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Sandy Freedman Oral History Project  
University of South Florida

Interview with: Sherry Crawford, Debbie Rotolo, Marion Sell  
Interviewed by: Robert Kerstein  
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[Tape 1, Side A]

RK: ...April 3, 2006 and with the University of Tampa. Interviewing three women who were assistants of different managers and the mayor during the Freedman administration; each is going to introduce herself.

SC: My name is Sherry Crawford, that's C-R-A-W-F-O-R-D. And I worked for George Pennington during Mayor Freedman's administration, her Chief of Staff.

RK: Thank you.

DR: And I'm Debbie Rotolo, R-O-T-O-L-O, and I served as Executive Aide to Robert L. Smith, the Public Safety Administrator, and Joe Abrahams, the administrator over Parks, Recreation and Cultural services.

RK: Thank you.

MS: I'm Marion Sell, S-E-L-L. I was an Executive Aide during the Freedman administration, and I worked for Mike Salmon, who was the administrator over Public Works and Water Resources. And also Bob Buckhorn, who was the Special Assistant to the Mayor.

RK: Thank you very much and thank you for coming down after a hard day's work, very much appreciated. I'd like to ask, [coughs] excuse me, each of you just a little bit about your backgrounds, and then when you started working for the City of Tampa.

SC: I tell you my name again? [laughs]

RK: If you don't mind.

SC: This is Sherry. I started with the city when I was still in high school with the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and that was during the Greco's first term. And I worked at a Model Cities program in several departments in the city; went to work for the Downtown Development Authority. And when Mayor Freedman took office that was one

of the agencies that was disbanded, and I was asked to come up there and work for Mr. Pennington. So, say, I've been with the city sixty—sixty-eight! [laughs]—thirty-eight years [laughs].

RK: Wonderful.

SC: Is that it?

RK: OK.

DR: And this is Debbie again. And I started with the city back in 1978 as a summer worker at the police department. And worked at the police department until 1985 when then Mayor Martinez appointed Robert L. Smith as the first city public safety administrator. At which time, he asked if I would come over and serve as his executive aide, and from that point on I stayed with that administration and then worked through the Freedman administration. And [I] have been with the city all that time, now twenty-eight years come June. But I'm a Tampa native; I've lived in Tampa all my life and my parents and grandparents are all from Tampa also. So I love this city.

RK: What neighborhood did your parents or grandparents grow up?

DR: Ybor City, West Tampa.

RK: Were you born in...?

SC: I was born in Tampa too, been here all my life, born and raised in Hyde Park. And until we moved out to the suburbs when I was, [in] middle school.

RK: Thank you Sherry.

MS: Hi, this is Marion. I started working with the city in August of 1981, and started with the library system when the library was still a part of the City of Tampa, and now it's part of Hillsborough County. Worked there for a couple years, and then went to waste water, and started working with the Freedman administration, I believe in February of 1987. So I've been with the city now for twenty-six years. I was originally from Allentown, Pennsylvania and I would never go back. Love Tampa, and will probably retire from the City of Tampa.

RK: Well we're here with three veterans obviously....

Three women: Yes. [laughs]

RK: ...to the city. That's great.

I would like to ask about your interactions and, I guess, how would you characterize the mayor, Mayor Sandy Freedman? I know that you worked directly with her, Sherry, you

two [Rotolo, Sell] did not. But, you interacted with her to some degree, or at least observed her. How would you characterize the mayor's leadership style?

SC: We all worked with her about the same, the only difference was that I, when Sonny, who worked for the mayor was out, I would sometimes take you know, help the mayor out. I was kind of her back up. But all of us interacted with the mayor about the same. What did you ask me now, what was the question?

RK: How would you characterize her style of, her way of kind of handling the job? And her way of interacting with others?

SC: I have never seen anyone in my life that never forgot a name. She would know, she would meet somebody one time and could always remember their name. Some people would say she was standoffish, I never saw that, I don't know where that ever came from that rumor. That's, I just never saw that side of her. She had a little bit of a temper, she'd lose it sometimes, but never to where you know, we didn't want to like, go into work. She was, I thought she was wonderful to work for. I liked her ideas. Sometimes a lot of people didn't agree with them, but I always knew that if she asked for something or did something it was because she really believed that that was best for the City of Tampa. And I always respected her for that.

RK: Thank you.

DR: And this is Debbie again. I found her very personable, like Sherry said, she would always, you know, ask me about my parents. She would know them by name. She would see people in the elevator and she could call everyone out by name. She remembered people. She always remembered details. If she had come in the office one day and said, you know *I've noticed a drug hole on this corner*, she'd be back to check with you to see you know, what police had done about it, or you know, the status, or if she—you know just details on different things. If a street sign was down, and she noticed it a week later that it was still down, she'd be back to check on it, all of those little attention to details, she was very concerned. You know all those type of things were important to her from the smallest item of city government to the biggest. It was a lot of budget constraints during that time, but she made a lot of things happen still. I mean, you saw the Florida Aquarium open, the Convention Center. There were just great things happening during her administration.

RK: Thank you.

MS: This is Marion. I agree with my friends on their thoughts about the mayor. She, I found her to be very fair. She would not do something for someone that she wouldn't do for everybody. She did have huge attention to detail, she would come to you with her little black book, and would follow up on that. In fact we used to joke with the police officer that drove her around to not take her down a certain street if we didn't have the pothole repaired or that street sign back up. You know, *give us two weeks before you go down that street and we'll have it the way she wants it*. She always made everybody feel

welcome. She, at Christmas time would go to each and every floor and look at their Christmas decorations and wish everybody Happy Holidays and just made everybody feel like they were a member of the family.

