P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0012
Robert Chapman
24 June 2014

ABSTRACT – Robert Chapman

Interviewee:	Bob Chapman
Interviewer:	Seth Kotch
Interview Date:	June 24, 2014
Location:	Campus of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
Length:	1 hour and 40 minutes

Robert “Bob” Chapman worked with the WDBS and WAFR radio stations in the 1970’s. Chapman grew up in Florida and moved to North Carolina to attend Duke University. At the university, Chapman focused on the campus radio show WDBS, Duke Broadcasting System, where he served as station manager. At WDBS Chapman helped facilitate the switch from an AM to a FM station in order to reach larger audiences. The station featured folk music, a women’s program, classical concerts, pop music, and other material. WDBS participated in political events on campus, like hosting a vigil in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr and covering the occupation of the Duke’s president’s house. Chapman also worked with Ralph Williams with WAFR, a black community radio station. Chapman served as the coordinator of Durham Bicentennial Commission in which he helped co-found Preservation Durham. This interview is part of Media and the Movement, an oral history and broadcast collection project housed in the Southern Oral History Program and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

TRANSCRIPT: Bob Chapman

Interviewee:	Bob Chapman
Interviewer:	Seth Kotch
Interview Date:	June 24, 2014
Location:	Campus of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
Length:	1 hour and 40 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

[Throughout the interview, birds are singing and breezes are hitting the mic, occasionally obscuring the conversation.]

Seth Kotch: Alright, I'll just start by saying my name is Seth Kotch. I'm with the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And I'm here on the campus of Duke University, not far from the Bivins Building, the current home of WXDU and the former home of WDBS, with Mr. Robert Chapman. It is June twenty-fourth, 2014. Mr. Chapman, thank you very much for sitting down with me. [Laughs]

Bob Chapman: It's a real pleasure. I can't believe that you're exploring this part of history. Thank you.

SK: Oh, you're very welcome. Well, we like to begin oral histories with a little bit of life history. I know that you grew up in Florida, or I believe I know that, anyway. Can you talk a little bit about your early life and maybe your parents and things like that?

BC: My mother is a native Floridian. My dad was born in Georgia and he grew up in Charlotte, [breeze picks up] joined the Navy, met my mom in Jacksonville, Florida, and I was born at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville. We moved back to Charlotte when I was two years old, and at age eleven, we moved down to St. Pete, Florida. My dad had gone to Duke, and he had also gone to a boarding school in Tennessee, called McCallie, and he [evidently] decided that I needed to do the same. And so, I went to McCallie and was admitted to Duke, I think largely because when my dad was there, the man he roomed with later became the director of admissions at Duke, and they made some sort of deal. The headmaster at McCallie couldn't believe I got into Duke at that time. [Laughs]

SK: So, does that mean you were not an academic star in high school?

BC: No, no. No, I set all the records at Duke in terms of the lowest possible GPA that's ever actually graduated. But it must have been inevitable that I would graduate, because I did. But I think they made a mistake on my transcript, quite frankly. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

BC: Or either they wanted to get rid of me, one of the two.

SK: Right, exactly! We'll talk about the things that you were doing instead of attending class.

BC: Well, one of the biggest, most fun things was being involved with the radio station. WDBS, which stood for the Duke Broadcasting System, had just moved to East Campus. It had been in the Divinity School Building, called the Gray Building, next to the Chapel over on West Campus, and had moved to Bivins Building, which was built in 1910 or so as Trinity Prep School. It was a high school. It was a feeder school for Trinity

College. And it was really a forgotten corner of the campus and sort of a nice, relaxing place to be. Plus, in those days, all the women were on East Campus, so it gave you an excuse to come to East Campus.

And I started out as a news announcer, and my good friend, Bob Conroy, was the chief announcer, and he became the program director. And then, another friend, Bill Veatch, became station manager, and he suggested that I run for station manager, which is the same as general manager. And so, there was a group of very intense individuals out of the Engineering School, primarily Jim Davis, who is still around. [Breeze picks up] Jim is the chief engineer over at WNCU radio and also does a show there still, all these years later, called "Eight Track Flashback", every Saturday.

SK: Right, right, um-hmm.

