care what my degree was in.” In fact, he was hired by the *Times* immediately following his graduation from USF. He first started working in

Sports, “Which I hated – I was terrible at [it] ... I ended up in literally every beat in the newspaper ... I ended up doing investigative work. That’s what I enjoy the most.”

Investigative reporter at the St. Pete Times

As an investigative reporter, he started a column called “Consummerism,” with the intention of “expos[ing] deliberate lies made by corporations ... Ralph Nader led the pack on that, but I was probably the first consumer reporter in the southeast U.S., possibly the whole eastern seaboard.” At the time, he and his colleagues focused on advertising, testing the premises upon which corporations promoted their products and merchandise.

While he worked at the *St. Pete Times*, he remembers that the staff was very young, “Which reflected the era of the times. We were a fairly liberal group then – all Democrats. I’m sure they’re all Republicans now.”

Careers

After working at the *St. Pete Times*, he left to join the *Miami News*, where he worked for two years. From there, he went to work in the corporate relations department at Allstate Insurance Company, then on to Arthur Anderson where he worked while earning credits toward his M.B.A at the University of Chicago.

Connection to USF

His connection to USF throughout the years wore “pretty thin” as he stayed busy with career and family, while traveling throughout the country. He moved back into the area sixteen years ago, and regrets not having spent more time at the University.

When asked what his impression of the campus is now, he jokingly remarks, “It’s a lot greener! There was so much ... raw shell where now there’s grass. It’s much more of a college atmosphere now.”

For the longest time, when he told people that he was a graduate of USF, “Nobody knew where it was ... and obviously they thought it was in south Florida, so I had to explain that ... but, over time, people started recognizing it ... over the last ten or fifteen years.”

Memorable experiences

He believes editing the *Oracle* was his most memorable and significant experience at USF. “We started the newspaper, and as a consequence we reset everything to zero, and reexamined all of the decisions, and I think made some good ones. A lot of them are still in place.” He was delighted to see upon his recent return to the campus that a passion still exists among staff members at the *Oracle* for their work. “They’re very impatient for people that don’t share that passion ... The people that are here are very dedicated to what they’re doing. I was impressed.”

End of Interview