RK: I haven't heard about the black book before.

All Three: Oh! Oh! Wow! The black book, she had a very thick black book! [laughs]

RK: And it was for...

MS: All those things that she wanted done. And she would come back to you and say, *I had it....*

SC: She'd see a street sign down, or a pothole....

DR: If she was out at public meetings you know, and the citizens would come up to her with questions and things like that, they'd be written in that black book, and she'd find the answers.

SC: And she read every piece of mail that entered that office, every piece of mail. You know, from citizens, from organizations, I just couldn't believe it, that's, you know, that somebody would—I mean I can't imagine the governor or something actually sitting there reading every piece of paper that comes into the office. But, she did it.

RK: You worked for Mr. George Pennington as well?

SC: Yes, yes.

RK: And did he play the major role in kind of organizing the administration?

SC: He did, he was more or less over certain departments. He wasn't, I don't know how much interaction or how much oversight he did with your [Rotolo and Sell] departments—I don't think there was that much. He was mainly over administration, housing, what else was...

DR: Purchasing.

SC: Purchasing. Any type of administrative department and housing, which was, of course was one of the mayor's strongest interests, was in affordable housing that kind of thing. We had a director, but George oversaw that, that department.

RK: Can you tell us a little bit how it worked with the weekly meetings for example?

SC: Staff meetings?

RK: Yeah.

SC: I was only in one. [laughs]

[All laugh]

SC: It was kind of just like a round table discussion. I mean they just all sat there and went around and everybody told what their concerns were, they're interests were and, just to get the mayor's feedback. And then you know, they'd all come out with their little notes and things that they had to do for the staff meeting.

RK: Now I was told by Mayor Freedman that she thought that each of you, or I shouldn't say each of you necessarily, but that you would have some interesting stories about some of the main characters in her administration. And we don't want you to be hesitant....

SC: Should we start...

RK: ...with anything that might be amusing or....

SC: Should we start with Bob Buckhorn? [Laughs]

RK: I think that would be a good one.

MS: Bob is still a character. I wouldn't even know where to start with Bob. [Laughs]

SC: He just had a different personality than everybody else. He was young. You know, I remember when we celebrated his thirtieth birthday in the, in the office. We have a picture of it, and, you know, with him with the hat on and holding a Happy Birthday sign, and....

MS: And I used to just instigate him, just to get him going. For instance if his phone would ring I would purposely let it ring for a while, and he'd sit in there, *Marion, it rang seven times, why didn't you pick it up?* And I'd say, *well gee Bob, if you had the time to count them, why didn't you pick it up?*

[All Laugh]

SC: He was, he was right across the hall from us, so, you could, you could get along with him that way. You know, he....

MS: He had a great, he has a great sense of humor. Absolutely. I think he always had the city's best interests at heart and would have made a terrific mayor himself...

SC: Yeah.

MS: ...if he would have been given the opportunity.

SC: Yep. And Chief Smith was just, probably the kindest person I'd ever met in my life I think.

DR: The way the office was set up we had cubicles, which is hard to believe for top administrators. And it wasn't really floor to ceiling walls, it was just, you know, seven foot walls type of things, cubicle style. So the four of—there was four of us sitting in front of our administrators, so you could hear a lot even though, you know they were talking about sensitive things sometimes. But Mr. Abrahams he had a very loud boisterous voice. And that's just the way he talked. So there would be occasions where Mayor Freedman would walk around the corner and say, *I can hear him all the way in my office!* You know?

[All laughs]

DR: [Mayor Freedman would say,] *Would you tell him to pipe down?* You know, and anyway, it was just, it was like family the whole day we were there, you know. We all had a good cause to work towards. But you know, we looked out for each other and you know, it was just a nice time, a nice working group. Everybody pitched in, you know, while I had my two administrators to work for, we all helped each other out. And George Pennington, there would be staff meetings that, that I sat in, and if anyone got too longwinded, he was the perfect person to move the meeting along. He would just say, *OK, that's enough on that topic now, and* [laughs]. And George Pennington would move things on, and he could keep the ball rolling in there. So, that was always interesting.

SC: And Mr. Russo was the one with the "Latin temper". He'd lose his temper, but then—I mean he could really raise his voice, I mean you could hear him and we'd, you know—we got used to it after a while—but twenty minutes later, he'd be in there just talking to the person just like nothing had ever happened. You know, it was just his way of getting his point across.

DR – Right.

SC - But I know when I first started working for George, I was scared to death of him, I went *Oh....* He kind of had a reputation I think with, throughout the city, that he could be pretty stern. So I know I was a little a little leery of him when I first came up there. But that didn't last long. You know, he was, he was a good boss.

MS: He was very, he was a kind-hearted...

DR: Yeah.

MS: ...person.

RK: You probably know his wife, [she] worked here for several years.

SC: Oh yes.

DR: Yeah, Barbara.

SC – She’s still here?

RK: She’s a consultant for UT's [University of Tampa] 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

SC – Right because I talked to her a couple months ago. I think that ya’ll are planning something here that I have to do, so that’s the reason I talk to her, but. Who else? Oh, John, John Dunn.

MS: Always had a funny story...

SC: John was wonderful, yeah.

MS: ...made you laugh. Mike Salmon was, I think laid back, very, very easy going. I would think Mr. Salmon is a true leader. I learned a lot from him. I remember he always told me that you don’t have to tell people that you’re a leader, they will just know it. And that was something that always stuck with me. Who else was up there? Steve LaBour.

SC: Oh, Steve, yeah.

MS: Who ran a neighborhood office...