BC: And a man named Evans Wetmore. And they started haranguing me to figure out a way for the station to get off-campus. We were a carrier current station, meaning that in theory you could pick us up at 560 AM on your radio, or you could pick it up at 1600 AM later on. We moved the frequency. But the signal was terrible, and it was really people enjoying doing radio shows, but virtually no audience whatsoever. And so, we began the quest for an FM station.

And Duke paid for a feasibility study to see if we could get a license, and they determined that the channel that WSHA is now on, which is, what, 89.5 or something like that, 89.3, was available. But it would cost a couple of hundred thousand dollars to build a station, and it would be a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year to run it, because you couldn't get ads. It was a noncommercial frequency.

SK: Right.

BC: At this time, WUNC-FM was off the air. The University had quit supporting it, and so that frequency was dark.

SK: So, it had been—WUNC had been running before it hooked up [0:05:00] with NPR in the seventies?

BC: Right. NPR started probably in ’71, I think.

SK: Okay.

BC: And so, the only idea we came up with was to acquire a commercial license and then support the station—make it self-sustaining by selling ads. And so, there was a really terrible station in town called WDNC-FM that played what we referred to as “Roop dee doop″ or ″elevator music”. It was automated. The FMs were very undervalued in those days.

SK: Right.

BC: AMs were where everybody listened. The two big AM stations in Durham were WSSB 1490 and WDNC 620. WSSB was the only rock and roll station, but it was only 1000 watts in the day and 250 at night. You could barely get it at night. And they had two DJs. One was called Country Boy, who had a fake Southern accent that was just horrible.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: But he was the morning man, and you woke up instantly if you left your radio on, because the guy—and a guy named Buck Poe was their Top Forty guy in the afternoon. And Top Forty was, you know, was a pretty insulting format. It was called the “sandwich format”, you know, one or two singles, and then an ad, and then a screaming DJ walking over the start and walking over the finish of the tune.

And at this time, something that was called “underground radio” or “progressive rock radio” was starting to evolve. And once you heard it, you didn’t want to listen to anything else. And there were a few stations around that I got exposed to, WORJ down in Orlando, WNEW in New York. [Breeze picks up] And then, there were a couple of AM stations that were attractive, WBZ out of Boston. And so, the possibility of using radio for something other than just, you know, screaming DJs was exciting.

So, we approached the owners of WDNC-FM and approached the vice-president of Duke, Chuck Huestis, and said, “If we can get them to agree to sell us their license, would you lend us the money to buy it?” And he said, “Well, I would be interested in seeing if the trustees would agree to do that.” So, he agreed to put it before the trustees. And we offered WDNC seventy-five thousand dollars for the license.

SK: [That’s a lot of money].

BC: Well, it was about ten times as much as it is today.

SK: Right.

BC: Or eight times. And so, we thought we had a deal with them. But the co-owner of the newspaper, Steve Rollins, had to clear it with his cousin, who was also named Rollins, and he didn’t want to do it. And so, suddenly, we were nowhere. And the second idea was to try to buy the other FM station that was underutilized in town, which was WSRC(FM). WSRC was a station owned by a group of five white dentists [that programmed] black or African American or soul music and had some popular DJs, Norfleet—oh, gosh.

SK: Whitted?

BC: Norfleet Whitted and Ervin L. Hester were the two probably most well-known.

SK: Um-hmm, sure.

BC: And they would run some very interesting things like the daily obituary column, you know, that Norfleet Whitted would read the obituaries. And then, Ervin Hester was known as Ervin L, and he was—you know, it was an interesting station to listen to, but it went off the air at sundown, and then they continued to broadcast on the FM, which was only 3,000 watts, and that was the 107.1 license. And so, as an alternative, we offered the station manager of WSRC sixty thousand dollars for that license, a much inferior license. And one thing led to another, but ultimately we got it under contract.

And then, we had it all set up to begin broadcasting, you know, reroute the telephone wires from Bivins out to their transmitter, and then build a new tower out on Rose of Sharon Road, and got it all figured out, and then the Duke trustees [0:10:00] turned it down. [Laughs] And it was like—because I think we were asking for sixty thousand for the station and another sixty-five thousand for improvements to turn it to stereo. And so, I remember we had the whole staff here, and I was in summer school, and it was the day of finals. And I talked to Mr. Huestis and I said, "If we revise the proposal overnight and cut the ask—and I think the ask was a hundred and fifty—if we cut the ask as much as we can, would you re-present it to them tomorrow?" And so, I stayed up all night, recalculated all the [debt amortization] schedules and all this stuff and got it back to Mr. Huestis first thing in the morning.

