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

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Current Position: USF Alumnus   Location of Interview: Hyde Park
Date of Interview: February 23, 2004   Abstractor: Jared G. Toney
Editor: Danielle. E. Riley   Date of Abstract: May 21, 2004
Date of Edit: June 1, 2004   Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Zappone came to USF as a student in 1965.

Mr. Zappone chooses USF
As many as two or three years before his high school graduation, Mr. Zappone
anticipated that he would go to college at USF, primary because of its geographical
convenience. Because he did not own an automobile, he rode to school with his next-door
neighbor who happened to work at the university library. As a result, he would typically
spend the entire day on campus.

Early academic record
Even before he enrolled at the university, Mr. Zappone was actively involved in taking
photographs and writing stories for the local newspapers in Tampa. "The main thing was,
I didn't think I was smart enough to get through college – and I really wasn't at the time."
He recalls that after his first trimester, he received an academic warning for his grades,
which consisted of a C, a D, and two Fs. "I did not study a lot in high school, I was
mainly interested in taking pictures and doing news stories … but my father really
wanted me to go to college [and] get that degree – so that was an important thing for me
to do … I decided that I needed to stay in college [and] apply myself."

Improving his academics

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His third semester he focused more on his studies, recalling, "I expanded my brain to its full capacity." After "a lot of politicking, a lot of writing, [and] a lot of schmoozing," Mr. Zappone came out of academic warning and had a 4.0 average his second two years. His major was political science. "I guess I was street smart, because when you didn't have the innate intelligence like many of the people had, you had to find another way to do it – and I did it."

Initial impressions of USF
Though the campus was "very sterile" and sparse when he first enrolled at USF, Mr. Zappone instantly "loved it." "I liked walking … I really liked that [open] space … I did a lot of walking, a lot of thinking."

Socializing on campus
Mr. Zappone recalls spending time between classes with friends outside of the University Center, or taking walks around the expansive campus. "I have to admit that on occasion I would be very smitten by a beautiful co-ed … I would go over to the Registrar's Office – data was easily accessible at the time – and at the beginning of each quarter I would go and see what their schedule was, and I would copy it down so I could be conveniently [in] their path … and I could walk with them … they never knew that I was there by design." He jokes that he should have written a book about creative ways to "pick-up" women on campus, "But, actually, I didn't want to share the secrets at the time!"

Campus aesthetics
Aesthetically, he said USF had a much different look and atmosphere to it than did the other state universities in Florida. In addition to some of the more spartan building structures on campus, there was not a significant school spirit among students at South Florida, partly due to the great number of commuter students on campus. Parking, as he remembers, was not a problem.

Registration
Although Mr. Zappone's academic status prevented him from being among the first to register for classes each quarter, he went early as an *Oracle* photographer and gained easy access to the registration tables, where he signed up for his desired classes. "The statute of limitations is up, so I can tell what my secret is now!"

Memorable faculty
Academically, he remembers fondly many of the experiences he had with professors at South Florida. "There were some truly great people at USF." One particularly influential instructor was Joseph Bondi, who taught his Introduction to Education class in the summer of 1966. "He was just a wonderful man … he inspired me … got me interested in learning the rudimentary aspects of teaching. We became very good friends eventually." Another memorable personality on campus was John "Knocky" Parker, an "eccentric" professor who taught a silent movie class. "He would show the movies, and he would play his piano as they did in the silent movies … But if somebody left class before it was over, he would get up from the piano and run – chase them out the door – and bring them

back … and then he'd start playing his piano again! He was a riot! … I loved his class – I think everybody did." Mr. Zappone also developed close relationships with Steve Yates, the faculty sponsor of the *Oracle*, and Dr. Arthur Sanderson. "They were very dear to me – very, very supportive of me, and just let me do whatever I wanted to do."

Involvement with the Oracle
Mr. Zappone first got involved with the *Oracle* by "sort of wandering up" and asking if they needed a photographer, which it just so happened they did. "They were familiar with my work. I had taken photos of President Kennedy two or three years prior … and other presidents and leaders … I sort of had the credentials … so they took me on."

While he didn't write for the *Oracle* initially, he would be given regular photographic assignments. In September of 1966, the first color photo was printed in the paper, an exciting moment for Zappone and the staff. "Most of the time I got no guidance … and they always liked what I brought them."