DR: Single-handedly.

MS: ...all by himself.

DR: Right. Neighborhoods became very important to the administration and their ideas, and he kept....

SC: That was the start of it.

DR: That and he, he was great at baking chocolate-chip cookies.

[All laugh]

MS: Yes he was! Even without the chocolate chips.

[Laughs]

DR: He would always make a special batch a little bit burnt for Joe Abrahams, because he preferred them burnt.

[All laughs]



MS: And Debbie liked hers without chips...

DR: Yeah.

MS: ... so he would come in with all his little special made batches. [Laughs]

SC: And other, the bake sales—tell him about the bake sales. You've heard about the bake sales?

RK: No.

SC: For United Way every year, you know, ya'll, well, we all have to fill in our little pledge cards and give our fair share. But to earn more money, the mayor started this bake sale up on the eighth—it was a mayor's bake sale. And we all had to bring in...

MS: Two items.

SC: Was it two or three?

MS: It was two.

DR: Two, yeah.

SC: Yeah, two or three items, and the mayor would come in with twenty, twenty items. And we would write letters to all the news stations, and you know, news personalities, and ask them to donate their favorite dessert for—one of Gail Sierens was fun, wasn't she? With her, then her husband Mike's Pies?

DR: Right.

SC: So we'd have a Mike's Pie, and we'd have things from Bob Hite and we'd have raffles, you know we'd raffle off one of the mayors cakes, and used to make like eight or nine hundred dollars. It was a, it was a....

MS: Big deal.

DR: Big donation for United Way, it really was. Yeah, that was real important.

SC: But it would, it would keep us busy out there all morning. You know, we'd be out there selling to the building. And everybody would look forward to it, the whole building looked forward to it. Because you never knew what the mayor was going to bring in. It was....

MS: She'd come in with her carts full of...

SC: Carts.

MS: ...baked goods.

SC: I mean, just full of baked goods!

[All Laugh]

SC: And she, things that she'd baked herself, you know, it was....

DR: Yeah, brownies, lemon bars, cakes...

MS: Angel food....

SC: Roasted almonds, her, what were those? Walnuts?

MS: Pecans.

DR: Pecans.

SC: Pecans!

DR: Yeah, the sugared pecans.

SC: Yeah.

RK: Didn't she write a cook book not long ago?

MS: She did.

SC: Yes.

DR: She did, yes.

MS: We all got one.

DR: The lemon bars were in that cookbook!

[All laugh]

RK: You mentioned John Dunn who dealt with the media, who was media relations I guess. Did you also have to, some way, interact with the media?

DR: We were always *no comment*.

[All laugh]

MS: Yeah.

SC: We'd go out there and greet them and it was, *No comment!* But being, we, you know, we knew—I mean I knew John when he was still with the [Tampa] Tribune. When I was working at the Downtown Development Authority he used to cover us with them, I already knew him a little before then and he was....

DR: Yeah, he's pretty hyper, he could, get the beat done just in time, you know. Kept up with all the calls, the juggling. Everybody you know, has a deadline to beat. But he was always, he stayed in a good frame of mind, usually was always happy....

SC: Yeah. He was.

MS: And he always made sure that our story was told fair.

SC: That's right.

MS: And if it wasn't, they would hear from John.

[All laugh]

RK: I was wondering about that.

MS: Absolutely.

RK: I was there one day and he seemed to be having some, heated words with a reporter, I guess that's it.

SC: Yeah, he'd—he looked out for the city.

MS: He did.

RK: Did you ever get the feeling that the media was being kind of hard on the city, on the administration?

SC: Yeah, especially during the, during the last, the last part I think.

MS: I do.

SC: There were a couple of things that she did that I guess didn't agree with certain people and....

MS: I think they were harder on her than some of the other mayors.

SC: Oh definitely.

DR: Yeah. There's you know, things that happen that you wonder sometimes, you know, why they're so hard on her, you know—you feel like they're picking on a, outgoing mayor, you know, to help set up for the next administration or something, you know. But it was, they would have their damage control in place.

[All laugh]

SC: She probably had a little, little, you know—what in the '80s, you know, first female mayor—I'm sure that she had that problem of having to show that you know, she could be on, that she could be a real leader, so. It was a little difficult, I'm sure. I remember when she won the election, won the first election, after—remember all the flowers in her office?

DR: Right.

SC: Oh you couldn't even, you couldn't even walk! And then we had to move some because it got to her allergies, remember?

[All laugh]

MS: Yeah

DR: Yeah, I wasn't there, then but....

SC: Unbelievable, all the flowers....

DR: Yeah.

SC: ...it was just unbelievable. She was you know, very well liked. And then, you know, I don't know if they do that with every—you know, Greco had his problems second term, so—I don't know if it's something that happens typically.

RK: Can you think of any other comparisons between the mayor—Mayor Freedman's administration and Mayor Martinez's other than treatment by the press? I know many of the same people stayed with the Freedman administration from Martinez, but did anything strike you as far as different styles or...?

SC: Well I know it made the transition a lot easier. I wasn't there during the, I wasn't working in the mayor's office during the Martinez administration. But you were Debbie.

DR: I came in just at the end. He left to run for Governor. It was a smooth transition as far as I remember. Mayor Freedman was the Chairman of the City Council and came over. But it might have been a little bit different management style—you wouldn't see Mayor Martinez walking around the corner of the cubicles to ask a question. His assistant would come over and ask the question normally. Whereas Mayor Freedman, she felt very comfortable with coming around and asking any of the staff members for assistance with

something or a question, or to get some answers, things like that. Just a little bit different management style like that.