But the only problem was I had a final exam in, I think it was a sociology course, or it may have been a history course. And so, being me, I hadn't done any of the reading, and I always waited until like the night before the test to study, always. And I didn't study. And so, that prior evening, all the guys said, "Can we do anything to help?" And I said, "Can you take the reading list and go to the library and prepare a synopsis of each one of these books for me?" And so, as I walked toward the test, thirty minutes before the test, these guys all showed up and handed me a ten-page synopsis of all the reading, [laughs] which I had just enough time to read. They got it from something called *Book Review Digest*, I think was the thing that they got most of it out of.

SK: I could have used a service like that.

BC: And I think I got an A-minus on this test, you know. [Laughs]

SK: Nice. Yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

BC: It was a fantastic service! And so, anyway—so, Duke agreed to do it. We went on the air on a—gosh, I used to have this memorized—June seventeenth of '71, was it?

SK: I think it was '71, yeah.

BC: And the first tune that was played was "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles. Anyway, in the meantime, we had gone through—because this all happened in the spring of '69—we had gone through torture in '70, because two different African American interest groups cross-filed on the license transfer with the FCC.

SK: Right.

BC: And the first one was a guy named Steve Roberts. And so, I met with Steve and I said, "Okay, Steve, what do you want?" [Breeze picks up] He said, "I'll withdraw

the petition if you give me a show." I said, "Okay," and so Steve had a show on WDBS for about four years after that. He was a teacher out at Wright School here in Durham.

The other two guys were a little more hardcore. They were Ralph Williams and Robert Spruill.

SK: Um-hmm.

BC: And they said, "Okay, we'll withdraw the petition if you get us a *station*." [Laughs] And so, there was a program in those days called the Educational Broadcasting Facilities Program under HEW. And Jim Davis and I got together. We found a frequency which was 90.3 FM. We filled out the application, we did, you know, all the finances, and we applied to the HUD—I mean, not HUD—to HEW, and we got forty-seven thousand and thirty-two dollars, and we got the station on the air. And it actually went on the air several months before WDBS did. So, I was able to fulfill my promise.

And it was a beautiful operation, gorgeous studios down in the old Prince Hall Masonic Temple, down at 336½ East Pettigrew Street. And a lot of great people were involved in that: Don Baker, also known as Shanga Sadiki, Obataiye Akinwole, Ralph, oh, gosh, Karen Rucks—a lot of neat people.

SK: So, this is WAFR?

BC: Baba Femi. Yeah, WAFR.

SK: Um-hmm, right, so get that on record.

BC: And so, it was a nice contrast between the two stations. And so, DBS went on. It was really the only progressive station in North Carolina at that point, one of about ten in the country.

SK: And when you say “progressive”, can you sort of define what you mean by that?

BC: Well, I defined it at one point—the idea that the music was part of a progression, that you played one song after another because the first song implied the second, and it revealed something that you had laid a predicate for in your choice of the first, and that you made it so that [0:15:00] the last note of the first tune was the first note of the next tune, so that it seemed like a continuous progression.

SK: Right.

BC: [Laughs] That was *my* definition.

SK: Sure. Was this a reaction to the sort of sandwich programming?

BC: Yeah, totally, which was just—and Top Forty had really gone downhill. And then there was the whole music movement worldwide, you know, that happened in the sixties. I mean, we called it “underground”, or “psychedelic” was the other description but, you know, the whole Janis Joplin and Grateful Dead and Rolling Stones and Beatles, obviously, and Cream and, you know, Frank Zappa, and everybody else that you think of that continually get played today on the radio.

SK: Yeah.

BC: So, it was just an amazing efflorescence of great music. And so, our problem was, you know, what do we play?

SK: Right. [Laughs]

BC: Because we had so much to choose from.

