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Walter Price, Jr oral history interview by Mark I. Greenberg, October 27, 2003

Walter Price Jr. (Interviewee)

Mark I. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Price is one of the two original "Green and Gold Guys."

Year of arrival

He came to USF in 1999 as a student.

Where did Mr. Price grow up?

He grew up in a town called Tavares, which is north of Orlando. It has a population of about 7,000.

Mr. Price's involvement with sports

In high school he was a swimmer, and competed on the state level. He played baseball for thirteen years, including being on the high school varsity team. He played soccer as well at his high school. He was involved in other extracurricular activities.

Promoting athletics

He played the bass drum in his high school band. They played beats to get the crowd pepped up. "That was the beginning taste of what I really enjoyed about football." For homecoming and pep rallies, he always dressed up, painted his body, and "died" his hair. "I have always had that spirited, athletic craziness all my life I guess."

Mr. Price as a child

He says his parents tell him he was always doing crazy stuff as a child, always looking to make someone laugh.

Planning his post-high school years

He looked at Florida State University because his whole family graduated from there. He also looked at USF because it was a closer school to his house. It was far enough away that if he does not have the time to go home he cannot, but if really needs to, he can. Also, his uncle went to USF, as did his father for two years, before he transferred to FSU.

“I had some familiarity with the school itself. Plus USF had just started a football team, and it was starting to look pretty fresh.”

Did the fact that USF had just begun a football program play a role in Price’s decision to come to USF?

He says it did not play a huge role in the fact that people look to institutions first for education purposes. “It always helps though when a university has a big athletic department, not just in football, but in other sports as well. You want your school to be known. I really didn’t want to go to a college that didn’t have too much of a sport background. It is something to do on the weekends. It is fun to support your school.”

The graduating class from Mr. Price’s high school

He graduated with about 200 other seniors. Where he is from, most people, after graduating, go right into the working world. He says out of the 200 that graduated, about fifty went on to college. He believes about ten to twelve of the fifty graduates came to USF. Out of those fifty he says probably about half actually stayed in and graduated from college.

First impressions of USF in 1999

He lived in Gamma at the time. It was right before they renovated it. “It was a totally different feeling because of all the people. But, I had been to band camps and soccer camps, so I was already used to sharing rooms and bathrooms. But, fifty people sharing one bathroom is kind of crazy. I was intimidated in a way about the size of the campus. At first I was a little scared driving here, and trying to find everything.” He didn’t get the full picture until the fall semester, when he realized there was 30,000 plus students on campus. He realized he was a number.

Impersonal aspects of USF and his father’s advice leads to Mr. Price’s decision to show his school spirit in a different way

In high school he was very popular. He was friends with everyone. When he came to college his father said get an education, meet as many people as you can, and leave being known. He looked for that when he came to USF. He realized in the beginning that everything was a student’s social security number, which he did not like. He felt less like a person and more like a statistic. He says that now USF has 41,000 students, so in most aspects students are just a number unless they are a pretty good athlete or are known in another way.

What did Mr. Price want to study at USF?

He came to study medicine. He wanted to be a pediatrician. But, when he went to a meeting about what it took to go through medical school, he decided it was not for him. “They were saying that if even if you go to school for thirteen years and pass all the tests, there still might not be a position for you. I didn’t want to take that chance of being in debt, and possibly missing out on something.” He changed his major numerous times, to political science, marketing, computers, and mass communications. He will graduate with two degrees in communications. One is interpersonal communications and the other one is public and culture communications.

How the “Green and Gold Guys” got started

His family has season tickets to the FSU games. He went to FSU games many times where he saw two guys—the “Garnett and Gold Guys.” They painted their bodies in complete garnet and gold, wore towels, and went up and down the stands to start noise and get the fans involved. “It looked like it was a lot of fun.” When he came to USF in 1999 there was a mix-up in who was supposed to be Mr. Price’s roommate. Brian Hope ended up as his roommate. He is exactly the same kind of person that Mr. Price is. Mr. Price asked him if he wanted to go to FSU to check out the “Garnett and Gold Guys.” In the fall of 1999 they went to a football game and approached the two guys. Mr. Price told them that he did not want to steal their image or be copycats. The guys told Mr. Price and Mr. Hope that they want people to be like them. The “Garnett and Gold Guys” want to get every university to have some guys like them.

Walter Price and Brian Hope officially start a new USF tradition: the “Green and Gold Guys”

Mr. Price and Mr. Hope came back to USF and painted half their bodies green and the other half gold, and wore towels. Mr. Price and Mr. Hope went to their first football game as college students and USF’s first game for the 1999 season as the “Green and Gold Guys.”