RK: You mentioned Steve LaBour before was active with citizen associations. Did you ever have citizens or representatives of neighborhood groups come to the offices and speak about issues?

SC: Oh we had, we dealt with all the citizens when they would come in with you, constituent concern, that was part of our job, you know, to go out there and get all of the information and try to help them solve the problem, whatever. But I guess you know, looking at our neighborhood office now and you know, in this administration, and seeing what it was back when Steve had it, you know, that was really, you know—Freedman's actually the—Mayor Freedman's actually the one that started you know, the neighborhood office.

DR: Yeah, gave it some status.

MS: We wouldn't even help Steve type.

[All laugh]

DR: He didn't have his....

MS: He just did it all by himself!

[All laugh]

DR: It was bare bones.

[More laughter]

RK: And that's changed?

MS: Yeah, it has.

DR: Well, the, the needs have grown. And so then they've changed staffing levels to meet up those needs.

SC: Meet those needs.

DR: Yeah.

RK: So that's something started during the Freedman administration that obviously has stayed and not only stayed, but expanded.

MS: Expanded.

DR: Very popular and...

MS: Absolutely.

SC: And I mean, things like the Challenge Fund and all the affordable housing programs that are still in existence today started during her administration.

MS: Well how about Paint Your Heart Out? Did she start that?

SC: Paint your heart out is another thing.

DR: Right.

MS: We used to always, every year, as an office, we would paint.

DR: Yeah. She would assign us a house, and we would come and paint!

[All laugh]

MS: Yep.

DR: That started.

SC: That started during her administration. That's helped a lot of elderly people, done a lot of—and all these volunteers that come together.

MS: And the town hall meetings—how about the town hall meetings? She used to have those neighborhood meetings...

SC: Oh yes!

MS: ....where everybody would have to go at night.

RK: And you didn't have to go did you?

MS: No. She did not make us go.

[All laugh]

RK: Did you hear about it the next day?

MS: Oh we'd hear about it the next day.

[All Laugh]

MS: They'd come back with lists!

DR: They'd be talking about it for a day or two!

[All Laugh]

RK: Sometimes you hear people criticize government just in general, saying that it's—what do you hear? That it's inefficient, and you know the criticisms better than I do, as well as I do. Do you think there's any—and I'm not speaking specifically about the Freedman administration, but just your experience—is it because anything valid about these kind of critiques of local government?

SC: Well not from where we work!

[laughs]

MS: I'm sure there's some validity...

SC: Yeah

MS: ...to it but city government is made up of a group of hard working, caring individuals. And I think we give it—the majority of us—give it 100% each and everyday. And it actually hurts our feelings when people say terrible things. Because we do, that's our life and we try to do the best job that we can.

DR: Yeah, it's unfortunate sometimes when the citizens call. You know, you have city government, you have county government—sometimes they're not even calling in the right jurisdiction, and you're trying to explain to them, you know, well that—*you know that would be county government, let me get a number for you.* But they don't want to hear that, they want help right then. You know and you know, you want to assist them, and you take the information and you respond as quickly as possible. But sometimes it's just not fast enough for them. But realistically, one problem may involve several departments, and by the time you get an answer for them, you know I think anyone that gets a problem, they're going to deal with it because all the employees are so conscientious about helping the public. But you know, sometimes they're unrealistic with their expectations on the—if you get them the answer and if it's a *no*, that's not what they want to hear you know. But you try your best to satisfy their concern. And, you know it's hard sometimes, because you give them an answer they don't want to hear.

SC: They don't like the word *no*.

DR: Yeah.

MS: Because that means that they, we haven't helped them. When we give them a *no*.

DR: Yeah.

[All laugh]

RK: Do you...

[All laugh]

MS: Basically.

RK: Do you recall the period when the Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla was supposed to have a parade but the time...

SC: Bamboleo! I forgot about that—I still got the cup at home, yes.

RK: And, that was difficult time I believe, for the mayor and the administration. It seemed to be getting criticized by some people in the Krewe...

SC: Well....

RK: ...in South Tampa and...

SC: And that's another example of a lot of people not agreeing with something that she did but she fully believed that you know, that, it wasn't fair. And that—she stuck to her guns, and she said, *we're not doing it*. And you know, as a Tampa native, I've always loved it. Gasparilla's just always been—I just love it. You know, I like to see the pirates come and kidnap the mayor and you know, get the key to the city, and it's just—it's Tampa tradition. So I missed it that year. But, it's another example of you know, she really believed that she needed to do what she did and she did it.

DR: And changes did come from it.

SC: Yeah, they did.

MS: Yep.

RK: Did you get nasty phone calls?

SC: I don't remember. I don't even remember getting that many. I really don't.

MS: No.

DR: Yeah, I don't remember a volume of calls.

RK: You remember a volume of calls over any particular issue?

SC: Take home cars.



RK: Oh.

DR: For the police officers.

SC: That was a rough one.

RK: And was it mainly police officers' families that were calling, or I guess you don't know necessarily?

SC: No I didn't, I don't think I ever did. It was, I remember there was a lot of, it was just a lot of bad press and just a lot of bad, you know calls and you know, the police officers felt that was one of their benefits that were being taken away from them. And—so that was a, that was a pretty rough time. Anything else?

DR: I can't think of anything off hand. The, atmosphere with City Council, I think it was pretty good at the time. You know each administration deals with different Council issues and I think we were very responsive to anything Council asked for, and so nothing comes to mind that would stand out.

SC: Yeah.

RK: You often hear that Tampa has a strong mayor form of government...

DR: Right.

RK: ...so the mayor is much stronger than Council. Is that your perceptions?