SK: So, backing up just a little bit, I guess I’m wondering about two things that sort of have to do with power dynamics. One was how you, as a Duke undergraduate, got

the ear of the vice president of the University and managed to push forward a substantial loan. And then, the other is your relationship with Steve Roberts, but maybe more so with the people who came to populate AFR, and how they sort of felt about these Duke students, and sort of what the relationship was to you, and whether or not that was sort of contentious or sort of friendly competition or a partnership, or what that was. So, maybe let's just talk first for a moment about your student status at Duke and how you managed to get Chuck Huestis on your side.

BC: Well, I—yeah. Duke was really a functional anarchy. [Breeze picks up]

SK: [Laughs]

BC: It was all driven by the accounting system. And, you know, it's the "every tub on its own bottom" idea. So, they had this sixteen-digit account code. And at WDBS, as the little AM radio station, they gave us the General Accounting Procedures book, which was—[laughs] actually, they had misspelled the word "procedures" on the back of it, which I thought was funny.

SK: [Laughs] Right.

BC: But, anyway, it explained how the component and the object codes worked and what fund accounting was—and so, I began to realize that if you could get some kind of traction within the accounting system, you could get power at Duke. And so, the man who ran the University in reality was the man in charge of the money. In those days, it was Chuck Huestis, you know. Today some people would say it's Tallman Trask, who is the executive vice president. If you really want to make something happen, you know, don't really mess with the academic committees or the various—you can be committee-d to death.

But so, the idea was: How do we present a proposal that makes sense financially? So, Terry Sanford had just come into the seat as president of Duke. And Huestis took it to Mr. Sanford. And I got to know Mr. Sanford pretty well later on. My wife worked for him for twelve years. I hadn't even met her at this point. And, you know, he was the kind of man who had no trouble encouraging people to take the next step. And he would always—he empowered people. He was not at all worried about failure. It didn't bother him at all, you know. He had had enough success in his life that, you know, he was willing to take a lot of risks.

And so, we presented this proposal to borrow this money at six percent. And Mr. Sanford said, "Okay, I'll back it, but you've got to pay *nine* percent." [Laughs] So, you know, he wanted to make our life difficult.

SK: [Laughs] So, were you going to pay for this with commercial revenue?

BC: Yeah, we were going to sell ads, run a profit. [Breeze picks up] The station really never did—and I think we had a two-year moratorium. And I got good advice from my dad, who was successful in real estate and so forth, about how you structure loans, and so I was able to figure out how to do all that stuff, and how to make deals. But I would say Terry as a backer, and getting Mr. Huestis to take it to him—and so, then Huestis became the chairman of our board, and we set up a separate corporation called WDBS, Inc.. And we had previously been governed by something called Radio Council, and that went out of business, run by Mr. Weatherby, who taught speech at Duke. [0:20:00]

So, we began attracting attention and decided to be pretty radical in terms of politics. There had been a change in—the Duke *Chronicle* had become pretty radical when Dave Birkhead took over as the editor.

SK: Sure.

BC: And they've pretty much stayed in the same political groove since then, the *Chronicle*, all these years. It's a little harder with radio, but the thing with radio is you can say it with music.

SK: Sure.

BC: And so, you know, there was protest music and there was folk music.

SK: Right.

BC: We ran folk music shows, and we ran a woman's show, and we had something called the "Daily Concert" every day, which was esoteric classical music, and so—a lot of fun.

SK: Well, it's interesting that you mention that. I feel like, of course, the idea of protest music is not unfamiliar to anyone who has turned on the television or read a book, especially a history book. But it seemed definitely that WDBS and VSP and AFR were—could be—their most political moments came through music, lesser than spoken commentary.

BC: Well, there was overt protest music, you know, Tom Rush and Pete Seeger and Joan Baez, and people like that, and I'm trying to think of one other. But AFR, when they went—the first day they went on the air, they did stuff that just made people all over town, like, "*What* is happening?!" They played Moms Mabley and Redd Foxx and all

these very off-color comedians from the—what do they call it? The—whatever circuit it was?

SK: The Shitlin' Circuit?

BC: Yeah, the Chitlin' Circuit, all these—and they just shocked people, you know.

SK: Yeah.

BC: And then, there was, you know, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," by Gil Scott-Heron.

SK: Right.