Mr. Price describes his first tailgating adventure as a college student

It was almost about to rain. Mr. Price and Mr. Hope tried to tailgate since it was their first football game as college students. Mr. Price’s friend from his high school was there. They had a propane tank, but it was up too high, and they went to light it and the lid blew up. Commenting on the tailgating adventure, which occurred before he even entered the stadium as one of the “Green and Gold Guys,” Mr. Price says, “That was how it started. It was fun.”

In the fall of 1999, Mr. Price and Mr. Hope enter stadium for the first time as the “Green and Gold Guys”

Mr. Price and Mr. Hope waited until everyone went inside Raymond James. They missed the whole first quarter and half of the second painting their bodies and getting in costume. They went up and down the stairs and got chants going, such as “defense” and “offense.” “It was a big rush at the time. It was a lot of fun.”

The first reaction of fans in stadium

When they entered the stadium they received a 50-50 reaction. Some people called them names and made fun of them, and others said, “This is the coolest thing ever.” Those reactions kept their spirits up.

The “hazards” of body paint

They paint with body paint. Although the green paint says stay away from the eyes, and the yellow paint says stay away from the lips, for every football and basketball game Mr. Price and Mr. Hope insisted on going all-out with the body paint.

How long were they the “Green and Gold Guys?”

They did this for four years. Mr. Hope graduated in May of 2003, and Mr. Price is still going to school. (Graduating in December of 2003 possibly). They passed the tradition down because USF wanted them to. They handed the reigns over to two new guys.

Commitment of the “Green and Gold Guys”

For four years and for every home football and basketball game they painted their bodies. They did not miss one single home game. They actually did some of the away games, such as Cincinnati versus USF for basketball, and Oklahoma Sooners versus USF for football. They also painted their bodies for other events, such as alumni events and homecoming parades.

How much have the “Green and Gold Guys” spent on costume supplies?

In the four years that they painted their bodies they spent four or five thousand dollars on paint and towels.

Important people, including President Genshaft, become aware of the “Green and Gold Guys”

He says during the fourth football game alumni came up to them wanting to get their numbers and talk to them. By their junior year they were pretty familiar with President Genshaft on a personal level. She knows who they are. “When we were painted up she always came up to us to see how we were doing and to tell us to keep it up. She was always very nice to us.” He says all of the administration knew who they were, and a lot of deans from other schools knew about them as well. Leroy Selmon was also very familiar with Mr. Hope and Mr. Price. They are known in other states and have even been on ESPN SportsCenter.

The guys have their pictures taken often

“I’m sure we are in every photo album in half of the homes in Tampa.” He says there were some games where they didn’t even see the football game because people continuously took their pictures. “We were there for the spirit of it as well as for the kids because the kids loved it. They always wanted to get their picture taken with us.” He says that made the kids want to come to the games, which in turn might motivate some parents to come as well.

Did USF help pay for expenses?

The university helped them with expenses when they went to away games. “They did a lot of things for us. USF has definitely been a great school. Everyone has been so generous.” For the Cincinnati versus USF basketball game, USF paid for their plane tickets and hotel room.

The “Green and Gold Guys” never sit at the games

At games they did not sit down. They continuously walked around throughout the games. “We probably walked four or five miles a game. We go up and down every stair and get people yelling. We try to get the wave going, we get defense chants, we get people yelling.”

Mr. Price attends his first football game unpainted, and knows it is time to move on
He recently went to his first USF football game without being painted up, just sitting in the stands. “It was horrible. I hated it the whole time. But, you have to move on. You graduate, you have to move on and start your life. You look back and say, ‘Look what I started.’”

The “Green and Gold Guys” are proud to have paved the way for a more school spirited atmosphere

Mr. Price says he looks back on his time as one of the “Green and Gold Guys” and is proud of what he started. He says now there are so many people at the games who paint their bodies. There are probably fifteen to twenty-five people per game that paint their bodies. “And it was just us two that started it. We were the only two that ever painted our whole bodies. We feel that we have accomplished our goal by getting more people spirited. I believe that we have done a good thing by starting a tradition of spirit.”

Does Mr. Hope see a growth in the athletic programs at USF?

He says the basketball team is becoming more disciplined each year. He thinks the new coach can take the basketball team to the next level. Referring to the USF basketball team, Mr. Hope says, “We have always been right there, that one game closer to being better. I think we will do it.”

Progress of the USF basketball team

“I think the basketball team has come a long way. We have four retired jerseys in the gym.”

Progress of the USF football team

“The football team is just unbelievable. The amount of growth it has done in performance is unbelievable. It started in 1997. We just got a bid to be in the Big East Conference. This is our first year in a conference. The progression in football is tremendous.” He says what the football program has accomplished in its six years of existence is unbelievable. He says it has come a long way in a short amount of time. Other schools have taken a lot longer to get where they are. He says one day USF will have a sell-out crowd for its football games.

Progress of USF’s athletic teams in general

“Every athletic team we have is just getting better each year.”

