

5-28-2004

Genoa Griffin oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 28, 2004

Genoa Griffin (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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Griffin, Genoa (Interviewee) and Huse, Andrew T. (Interviewer), "Genoa Griffin oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 28, 2004" (2004). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 213.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/213

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

Narrator: Genoa Griffin
Current Position: USF student; Member of the
USF Sailing Team
Date of Interview: May 28, 2004
Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date of Edit: August 6, 2004

Interviewer: Andrew Huse
Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
Abstractor: Jared G. Toney
Date of Abstract: July 20, 2004
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Griffin came to USF as a student in 1999.

Background

Ms. Griffin went to school at Plant High School in Tampa, where she was actively involved with the sailing team. After her high school graduation, she first went to college for one year at Florida Atlantic University for swimming. Because she missed sailing so much, and Tampa was closer to her parents, she decided to transfer to the University of South Florida. "I felt welcome, so I made the change and transferred over to USF" in August of 1999.

Before deciding to make the move to USF, she was contacted by Steve Lang and a number of sailing team members whom she knew from high school.

USF sailing team

"There is such a different vibe ... on the USF sailing team ... It really wasn't a hard transition because everyone made me feel warm and welcomed ... I felt more comfortable ... here at USF."

When she first joined the team at USF, sailing was not yet a varsity sport, but was instead a "club level" activity for students. "It was still pretty new at that point ... putting the whole team together. I think that's also why I didn't feel so intimidated ... When we first started, we had a meeting and then we went out to practice."

Competitive sailing

The hardest part of sailing competitively for the team, Griffin recalls, was learning to sail with another person rather than individually, as she was accustomed to doing. "I had to learn how to work with somebody else in the boat ... when I had a crew ... I had to realize you can't get frustrated or mad at them ... So that was probably the hardest, was getting used to that type of [sailing] ... you have to respect [your crew] ... and work with them."

Communication

Communication, she asserts, is one of the most crucial components to a successful competitive sailing team. “Communication is the biggest part ... you’re doing this for the team, you want to get better as a whole.”

Travel

The team also learned valuable lessons when traveling to compete against other schools such as Harvard and Yale, where teamwork was essential to being successful. “It’s very similar to any sport.” Even though still only a club, the USF sailing team would compete against other varsity teams at various regattas around the country. “We didn’t of course get the funding that we needed as much, and it made things a little more difficult.”

Supporting the sport

“We support any sailing team. We support sailing itself. That’s the one thing that I think is really nice. It’s competitive definitely ... but in the end, we’re supporting the sport of sailing.”

Childhood experiences with sailing

Ms. Griffin was first drawn to sailing as a child when her father sat her down one summer and gave her two activities from which to choose: She could either join the Davis Island Yacht Club and learn to sail, or take a computer business course. She chose sailing.

“Funny thing is, I really didn’t want to. I loved cruising around with my parents ... Well, I ended up liking it – loved it, joined the sailing team, and it just kind of grew from there.”

Personal appeal

“It [is] a certain satisfaction you get when you’re out there on the water. It makes you feel good ... Even if you don’t win, you build confidence, you get a certain self-satisfaction of knowing you did your best, and ... it’s something that’s in my blood, I feel like ... It’s a feeling that you get – I don’t even know how to describe it.”

Origins of her name

Her first name, Genoa, actually comes from a particular type of sail. “It’s the name of a job on a sailboat, and so that’s what my parents named me after – they’re very sailing oriented ... With a name like that ... I kind of had no choice – I would have to sail. So it’s a good thing I liked it!”

Academics

Academically, she did not yet know what exactly she wanted to study. Though she went on to earn her degree in marketing, she hopes to return to school to pursue an advanced degree in a different field, perhaps in marine biology.

It took Ms. Griffin a couple of years in school to figure out what area she wanted to major in. “I changed majors a couple of times ... I just jumped around taking classes that didn’t really help me graduate any sooner.” Finally, she decided on marketing. “They had a ... great program here, and I just went with it ... It was sort of like I just picked a major, and I was there for the sailing!” Marketing, however, was something she felt she could

use after she graduated. Now, however, her focus has been refined and she wants very much to go back to school.

Commuting to St. Petersburg

For four years, Ms. Griffin would drive to the St. Petersburg campus three or four times a week for sailing practices. She also had to arrange her classes around a hectic and demanding practice schedule.

Learning experiences

“I’ve really learned a lot over the past four years on the team ... about myself ... at the same time, you build friendship[s] that last forever ... you get to know people a lot ... you learn a lot about other people too.”

Asked what she brought to the team, Ms. Griffin believes that, “Part of it is the confidence ... I was very aggressive ... and I always tried to make whoever was on the team feel welcomed.”

Role on the sailing team

Ms. Griffin served as the team captain for two years, and then as the team commodore. “So I tried to be a role model for everybody, but at the same time I kind of had my role models as well ... I wanted to be somebody they could rely on ... When you do that, I think it rubs off on other people.”

Recognition for USF

“It’s great representing USF and seeing our name on the ranking list now ... We’re becoming more recognizable – it’s bringing more recruits in, and that to me is just so great.”

Social events for the team

In addition to competitions, members of the sailing team spent a lot of time together off the water as well. “The reason we had a ... tight bond ... was because we did a lot of events ... together” for functions such as bowling, cookouts, holiday parties, and banquets. “You get to know everybody in every form.”

Attaining varsity status

A particularly important time, Ms. Griffin recalls, was when sailing gained status as a varsity sport at USF. “It was a great feeling. We were able to compete more. We had respect from USF ... we felt a part of [the University] now ... it was nice having that feeling that you’re doing this for USF now ... you have the support of the school ... I think it made a huge impact.”

Favorite locations

Having traveled a great deal and sailed at many locations, one of Ms. Griffin’s favorite places to compete is in Charleston, where there are strong currents in the water. “I like going to Hawaii, I have to say that! ... I like going there because it’s really challenging ... it’s extremely windy.” Although she liked many of the schools in the northern U.S., “I

did not like the weather. I am a warm weather girl!” She also always really enjoyed the challenge that Annapolis presented for her, partly because of the ever-changing conditions. “I like pushing myself to the limit ... so I like places where I can do that.”

Advice for students new to sailing

“Try it - go out there and try it ... They’re not going to make you do anything you’re not comfortable [with] ... You may fall [into] the water occasionally, but ... there’s no problem, we can pull you right back up ... Just do it – go ahead and try it ... They’re going to welcome anybody that wants to join ... The team will work with you ... it will become your family.”

End of Interview