BC: And then, anyway, politics were—there was a big shift in politics among the students who were politically oriented, which was only probably a fourth of the students, or a fifth, from the Civil Rights Movement to the Antiwar Movement. And that probably all happened in '67, '66.

SK: Sure.

BC: Probably the Watts and Detroit riots in '66 were sort of at the end of much student interest in the Civil Rights Movement. Plus, things like SNCC threw the white members out, you know.

SK: Right.

BC: And then, the war was cranking up. And so, pretty much every—and then there was that, and then there was the counterculture, which was basically oriented around all the different kinds of drugs that came up. Pot and LSD were probably the two main ones, mescaline and mushrooms and stuff like that. And so, you know, people getting stoned and listening to psychedelic music was a different experience. [Laughs]

But I think the Antiwar Movement, even then, I don't think it ever involved more than a fourth of the students at Duke.

And then, I guess probably the biggest Civil Rights Movement involvement of the radio station was the Vigil, which was when—in '68. This is before it had become FM.

SK: Right.

BC: But—

SK: I'm sorry. This is the vigil that took place after Martin Luther King's assassination?

BC: Right. This was in May or—

SK: April, probably, of '68?

BC: April, yeah, April of '68.

SK: And this wasn't just sort of an evening gathering? This was a days-long, or longer than that gathering?

BC: Yeah, and the radio station was pivotal in that, because the—sort of the run-up to it was—we had a very active news department at WDBS. And Adam Clayton Powell, who was the black congressman from Harlem, was speaking at Duke, and we were covering that. And the night that we heard that King had been shot, Powell also had an attack of some—not a—it wasn't a—no one attacked him. He had a health episode, like a mild heart attack.

SK: Yeah.

BC: And so, we were the supposed ABC News affiliate. And so, we started—you know, they always—once something horrible happens, they want to find other things

happening. And so, [0:25:00] this story of Powell was something we originated out of Durham that made the national ABC News.

And then, Raleigh caught fire, you know, that night. And we got a call at WDBS from some of the student activists saying, "We're going to have a protest march to Hope Valley." And the basis of that was there had been, like a year or two, maybe two years before, there had been a civil rights protest march around the Hope Valley Country Club because the Blue Devil Club, which was part of somehow of the athletic association, was having their annual banquet there, and Hope Valley Country Club did not admit black people. And so, this made the *New York Times*. And, you know, it led to Duke doing a number of things, including selling the grad student housing to the Housing Authority out on Morreene Road. It was almost a direct response to that.

So, this same idea came up. And Dave Birkhead and Bunny Small and Abbey Doggett and two or three of the radical leaders said, "We're going to have this march." And so, we, as being the radio station, we started broadcasting on our little AM station, "There's going to be this march tonight," and like a thousand people showed up on the main quad. So, we knew that people were listening to us on occasion. And then, Bill Griffith, who was the vice president or dean of students, said, "Why don't you all, instead of going to the Hope Valley Country Club, why don't you go to the president's house?" It was his idea. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

BC: Which was much closer. I mean, Hope Valley is like four miles, and the president's house is like a half a mile. And so, a thousand people—and Mrs. Knight, Douglas Knight's wife—Douglas Knight was president of Duke—stood out in front of

the house, which is on a hill. It's sort of a would-be Frank Lloyd Wright modernist concrete low-slung building. She stood out in the driveway as the students came up, and the front door was open, and she said, "Come on in!" And she didn't know that there were a thousand people, because like the first group was like twenty. And so, like all thousand people went in and took over the president's house. And then, they occupied the president's house for three days, I think it was.

And all of that was broadcast by WDBS live, every speech. We had mics, and so everybody else on campus was listening to the radio station about what's happening inside the house. And then, they voted to move to the main quad. And so, after the third day, they marched to the main quad and set up tents, and they were there for another week. I say "they"—we—I was there, too.

And the agenda was the mistreatment of the black service workers at Duke. Because when I was an undergraduate at Duke, I had a maid. Most people don't know this. I mean, not my own, but my floor had a maid.

SK: Right.

BC: So, my bed when I came back from class was always made up.

SK: Oh?

BC: And the trash always emptied.

SK: Yeah.