DR: Oh, yeah.

SC: Definitely, yeah.

DR: No doubt about it. [laughs]

MS: Mayor Freedman was always in charge even when she wasn't there.

DR: Right!

MS: And she was always reachable.

SC: Was there ever anything she had to veto? And we were afraid she might—I think she might...I know something's, something is coming to my mind, but I can't remember what it was.

RK: Do you remember the period at the end of the administration when there was some chance of getting a hotel where now the Marriot is and City Council voted against that? Does that ring a bell?

MS: Absolutely.

DR: There was a lot of negotiations...

SC: Things going on....

DR: ....and they really worked on trying to make a deal come through. But it, it just didn't work out.

SC: Didn't work out. Yeah, downtown you know, downtown development was another thing that she really worked hard on. But the economy was so bad during that period of time. You know she did an awful lot with very little resources, so.

RK: Each mayor I think has different people that he or she are relatively close with—who are not in the city government but are active in the community on one way or another, business or neighborhood associations. And I wondered if, in your eyes, Mayor Freedman had certain people that she was very close with who she consulted with informally or formally, who came up to visit.

SC: I don't recall that, and I know she, you know, was very close with her family, and she relied a lot on her staff. I remember some of her friends. You know, like the Shimbergs and—but I can't, I don't recall her, I don't remember that.

DR: Yeah, I—you know I know she, you know had an open door policy that she would see her staff when they needed to see her on different issues or things like that. And she confided in her administrators and, you know they were very honest with each other and close. And I know she used them as sounding boards for ideas.

RK: One issue that came up with some regularity I suppose was trying to widen city government in terms of hiring African Americans and women at different levels of the administration. Is this something you saw from your perspectives?

SC: Yeah, oh yeah, that was, you know that was another, another thing that was going on, you know at the time. We needed to make some changes and I think she handled that very well. There was the one incident that....

MS: She did. She just tried to ensure that women and minorities received promotions in a lot of—in, in departments whenever she could. She, she believed from, in promoting from within and sought out the best candidates. And it was always wonderful, if it turned out to be you know, a woman... [laughs]....

SC and DR: Yeah, yeah.

MS: ...or a minority, that was just the icing on the cake then, at that point.

DR: Did she start cultural diversity training? Or was that already in place?

SC: I think she did. I'm trying to remember when I went the first time, it was so long ago. It might have been—that might have been something that was started during that administration with the T-Police [Tampa Police].

DR: All new employees go to cultural diversity training.

RK: And has that continued over time?

DR: It has continued.

RK: Were there tensions at all because, if, if there was an emphasis on promoting and hiring of minorities and women? Was there any tension due to that?

MS: No because she didn't make it unrealistic....

DR: She was very, very fair.

MS: ...if there were qualified applicants.

SC: Qualified.

DR: Right.

MS: Absolutely, but she wasn't the type that would make you promote somebody that didn't deserve to be promoted.

RK: And is that policy....

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

DR: ...totally a time change.

SC: ...I know. It's a—the time change has got me.

RK: Now we were speaking about diversity and future administrations, whether that's kind of, the emphasis has continued.

SC: Yeah it has, it's just that it, it—during that period of time it was just a little more...

MS: Prevalent.

SC: ...prevalent. You know, but a little more out in the—people were, were, waiting, you know—looking to see what the city was going to do in that regard, so that was, you know that, I think was one of her strongest, strongest things too—was how she felt about those issues.

RK: You mentioned she read each of her letters, and I know you didn't read them of course, but did she get nasty letters regarding this issue or any others?

SC: Oh I'm sure she did. Yeah, I'm sure she did at times. Those mostly went through Sonny. But I mean, you know, working for administrators, I mean, we're used to it. You know, we've seen them. We know, you know they, that's gone on forever. But every, every mayor gets them.

MS: It's still going on now, they just come in email form.

[All laugh]

RK: It's easier with email.

MS: It's so much easier, absolutely.

RK: Each of you stayed in with Mayor Greco, is that true?

SC: I did and then he moved downstairs and I stayed upstairs...

RK: Oh I see.

SC: ...with one of his, with one of his, what do you call it, what was Ron?

DR: Special assistants?

SC: Yeah. [laughs]

RK: Who was that?

SC: Ron Rotella.

RK: Yes. Mayor Greco I think had a different kind of persona than Mayor Freedman.

SC: Yes, yes.

RK: How would you characterize the major change, just in terms of leadership style?

[all pause]

MS: Silence.

[all laugh]

SC: It was totally different. I mean totally different.

DR: I don't think he worried as much about the day to day operations and the, you know...

MS: The details...

DR: ...little details. You know, he was looking at the big picture, the big projects, and, and things like that, I felt.

MS: Yeah, he...

DR: He was interested and you know, he'd hug anybody he saw. But you know I think those type of details you know, just, he left...

MS: He left to his staff.

DR: ...yeah, the staff. You know he knew we were competent and would handle that.

RK: So that was the major difference?

[Sounds in agreement]

RK: Can I ask about the present mayor as far as style?

SC: A lot, a lot more like Mayor Freedman. Yeah, very detail oriented. Is in, you know, she stays involved in, in everything. You know, she, to me—she reminds me, I mean she's not like Mayor Freedman exactly, but their styles are the—their attention to detail, their concern about things is about the same.

RK: Any other recollections or stories, or impressions?

DR: It was just great the way everyone worked so well together in the Freedman administration. Chief Smith, you know, while he had his expertise in police and fire, that type of field, I, it would be often that he would meet with the other administrators on issues and they would work together and you know, with Mike Salmon and Joe Abrahams and George Pennington and everybody. Just, I don't know, it was such a positive time.