Writing for the Oracle
After some time, he began writing for the *Oracle,* something that he also particularly enjoyed doing. "They didn't give a lot of assignments … they let me write what I wanted to write … but there was always a lot to write about."

Involvement with Theatre Arts
Mr. Zappone got interested in theatre arts after "taking fancy to a lady" who was involved in the department. He participated in several summer arts programs as a student, and ended up doing the public relations for them, using his connections in the media to gain publicity for the department.

Photographs
"I think too that I was very motivated by impressing my professors with my photographic abilities, so I would get on the roof of the University Center … and I did a lot of night photography … Of course … during the warmer months, the ladies from the dorms came out and they laid out on the grass … so I was able to get a lot of excellent pictures for the *Oracle* … Those were back in the days when … pictures of lovely ladies in bikinis were acceptable in publications … That's probably the thing that I became really know for … and of course it was a way of meeting girls too."

Naming of the Oracle
He really attributes the paper's conception to Steve Yates, who served as the faculty adviser for the *Oracle*. "He was just a wonderful man, a great instructor – very patient, very understanding." The name came from a discussion between Yates and Mr. Zappone about the spreading of news in the classic era by the Greek oracles. "I was just thinking maybe we could tie that into the paper, like – the *Oracle* … I guess about a week-and-a-half later they named the paper the *Oracle*."

Oracle stories

"We always had stories of student government – those were really boring – but we had to cover student government… We had a scandal or two here and there … you had to work hard to get the stories… I never failed to get some great feature pictures. I think it really prepared me for later years working at the papers and the TV stations… I never got over how in the university environment they could take simple things and make them difficult."

The sixties at USF
The sixties at USF, he recalls, were defined largely by the war waging on half a world away in Vietnam. "We had a lot of protests on campus … it just got to a place where everything was protested … If there was anything to protest, there were blank signs and sticks ready to go! … I never became impressed with those protests until much later in my life, when I look back – those people actually recognized what it was for and what it was all about… The first time I ever realized just how awful that war was, was when I saw the movie Forrest Gump."

Streaking
Aside from frequent protests, Mr. Zappone also remembers that in the early seventies streaking (running naked around the campus) became enormously popular. He recalls covering a number of the incidents for the television station for which he was working at the time.

University development
The university's development, Mr. Zappone notes, has been a point of some concern for him. "I think the buildings are starting to become a bit more imaginative, but they way they're laid out and where they are – it may be the best they can do but I just think that there would have been a better way of laying the place out."

Chinsegut Hill
Every once in a while, as Mr. Zappone recalls, the *Oracle* staff would have a retreat at Chinsegut Hill. "That was such a wonderful, nice place. I loved it there."

1966 Pacemaker Award; Trip to Chicago
In 1966, the *Oracle* was awarded the Pacemaker Award in its very first quarter of publication, "Which was the top award that you could get for a university publication." To accept it, the staff traveled to Chicago, where they stayed in a "great hotel" and took advantage of a variety of seminars being offered. The most memorable part of the trip, for him, was the day that he took off on his own to find the *Playboy Magazine* Headquarters in downtown Chicago. "To my great amazement … I got on the elevator and I stopped on every floor. Every floor I stopped on there was a receptionist who had been a Playmate that I recognized. I can't begin to tell you – that was the highlight of my life to that point." The trip to Chicago was also the first occasion in which Mr. Zappone had flown on an airplane. "I think we really deserved that award … we wanted to put out a great paper. And a lot of credit, of course, goes to the St. Pete Times."

Swimming credits at USF

Mr. Zappone recalls that at the time, in order to graduate, students had to complete four credit hours in physical education, one of which had to be swimming. "I could not swim, and I was terrified of water. So, the whole time I was at USF, I figured I would get up to my last hour and just not graduate… I took swimming … and I went to the coach … he was so kind, he assigned a student assistant to me just to get me to learn how to swim… After he worked with me about a month, I could actually float on my back!" Yet, to pass the class, students were required to dive into the pool from the high dive. Terrified of doing so, the coach told him, "'Tony, you've made such a vast improvement … we'll wave the dive and pass you with a C' – so I got to graduate!"

Mr. Zappone advises students today to, "Read everything you can. Develop a love for knowledge - a curiosity… Go to college with the idea of learning to enrich yourself, to make yourself a better person… Keep an open mind, and develop an intellectual curiosity that will take you not only though college, but through life… Make it fun!"

End of Interview