BC: And these maids and janitors were being paid sixty-five cents an hour, which was minimum wage in those days.

SK: And these were, by and large, African Americans?

BC: A hundred percent. And they mostly lived around here in Walltown, where we're sitting right now.

SK: Okay.

BC: Right across the street. And so, they wanted to form a union called Local 77, and they had a leader named Oliver Harvey, a very nice man. And sort of the ultimate resolution of the Vigil—and the Vigil was amazing, because the black restaurants in Durham started sending food over, The Chicken Box and—

SK: Wow.

BC: And it was fried chicken and grits and mashed potatoes. And it was a totally self-sustaining, almost, kind of thing, and students camping on the quad in tents.

SK: Right.

BC: I mean, you see it now in Krzyzewskiville, but—

SK: Exactly. [Laughs]

BC: And then you'd get expelled if a woman was in your room, you know, so this idea of sleeping together out in a tent in front of the Chapel was quite radical. So, anyway, ultimately the chairman of the Board of Trustees—and Knight disappeared at this point. He went off—he had an attack of what is it, liver, hepatitis—and he was gone. [0:30:00] And so, the chairman of the Board of Trustees came in to take over the school, Wright Tisdale. And the final resolution of the Vigil was Wright Tisdale singing We Shall Overcome while holding with Oliver Harvey and agreeing to recognize Local 77 as a [bargaining union] for the service workers. So, that was the Vigil, more or less.

SK: Do you remember—I mean, that's such a—obviously a pressing need, but such a specific one to address in the context of this assassination, when I'm sure people

were just generally upset and worried about the Movement, and sort of just fearful and unhappy generally. Do you recall at all how that emerged as the essential issue behind the Vigil?

BC: I think it was, you know, "What can we do locally?" You know, the whole idea of act locally. We had—you know, Pete Seeger came, Joan Baez came, and we broadcast all this, too. And this guy named Big John Beecher came down from the mountains, who was a legendary radical from Celo or some place. And, I mean, it—and David Harris came. [Breeze picks up, plus mechanical humming sound (fan, blower?) begins] And he ended up marrying—who was it? One of the—was it Joan Baez? Or it may have been, oh gosh, the woman who was married to Ted Turner, the actress.

SK: Jane Fonda?

BC: One of those, I think, was married to David. Anyway, he was the president of the student body at Stanford, either Berkeley or Stanford.

SK: Yeah.

BC: He came all the way over.

SK: Wow.

BC: It was a very intense thing. And we were trying to feed all this to ABC and we had a quote, which our news director, Scott—um, anyway, it was attributed to him, that they said to him, "Call us back when the rocks start flying."

SK: Um.

BC: Or, "Call us back when somebody gets hurt." you know.

SK: Right.

BC: And that actually made the *New York Times,* that quote.

SK: Wow.

BC: You know, here's a peaceful vigil, and the national news is not interested unless somebody is—unless there's violence.

SK: That's very interesting. So, you said that only about a quarter of the Duke population seemed to be involved in activist kind of activity.

BC: And I think that's probably overstating it at this point. It was probably closer to fifteen percent or ten percent.

SK: You arrive in 1965? It's a couple of years after the school was desegregated. I'm assuming the students—

BC: There were only four black students when I got to Duke.

SK: Wow! So, that's fewer than desegregating the schools—

BC: And I had never been to a class with a black student.

SK: Um.

BC: And probably the whole time I was at Duke, maybe I had one or two classes where there was even one black person there.

SK: And I'm assuming that was also true at a boarding school in Tennessee.

BC: Oh, yeah!

SK: Where did you develop your sense of racial politics or social justice?

BC: I think it's the same as the kids today that don't even understand why people talk about race, you know. Growing up in St. Pete, I had a couple of experiences. There was a pool downtown—and it's just like knowing what's right and wrong, you know, and what's this all about? But my friends, two friends of mine and I were swimming in the Spa Pool, which the city owned, and the pool was full of people, all white. And three

black guys came in, in swimsuits. And you could have heard a pin drop. The place became totally quiet. And they went to the high dive, and all three did these beautiful dives into the pool. And all the white people, except me and my two friends, it was like oil and water, they just *whewww*, out of the pool! You know, they *ran!*

And so, we stayed and we swam with these three guys, you know. It didn't even cross my mind. What's going on? Why is this? I used to ask my grandmother, "Why does it say 'colored sit in the rear' in the city bus?" I would always go sit in the rear. It was much more fun to sit in the rear.