SC: Team, you know, very team oriented.

DR: Right.

MS: Very, very team oriented. At the holidays the mayor would always have a holiday lunch, and...

SC: Oh, she was wonderful at the holidays....

MS: ...yeah, we would all...

SC: ...just wonderful.

MS: ...yeah, we'd all sit in her office and...

DR: She would always have a lunch catered in...

MS: Absolutely.

DR: ...and we'd sit around in, in her office and, you know. But like issues that would come up on the Bayshore. There was a time when the balustrade, is that...

SC: Yeah.

DR: ...what you call that?

SC: Yeah.

DR: There was a debate whether to—it needed to be renovated, improved. And they didn't know whether to get rid of it completely and just have you know, a flat sidewalk going out into the water, or replace it and, and refurbish it. And she went around the room, and here we are, the aides to the big administrators, and she was asking everybody's opinion on what they thought if, you know it should be replaced or not. And you know I felt like my opinion counted in her administration. And of course I wanted it to be replaced and, I mean, refurbished. And I was glad the vote went that way. But you know, she cared what anyone, you know—she valued everyone's opinion, which was great.

RK: So that wasn't unusual? She would sometimes ask your opinions on different issues?

MS: Oh absolutely.

DR: Yeah.

SC: Yep. And I remember at Christmas when she would come in to help during the holidays, well she just had to be out there putting some ornaments—she had to have, she had to have at least put two or three ornaments on that tree. I mean, she just had to. You know she was....

DR: But she was fair, we had Hanukah and Christmas up.

[All laugh]

SC: We had all, everything from...

MS: Represented.

DR: ....Kwanza and...

SC: But she wanted to take part in each and every part of it. She'd go around judging Christmas trees on every floor, and...

MS: And that meant a lot to the employees...

SC: Yeah.

MS: ...to see the mayor come down, and she would visit with them and give words of encouragement and thank you's to everybody for working so hard all year, and...

SC: Yeah. I mean, and she'd get on the elevator with people and just start asking them about their family and you know, I mean she might have only met them one time—it was just, it was just amazing. To have that gift, you know, to remember somebody and remember things about them. And—so I just never knew where that, where the press came up with that, the way they said she was. You know, aloof...

MS: Yeah, that wasn't the mayor...

DR: That's not...

MS: ...that just wasn't her.

DR: ....they didn't take time to know her.

SC: No.

MS: And she has a wonderful sense of humor, and always takes a second to joke around with you and catch up. But that's just the way she was always was.

RK: Did she ever return to City Hall for any functions after she left?

SC: I've seen her at a couple of—not sure what I've seen her at.

DR: They had a, a ceremony for Joe Abrahams; they had named the Wellness Center in Ballast Point after him. And they had a ceremony, and all the mayors that he worked for

were on the podium. And she came to that event, and they all had nice comments to say. That was really an amazing day that they all came out in his honor. And it was a great tribute.

SC: And we see her, you know, we have lunch with her. Try to do it at least once a year, twice a year. Probably irritated with us now because we haven't done it.

MS: Yeah, we'll hear about it.

DR: Yeah! [All laugh]

SC: After all these years you know, we still get together as a group and, you know, at least, you know, try to get together.

DR: I remember when she did come out with her cookbook and she had a signing at...

SC: Yeah.

DR: ...Burdines's at the mall, it was like almost the whole City Hall was in line...

SC: Yeah!

DR: ...waiting to get her to sign their book, you know it was like...

RK: I heard that.

DR: ...the whole team.

MS: We all have our cookbooks.

DR: Yeah.

SC: I remember going to a—she was moving from Davis Island over to the...

DR: Her condo?

SC: ...her condo. And I remember she had a yard sale. And I went to the yard sale, I went—*wow, I'm actually at mayor, the Mayor of Tampa—at her yard sale!*

[Laughs]

DR: Well one thing, when her administration was ending, all the things that she had accumulated through the years, all of the memorabilia and little gifts and trinkets and things—she ended up, we have a...



SC: She, we had auctioned them off, I think it was, we had it at—they go to benefit Paint Your Heart Out, did it?

DR: Yeah, we had a flea market, and she sold all those items and it benefited Paint Your Heart Out, so—I still have a little heart, and red white and blue flag heart from her office.

SC: I still have a, a big gold “S”...

MS: Yeah.

[All laugh]

SC: ...sits on my desk.

MS: Right.

DR: So we all bought a piece of the administration.

MS: I think I have some Super Bowl item.

[All laugh]

DR: You and your football.

[Laughs]

MS: That’s right!

SC: Oh that was another thing, yeah, we were there for the first...

DR: Yeah,

SC: ...for Super Bowl. That was exciting.

RK: You got to go to the game?

All Three: No.

SC: No, but it was exciting. You know, it was an exciting time to see...

MS: For the planning.

SC: ...all the planning and everything that went into that, and—you know and it—been through a couple since then but the excitement of that first one is just....

RK: Did you get a lot of outside reporters calling and asking questions?

SC: Oh yeah, during that time, yeah.

DR: Yeah

SC: Poor John was about ready to pull his hair out, you know.

DR: Especially with Robert Smith, with public safety, a lot of the news affiliates would call and ask about you know, our strategy for crowd control and things like that. And he took a lot of calls during Super Bowl.

RK: Any other memories?

SC: I'm sure, we have a million, I just can't—I had forgotten all about a couple of the things you mentioned [laughs].

RK: Well I very much appreciate you coming. Again, I know you spent a full day at work and it was very, very nice of you to record your thoughts and observations.