“Spirit” organization

There was an organization at USF at the time called Spirit. The members elected Mr. Hope and Mr. Price as president and vice president of the club. Mr. Price says the club inspired other people. The club’s activities included getting people to have school spirit at events, throwing out little footballs and pom-poms at games, and trying to get more people to attend games.

The support of Mr. Price’s parents

They have always supported him. “They have never told me I couldn’t do something.” They bought a lot of their paint. “They came to all the games. They loved it.” Like his father told him, “Don’t leave as just a number, leave being known.” He did that and his father was proud of him. They always loved the idea of the “Green and Gold Guys.” “They thought it was the greatest thing.” They wanted Mr. Price to learn and have a good time.

The academic side of things

He changed his major seven times. He has taken many different classes, from child psychology to marketing. He says with his communication degree he can hopefully get a job anywhere. He has emphases in interpersonal communications, group presentations, and human persuasion.

Mr. Price’s career goal, and how his degree will help him

His father owns a real estate business, and would like Mr. Price to open up an office in his name in Tampa. Mr. Price says communication is very important in real estate. His father does real estate appraisal, which is not selling the house, but rather appraising the house. Mr. Price says appraisal involves talking to banks and other people. Plus in owning one’s own business, communication is important. His father did not need a degree either but he got two degrees from FSU, in real estate and business. “I think because of that he gets a lot more business.” He believes a college degree will help him. Plus he says there are risks involved in running one’s own business. If something happened, Mr. Price always has his degree to fall back on.

Mr. Price on why they became the “Green and Gold Guys”

They did it because they did not want to just sit at football games. They did not do it to get recognition or fame. He says if the games had sell-out crowds, it would be different, but since they were not sell-out crowds, they just did not want to sit there.

Choosing the successors

They did not want the “Green and Gold Guys” to disappear. Mr. Price decided he wanted it to become a tradition. Mr. Hope thought that was a good idea. They started networking more with the alumni center. “Before you know it, they were on us about finding two new people.” Debbie Lum, who works at the Alumni Center, wanted them to pick two guys. They started looking for two new guys. They held a meeting, where only two people showed up. They kept one guy. “It was a hard decision. We had to make sure we found two people who would go to every game, and stick it out. They had to have the money for paint. It had to be a tradition they were proud of and wanted to help.”

The successors

James and Bishop became the successors in the fall of 2003. The two guys had some trial runs the year before. “We are so glad we picked them. They are the two best guys we could have picked for the job. They are always there at the games. They are both sophomores so they will be here for two more years at least.”

A scholarship is started for the “Green and Gold Guys”

The alumni center, notably Debbie Lum, began a scholarship after Mr. Price and Mr. Hope. Each year they give the two “Green and Gold Guys” \$500 to buy supplies.

What does Mr. Hope do now since he has graduated?

Mr. Hope now sells trucks at Gator Ford in Tampa. “He is really good at it.”

Mr. Price talks about Mr. Hope

“He is a very good golfer. He is a very go-with-the-flow guy. He is crazy and fun. He is everything I am. We are like two peas in a pod. We were a perfect match for the “Green and Gold Guys” because we both liked to have fun and didn’t mind painting up.”

Logistics of painting

Half the body is green and half the body is gold. “I believe it was always left side yellow and right side green, except for the hair.” Mr. Hope always had gold hair and wore the gold towel. Mr. Price always had green hair and wore the green towel.

Where did they paint their bodies before games?

For the first year they painted up in the parking lot at Raymond James. After that they received their own dressing room at the stadium. They had their own access passes. Their room was right next door to the USF football locker room. They always finished painting right when the team walked out. So they gave them all high fives. “The players loved us.”

Mr. Price comments on the support they received from the football team

He says for the most part, almost every one on the team, and the coaching staff, is genuinely nice to everyone on campus. The football players always clapped for them.

How long did it take to paint up before a game or an event?

The first two years it took an hour and a half to get the paint on. By the time they graduated they could get ready for a game in fifteen minutes. Mr. Price says the progress in getting-ready time came with a lot of practice.

How did they put the paint on?

They put the paint on with their hands. They helped each other with getting the color-dividing line down their backs correct.

How much paint did they use?

It took about sixteen tubes of paint to do one body, front and back.

Who provided the paint?

They got the paint from Party City. They gave them a discount because they bought so much paint each time they were there, and thus giving the store a lot of business. The manager gave them a twenty percent discount. The manager only carried the paint during Halloween, but he went out of his way to special order it for them.

How did they ride home after games?

