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Pat Holley oral history interview by Danielle E. Riley, March 18, 2004

Patricia Holley (Interviewee)

Danielle E. Riley (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Background

Ms. Holley grew up in up-state New York, and moved first to California before finally settling in San Antonio, Florida, where she decided to attend Pasco-Hernando Community College. After earning her Associate of Arts degree, she transferred to the University of South Florida.

Decision to attend USF

“I think, really, the attraction was location more than anything, because it was close by where I lived. I didn’t have to move anywhere; the commute wasn’t really bad ... so it just made sense. To be honest with you, I didn’t know a whole lot about USF up until then, and I think the university still was kind of low-profile at that point.”

Academics

Ms. Holley “wasn’t really sure” what she wanted to major in at the time of her transfer to USF, though she had “always enjoyed mass communications.” When she began at USF, the mass communications program was only just getting off the ground. “What was great about it was that they set up internships for us so we were able to go out and really get some valuable work locally at some of the commercial affiliates ... We really got some real world experience quickly.”

Impressions of USF

She recalls her initial impression of the USF campus was “pretty overwhelming” and more crowded than she was accustomed to. Despite the difficulties of registration, Ms. Holley was always able to get into those classes that she desired.

Influential professors

Ms. Holley “really enjoyed” all of her classes as a student at USF. One professor served as an informal mentor for her in the mass communications program. “He had the hardest classes ... He was the toughest professor ... but I enjoyed him because I learned the most from him.” Another instructor, Navita James, was also particularly influential to Ms. Holley because she was one of the few women in a male-dominated industry. “Women

were still ... breaking into it a little bit ... So it was kind of nice to see a woman who was excelling within the academic institution in that area ... it kind of spurred me on.”

Extracurricular activities

Being a commuter student, Ms. Holley really was not active in any extracurricular activities at USF. “At that point, there really weren’t a lot of students living on campus ... of course at that time ... we didn’t really have a lot to draw students to stay on campus.”

Socializing on campus

Often times, students would congregate at “The Keg,” located in the basement of the Marshall Center at USF. “I met some of my closest friends that I’ve kept in contact with ... in that environment, just being able to kind of unwind after classes and go and listen to music. It was really nice.”

Commuting

Because she did commute from San Antonio, she would usually arrive at USF fairly early in the morning, when parking wasn’t a problem, and stay most of the day. “I kind of knew my window of opportunity. If I got here past a certain hour, I knew I was going to have a hard time finding a space, so I’d consciously try to get up early and get here.”

Work

Ms. Holley also worked while she was attending classes at USF. She worked mainly in the “University Collection” area and around the University Square Mall. Because she had been familiarized with wine while living in California, she was able to procure a position at “a little wine boutique” in the area. “So it was kind of neat ... I learned about how to display products – which really kind of helped in what I ended up doing in television, and gave me a little better eye when I was looking at sets and that kind of thing ... It did all kind of come together as a life experience.”

Internships

Through the university, Ms. Holley also worked as an intern at Channel 28 in Tampa, “Basically when they were still kind of a ‘mom and pop’ television station ... so they were really tiny.” After a day of classes, and a part time job, Ms. Holley would work the night shift at the television station. “It was a really good experience, and because it was a small organization, I got exposed to a lot more than I think I would have otherwise.” She also worked at Channel 44 for a semester on a program called “PM Magazine.”

Mass communications

“I think the main thing that drew me was that I really enjoyed technology, and ... I’m a real hands-on person ... I love the creativity that’s involved with it ... It’s a really good creative outlet, and also a physical outlet ... it can [also] be a real trying type of position ... All of that kind of just wrapped-up into a perfect type of profession for me.”

Graduation

Ms. Holley graduated from USF with her degree in mass communications in 1984. “It was big, and it was fun, because at that point in my major there had been a real core

group of people that kind of moved through the program together, so we had a pretty tight group.”

After graduation

After graduation, Ms. Holley remembers that she “really didn’t” have a plan. “In the industry ... it’s really tough to break in ... so it really has to do with timing.” Just a week before her graduation, she heard of a position opening at WUSF Television and decided to apply. After looking over her resume, Bill Brady, then program manager, asked, “When do you want to start?” After thinking about it for some time and investigating the station, Ms. Holley decided that it would be a “good place to start.”