SC: Oh, well we thought a lot about her, so, you know, she means, means a lot to us, so.

RK: Thank you very, very much, I appreciate it.

All Three: Thank you.

DR: Thank you for having us, we appreciate it.

[Tape stopped]

RK: It turns out that we're not completely done...

[All laugh]

RK: ...a couple of other points to make.

DR: We forgot about poor Kathy Betancourt!

MS: Yeah, that's right.

SC: We didn't mention Kathy. You always knew when Kathy was around, was around, because you could hear her. I mean, Kathy does not know how, what it means to be quiet. You know to be, you know to talk...

DR: So when she was in town from Tallahassee we knew she was there.

SC: Yeah, but she, I mean—that's somebody that got a lot of work done around there. I mean she was always...

DR: There was always a burning issue she had to go, follow...

SC: ...a go getter!

MS: Absolutely. Or when she was in Tallahassee and she would call daily, if you had to go get the administrator or the department director that she was calling for, you'd say, *hold on a minute!* [Imitating Betancourt,] *No! Don't put me on hold!*

[All laugh]

DR: When Kathy would start and then would just...

MS: *Well, give me a minute Kathy.*

SC: But when something would make her laugh, I mean, the whole floor could hear it. I mean she would just let out with a laugh.

MS: Do we—but at the time that Richard Simmons had come to the office.

SC: Yes, and, and James Michener.

MS: Well Richard Simmons came, and he...

SC: I got my picture taken with James Michener.

[All laugh]

SC: That's another funny story!

RK: Richard Simmons, is he the exercise person?

DR: Yes!

SC: Let's talk about Richard Simmons first.

MS: The exercise person! He came in his little, little short, short, shorts. And we all went out in the lobby...

DR: And we were proclaiming something that day.

MS: ...I forget, but we all went out in the lobby to see him. And I remember Mayor Freedman came out and she had a polka dotted dress on. And he looked at her and he said, *my dog has the same outfit.*

[All laugh]

MS: He must have a Dalmatian! [Laughs]

SC: Do you remember when he picked her up and carried her [laughs]?

MS: And he picked her up and....

SC: Picked her up! You know how hyper he is...!

[All laugh]

SC: ...picked her up and carried her! And I mean I thought for sure she was going to, I thought she was going to slap him. But she, she found it humorous; I mean you know, she just played right along with it.

MS: She did. And...

DR: And I remember at that point, Kathy Betancourt walked out and the dress she was wearing had on this big white collar. It was a blue dress with a white collar...

[All laugh]

DR: ...and Richard Simmons stopped and he looked at her, and he says, *oh my! A virgin pilgrim!*

[All laugh]

MS: And Kathy was not pleased [laughs]. So, she didn't stay long.

[All laugh]

MS: But we got to meet Henry Winkler.

SC: Oh yes, yeah! When they were filming...

MS: *Cop and a Half?*

SC:... *Cop and a Half*, here.

RK: He came to visit?

MS: Yeah, he came.

RK: He came to the mayor's office?

MS: He did.

DR: And Burt Reynolds.

MS: See I didn't even get to—yeah, but I didn't get to see him.

SC: I missed him.

MS: Yeah, but I didn't get to see Burt. He wasn't as personable with us as...

DR: Very [inaudible]. All the dignitaries that come through, and...

MS: And the Queen.

SC: The Queen! How could we not, how could we forget to tell you about the Queen!

MS: Oh, remember the Queen?

SC: And me, when I met Prince Phillip!

MS: That's right!

SC: We all go, yeah, that, that was, now that was big, that was huge. I don't think a Queen has ever been here before or since.

DR: Right.

SC: So it was a really huge event. And we were all on the Esplanade, you know where that is?

MS: The mayor made sure that we all got to see her.

SC: The mayor made sure we were all there so that could see this, I mean this was really big. And there, she walks down first and there's a gentleman walking behind her. And I'm standing there, and he walks right over to me and said, *how are you doing?* And takes my hand and shakes my hand. I said, *fine!* You know, I figure, man I don't know if ya'll were standing beside me, I went *who was that?* [laughs].

MS: I said, *that was Prince Phillip!*

SC: I've never been so embarrassed in my life! How could I not know who he was?

DR: You knew from that point on,

SC: I knew him then, never forgot him after that, but....

DR: But the mayor had ridden in the limo with the Queen. And when they got to the Esplanade, Mayor Freedman mentioned to Queen Elizabeth, *you might want to bring—you don't need your umbrella*. Because the Queen was going to carry her umbrella on her arm. And so, when Mayor Freedman says, *you won't need it, there's no rain today*, and the Queen goes to the mayor, *one never knows!*

[All laugh]

DR: And she proceeded to carry her umbrella!

MS: Or how about when Mayor Freedman got to go to the White House, and she told us that she got to sleep in the Lincoln bedroom, but the bed was so high, she had trouble getting into it [laughs]

SC: Up at her podium, you always had to take her little step stool with the podium, you've heard that story. That was funny.

RK: Did James Michener visit at all?

SC: Yes he did, he was one of my favorite authors, I read all of his books.

RK: He was living in St. Petersburg is that true?

SC: I believe so, and it was shortly before he died. But he came in the office—I still to this day don't know why he came in. I don't know if he was thinking about maybe doing a novel on this area, I mean I have no clue. But Mayor Freedman knew how much I liked him [sighs deeply]. And I was very shy. I mean, I, you know, I don't, I didn't, don't do well with important people or famous people. You put a camera in front of me and I would just faint, you know, I just can't do it. [all laugh]

And she made me go out front and stand in front of the city seal and have a picture taken with him. And I remember they took one picture and she said, *ya'll are not even looking at each other!* So she made me look at him [all laugh]....