SK: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

BC: [Laughs] You know, and people would scorn me. So, the next day, St. Pete tore the pool down.

SK: Wow.

BC: The *very next day* they had bulldozers out there, like it couldn't be sanitized at this point or something.

SK: Do you remember what—I don't want to put you on the spot for something so specific, but do remember what your grandmother said to you, or generally what people would say to you when you would ask questions like that, you know, "Why is the sign here? Why are these people being treated this way?" You know, "What's happening?"

BC: I think my parents, my dad and my mother, they always taught—you know, we were never allowed to use the n-word or cast aspersions, [0:35:00] and we, you know, always—I don't know, I think we had an attitude of respect that just came through the family, even though we were Southerners. But there was some history in our family on

my mother's side. Her great-grandfather had been assassinated in Atlanta for sponsoring—he was in the state legislature—for sponsoring legislation to end prisoner rentals—

SK: Oh, wow!

BC: Which was the thing that they did to substitute for slavery, and it was much worse than slavery, because slaves were an asset and people took care of them. When they rented prisoners, it was an expense, and they abused them much worse. And it went on until, like, to the 1940s.

SK: Oh, yeah. North Carolina was notorious.

BC: North Carolina. Probably the very worst was Alabama. But Georgia was terrible.

SK: Wow.

BC: And the governor of Georgia, John B. Gordon, had my mother's great-grandfather killed—that's our theory, and there's a book out now that pretty much proposes that theory.

SK: Wow, okay.

BC: Because he [Gordon] was one of the largest owners of convict leases. So, this sort of comes down in my great great grandfater and he was a Confederate soldier from Charleston. And on my dad's side, also, his great-grandfather was in the Texas legislature after the Civil War. And he introduced these bills that never got a minute of consideration, like "workers must be paid in cash." [Laughs] I went to Austin and looked up his—or "scales need to be accurate," you know.

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right, right.

BC: [Laughs] And things like that.

SK: The little details.

BC: But none of that ever passed. So, the sense of—I think it's just that I inherited it in my—sense of social justice.

SK: Do you think your father's military service had anything to do with that?

BC: No.

SK: No?

BC: No, the U.S. Navy was totally segregated.

SK: Right.

BC: And this—in World War II, I never heard of any integration of the Navy. They had Filipino cooks, I think was about as close as they got.

SK: So, when you got to Duke, did you find that there was any exchange between the campus and a town that is half-black?

BC: Yeah. I was involved in a number of civil rights marches. There were a couple of really great leaders in Durham at the time, Howard Fuller—

SK: Yeah.

BC: And Ben—oh, gosh. He had a group called UOCI. I'll think of Ben's name in just a minute. And Durham had a reputation for being a place where African American businesses had been successful, and NC Central, obviously. Ben Ruffin was the guy I was trying to remember.

SK: Right.

BC: And two or three other men like that. And they had run, while I was here, there was a boycott of downtown businesses. And the head of the woman's student

government at Duke, Mary Earle, whose sister is Sylvia Earle, the famous scuba/deep sea diver, from Greensboro, was very radical, and Abbey Doggett. And over one summer—I came to summer school every summer. [Laughs] I had to to stay in school. There was a big peace march—not peace, a big civil rights march, that started at St. Joseph's and went to City Hall. The governor called out the National Guard. You know, the Klan showed up. There were only four or five of us that were white people in the group.

And one of the Klan's guys—they showed up in this big red pickup truck with German shepherds on the back. And one of these guys threw a Coke bottle, and it hit one of the marchers in the head, who was standing in the front. This was old City Hall where the Arts Council is now. And it was one of these moments where the whole thing could have just come unglued, because the Klan's guys were outnumbered like fifty to one, but I'm sure they were armed. And, you know, it could have been a really messy situation. And Howard Fuller, God bless him, he just stood out and put his arms out like this and just stopped the crowd.

SK: Wow.