They used their cars to get to and from every game or event. Every other game they switched off whose car it would be. They had the hardest time trying to figure out what to sit on. One day they happened to be transferring a couch from Mr. Hope's old apartment to a new one in Brandon. A clear shower curtain covered the couch. It flew off as they traveled down I-75. Mr. Price slammed on the brakes, and ran across the interstate to get the curtain. He put it in the car. Mr. Price thought, "You know what this is what we will use to sit on." They decided to use that after every game because it did not matter if paint got on it. They wore T-shirts as well. They wrapped the whole car with a shower curtain so they would not get any paint on anything. However, Mr. Price says there are still traces of paint in his car. He says the whole back of his seat is all gold. He says they could not wear a seatbelt on the way home from games, so they drove slowly. Law enforcement never stopped them. Mr. Price says people did yell and honk their horns at them on the way home from games.

The estimated number of times they painted

He says they probably painted up about 200 times.

How long did it take to get the paint off?

It took about an hour to get the paint off.

Where did they take the paint off?

Mr. Price lived in Fontana Hall for two and a half years, and Mr. Hope lived there for one and a half years, so they used the bathroom in their rooms. The last two years, when neither lived there, Fontana Hall gave them a private room in which to shower. "We never had to worry about ruining our apartments." The best way to clean the shower was with WD-40, which caused the paint to run off the shower walls. Mr. Price says they really appreciated Fontana Hall letting them have the room for two years. "It was extremely nice of them, they didn't have to do that."

People who paint up just for televised games

He says one sad thing is that a lot of people just paint their faces when a game will be nationally televised, but Mr. Price and Mr. Hope did it for every game.

Mr. Price comments on the appreciation they have received from others

He said it did feel good to have the most important people, such as President Genshaft, coming up to them and thanking them. "That is the greatest joy." During Mr. Hope's senior year they did a homecoming float, which cost \$1,100. They had \$1,300 donated to them. "That really showed the appreciation for who we were and what we did."

What really stands out to Mr. Price about his time as one of the "Green and Gold Guys?"

Mr. Price says the most special part was the kids. Kids always came up to them wanting their picture taken with them or wanting hugs. "It's a good feeling to have someone enjoy you that much."

The “fame” of the “Green and Gold Guys”

Although no one officially interviewed them, Mr. Hope and Mr. Price appeared on ESPN SportsCenter, and on a lot of local news channels. They had their picture taken with Dick Vital. They were sort of interviewed for a UF versus USF basketball game, but they were not painted up because they spent the night at the Sun Dome.

Sleeping outside the Sun Dome for UF vs. USF in basketball

The night before UF played USF the “whole school” camped out beside the Sun Dome. It was an all-night pep rally. Mr. Price says it was raining, but no one cared. Everyone was having fun. They next morning they woke up and saw news cameras everywhere.

Mr. Price comments on the show of school spirit just for big games, such UF vs. USF

Although Mr. Price is glad to see school spirit, he says the one thing that sort of upset him was that the huge show of school spirit was just for the Gator game. There was almost a sold-out crowd for the game. “It was so loud. It was amazing. If we could just get that for every basketball and football game.” His dream is to see Raymond James sold out for a Bulls football game, which means 62,000 people would be in attendance. “I think it will happen.”

Mr. Price wants to begin a “Green and Gold Guys” Foundation

He talked to Debbie Lum about starting a group at the Alumni Center, which would talk about traditions. They would go to high schools and do presentations. Also, Mr. Hope and Mr. Price would like to be in charge of a “Green and Gold Guys” Foundation, which would make sure that there are two “Green and Gold Guys” every year.

When he leaves USF, what will he take with him?

Mr. Price says he has learned the ability to think on the spot and solve problems quickly. He will leave USF knowing that he had a great time, and that he will be remembered no matter what. For the rest of his life, USF will know who Walter Price and Brian Hope are. “We made a stand. I will have the joy of knowing that I will have made my parents extremely happy by doing everything they asked me to do to graduate—get an education, meet as many people as [I] can, and get known.” He says the joy he will see on his parents face when he graduates will be something he will always remember. “This is a great school. I would love for my kid to go here. College has definitely been the best four years of my life.”

What would Mr. Price tell a prospective college student about USF?

He would say that one should never base his or her reason for going to a particular university on its football team. He would say, “Why would you want to join an old tradition, when you could start a new one?” He would say that a school such as FSU already has enough people there. They should go to a school that needs more tradition and spirit. “We need to get USF like UF and FSU.” He says he would never say that USF is the best school in Florida. “You need to go where you want to go for your field of study. But, you need to realize that USF has a lot of fields of study plus the university is trying to start a tradition with football.” He says the sad thing is that a lot of people think about a school’s football team when they are choosing a university. He says

football teams are great. “It’s an American sport. That’s what college is about—going to the football games and having that beer with your buddy. But, you have to realize too that you have to pick a school that has a good education background. You don’t want to go to some school just because they have a good football team, and not learn anything except for what play was just run. You don’t want to graduate knowing the plays in football.” That is what Mr. Price would say to a prospective college student.

Mr. Price really appreciated doing the interview.

End of Interview