DR: She liked those details!

MS: She liked...absolutely! And I remember when I saw the picture...

SC: I dreaded that picture, yeah.

MS: Who said, *Who's the older gentleman here with Sherry?*

SC: Oh my gosh, that's James Michener!

[Laughter]

RK: Did George Steinbrenner ever come?

SC: George Steinbrenner. This is kind of a, well maybe I shouldn't say this, we're on tape, but this is a funny story. He, when I was filling in for Sonny one day, his office called for the mayor. And I had never—I think it was one of the first couple times I had done it, so I wasn't really sure about protocol. So his assistant called and said it was George Steinbrenner, and he wanted to talk to the mayor. And I said *well, she's here, can you put him on?* And she said *well, you put her on first.* And I went, *I don't think so!* [Laughs]. And the mayor told me later, *Sherry, it really doesn't matter, you can put me on first!* [Laughs]. But I didn't know, you know, so—the funny story about Steinbrenner—yes he did. Yeah.

MS: And a Bob Buckhorn story, Bob always came in dressed to the nines. His suits, his ties, everything, you know was high dollar Bob. And he wore this one suit, it was a blue and white striped, seersucker suit. And that suit used to drive me crazy, it reminded me of the ice cream man [laughs].

[All laugh]

SC: George had one too, remember? George had one!

DR: Joe had one too!

MS: I could not stand that suit! [Laughs]

DR: But Bob was the kind of guy that after about two months, he would get tired of his ties, so he would give them to Joe Abrahams, and Joe would...

MS: Joe! He would!

DR: ...he would hang them over the doorway. So when Joe came in, there were the ties.

DR: Joe had a great tie collection.

[All laugh]

SC: And what about the lunch we went to, when we pulled that joke on Joe?

MS: Yeah, there, it was always pranks going on—even though we were working hard. We had gone to a special occasion lunch, probably at the Valencia, and Joe couldn't come that day. And all the leftovers from everyone's plate, they put in a to-go container, and brought him back all the leftovers, because he always had such a big appetite. But they knew he....

SC: But the waiter, when we told him to put it in a box, I mean he fixed it up just so elaborately, it looked like we purchased him this...

MS: This lunch!

[All laugh]

SC: ...huge lunch! But it was everybody's lunch!

[All laugh]

MS: Or do you, do you all remember the year—I think it was Bob's thirtieth birthday, when you made the mistake to send me to pick up the birthday cake. And I went to pick up the cake, and I'm getting it out of the car—and the cake....

SC: It was black, right?

MS: Yeah, it had little tombstones and black icing and everything. And I went to get it out of the car, and the whole thing just slid right out of the box onto the parking lot, [laughter] and there I am; I'm just horrified because I'm supposed to be going back to this mayor's office birthday party. And I'm, I just took the cake and I scraped it back in the box [laughs]. It had gravel and everything in it. They, they were good sports about it. We didn't eat it, but...

DR: Yeah, right.

MS: ...talk about embarrassing!

DR: Yeah!

[All laugh]

DR: It definitely a [inaudible]

MS: It definitely was [laughs]. What else?

SC: We worked but we had fun!

RK: Did Donald Trump every come to your office?

All Three: No.

DR: Bill Clinton came through...

MS: Yes he did when he was running...



DR: ..when he was campaigning...

MS: ...for office.

SC: And a couple, a couple of democratic candidates came to the office. It was Al Gore I believe, once. Gephardt.

MS: Gephardt.

SC: I remember, I felt so—I used to say some pretty silly things. I'd, you know not, just not thinking, but I think it was Al Gore if I'm not mistaken. He had come in the office, and somebody had introduced me to him. And a little while later, somebody else came in and introduced me to him. And then the mayor came out and said, *Sherry, this is*—could have sworn it was Al Gore, and I went, *yes, Mr. Gore, for the third time*. [Laughs].

[All laugh]

SC: I mean he's, I could have kicked myself; was thinking what I could crawl underneath some ...[laughter]...I mean, just say hello again and forget it! Don't have to stick your foot in your mouth. [All laugh]. And then this guy runs for president, you know. I'm pretty sure it was him.

DR: Yeah, Sherry had the pleasure of doing all the city proclamations. And so she helped compose a lot of those and, and...

SC: Yeah, and for...

DR: ...and it was you know, clown week, and....

[All laugh]

SC: ...clowns week, the clowns would come in yes. Well that's when I started doing them, because Sonny did a lot. And then I would back her up so. And I still do them to this day, but...yeah, we did have some strange groups.

MS: Yeah we did.

RK: Was it hard for a group to get to see the mayor?

MS: Not really.

SC: No, I don't think so. You know, Sonny was very protective of the mayor, but no, I mean it doesn't seem like it was—I don't ever remember there being any stress or tension.

MS: No.

DR: No.

SC: Unless maybe it was just the times were slower, and the city wasn't quite as big. But you know it was just not—we stayed busy but we didn't, you know we weren't, were never, we never felt hectic or....

MS: Well I think we, because we enjoyed what we did and we, we were just one big family.

DR: Yeah, we backed each other up and we, you know, made the best of it.

SC: Yeah, one person got busy, then you know, the other one wasn't that busy, we just, you know helped them out. It was a good, it was a good group.

DR: Yeah, the ten years went fast.

MS: Yeah, they did. They did.

DR: Went really fast.

RK: OK well....

MS: Now we're done [laughs]

[All laugh]

RK: Thank you for that addendum.

SC: I cannot believe we didn't....

[End tape]