WUSF

“I don’t really think that I fully realized the impact of it until I got in there, and then I realized that I really made a great move.” Though she was pleased, Ms. Holley viewed the job as more of a temporary position that would give her the additional experiences to springboard her onto a larger market with a commercial station. “It wasn’t a ‘wow’ factor until I got in there, and as I went through the station I realized what a great move it was for me.”

Impressions of WUSF

At the time, the WUSF television station was “really tiny,” Holley recalls. “I remember walking in and I said, ‘Wow, there’s a lot that can be done here.’ I mean, it was really at its very beginning ... But, there was a really small, devoted staff who had been there for quite some time. And we did a lot of programming that benefited the university.”

Initial responsibilities at WUSF

Ms. Holley was hired on at WUSF in the “traffic area” where she coordinated a programming grid and schedule for the stations. “It was interesting ... [it] is not a real glamorous part of the station by any means ... However, it’s really where the rubber hits the road, basically, and it’s something that’s really valuable for anybody ... to know.”

Modest size of the station

Because of its size, Ms. Holley does not believe that the community really acknowledged the station at that time. “It really did truly look like a little college station, it didn’t really look like what it really was ... It wasn’t anyone’s fault, other than we just had a very tiny staff trying to do a lot.” Additionally, WUSF was often overshadowed by the presence of a primary public broadcasting station, WEDU, in the same market. “But we’ve had a devout audience for a long time.” Ms. Holley recalls that, “For me ... it was probably the best thing that could have happened ... I learned a lot ... it was a good experience.”

Turning point for WUSF

A turning point for the station was when a full staff was hired at the Sarasota broadcasting location, and Holley and her colleagues in Tampa no longer had to manage and coordinate two stations. As a result, she felt that they were able to focus exclusively on WUSF promotions and programming, “and it showed.” “I would say it was like a total rebirth of the station.”

Her job progression at WUSF

Personally, Ms. Holley made “some really quick moves” at the station. After working in the traffic area, she moved into operations where she worked for about a year and a half. Then, she took a position in the on-air promotions area. “That was really where I wanted to be, because that was involved with production. It was ... an opportunity to at least be a little bit creative, which I really hadn’t had up to that point.” With a renewed effort on programming, Holley recalls that the station’s audience continued to grow. Her next position was in underwriting, where she worked for a couple of years. “It kind of naturally grew into the membership area ... where the production, and promotion, and underwriting background kind of made sense.” Her position then evolved into that of the creative services director for the station. Her next step was to station manager at WUSF.

Programming

Though WUSF continues to broadcast college telecourses, their programming overall is much more generalized and intended for a wider audience. The station, however, continues to be “very valuable” for USF students who gain experience in broadcasting through internships.

Station changes

The station has only recently made a move from the basement of the Student Services building to their very own facility at USF, where they have much more sophisticated equipment and resources at their disposal. “When we moved into the ... new building, it was kind of like, ‘This is what we were fighting for all along.’ So you have to step up and really do something good with them.” Instead of continuing to rely on students to fill positions at the station, they decided that the station “really needed to start getting some professional people ... But we did keep students in some of our other areas ... because it was still a good experience for them, and there were a lot of support roles that they could really play well ... So we started ... bringing people in that would be able to really kind of take us to the next level.”

WUSF’s relationship with Mass Communications

The station’s relationship with the mass communications department continues to be a very good one, and WUSF has “always tried” to recruit from the program at USF. “We’ve also had really good luck with fine arts as well, mainly because a lot of their students are trained in the theatre ... Because I come from mass comm., I’ve always had kind of an affinity with it, and I always try to encourage relations with them.”

ESPN Regional

On one occasion, shortly after the University got a football team, ESPN Regional approached WUSF about doing the coaches’ shows for both basketball and football. “We actually struck a deal with them, and got them to come in, and we started producing out of our studios ... ESPN is still with us today – we are still producing the ... shows.”

Campus improvements

Ms. Holley feels that the recent construction projects on campus have really improved the university environment a great deal, in addition to increased on-campus housing available to students. “What they’re doing now, I mean, all the residence halls that are here, I think that’s great. Because that does get students here, and it makes it possible to do a lot of the activities that really weren’t available when I was in school.”

Academic advancements at USF

“Probably one of the most impressive [improvements] on the academic level was the Research I designation ... because that was what really, I think, raised us up to a national level of recognition ... Speaking from the station’s standpoint, I see that as a pivotal moment, because that gives us an opportunity on a lot of different levels.”

End of Interview