BC: I was adopted by a guy, not Ralph, another guy who [later] worked at WAFR, during the march, and they got us back to St. Joe's, [humming noise on recording ends] and we spent the night in the basement, because the National Guard—there was a curfew. You couldn't leave. Anyway, so—

SK: I don't think people hear about that kind of history in North Carolina, and especially in this area, the sort of—[0:40:00] the potential for violence and the real violence that happened.

BC: Well, not that long later, five years later, all the people who ended up going to Greensboro, I knew all those people.

SK: Um-hmm, yeah.

BC: Anyway, that was an odd group. But there was a liberal streak in Durham that was very fair. Probably the guiding light was Mary Semans. Have you ever heard of Mary Semans?

SK: I've heard of her.

BC: Yeah, she was a member of the Duke family and a member of the Board of Trustees and on the Duke Endowment, and she was Ben Duke's granddaughter. And she had been on the City Council in the sixties and led the integration of the Carolina Theater. And all of the civil rights groups that needed assistance, she always gave them money. And so, because she was a real leader in Durham, I think that helped Durham not get out of, you know, get out of control. But what was happening in Durham was white flight. I mean, with the integration, the city school system almost immediately went ninety percent black. And virtually everyone who could afford it, moved; all the white people who could afford to move, moved out of the city district, which was not even the city limits—it was smaller than the city limits—or sent their kids to Durham Academy, you know.

SK: Right.

BC: And that was—and they used to call Forest Hills the Durham Academy school zone. So, and there were a lot of things that were breakthroughs over the years. I mean, LeRoy Walker was a huge influence for the good, and then the integration of the Duke sports teams.

SK: Right.

BC: And, I mean, I think Durham has pretty much had its act together, compared to a lot of places.

SK: Sure. It's interesting, because I used to live in Forest Hills.

BC: Hmm?

SK: And a lot of Duke faculty lived there, and they still do.

BC: Um-hmm. And one or two of them send their kids to Hillside, but not many.

SK: I doubt that, yeah, yeah.

BC: [Laughs] I knew a couple who did, but it was, you know, being the only white kid—

SK: Right.

BC: And this was the old Hillside, which was near Central.

SK: Right, right. So, you had a sort of inherent sense of racial equality or a general sense of—

BC: No, I mean, what did you think the first time you heard of the Washington Redskins?

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

BC: Did it just—I mean, as a kid, didn't it sort of like—?

SK: See, I think that's—

BC: Did they think that through? [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, well, yeah! [Laughs] I think that's actually a really provocative question, because I think—I mean, I don't want to turn this conversation to me, but I don't know how much I thought about it. You know, I don't know that I really noticed.

BC: See, I notice that stuff.

SK: Yeah. I think I would *now*. I mean, I'd like to think I would now, right?

BC: [Laughs]

SK: But I don't know. I remember when I was a kid, I had a friend who liked the Redskins. And I don't know why he liked it, but for all I know, he liked them because he thought that the stereotyped image of the warrior was cool to him.

BC: Right. Yeah, yeah.

SK: In a way that carried—we had no idea, really, of the sort of—the politics of identity or anything, for better or worse.

BC: Exactly. That's right, that's right.

SK: But I don't think, you know, I think most people—you know, the analog being to the seventy-five plus percent people at Duke at the time who [were inactive/weren't active]—I think most people don't get their hackles raised by that kind of thing, right.

BC: Right, right.

SK: And that's why it takes activism to sort of give people a slap across the face, or a nudge, or whatever you want to call it, to say, "Hey, complacency is a choice."

BC: Exactly, exactly. And that was a big part of what was going on. They even called it radicalization, you know.

SK: Oh, yeah.

BC: Just opening people up to awareness. Sensitization, I guess.

SK: Sure. So, did you—were you a radio listener as a young person? What do you think prompted your interest?

BC: Yeah, I loved radio. I mean, in St. Pete, the talk show on WLCY with Marshall Cleaver, called “Open Mike”. We always made fun of it and called it “Open Mouth”.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: Because they would have—even in those days, and this was in the fifties, there would be people would be calling in about how the Council for Foreign Relations was taking over the world and the U.N.

SK: Oh, right. Wow, yeah?

BC: The same strain, the same stuff as now. [Coughs] And then, when you get exposed—I mean, the whole rock movement, I mean, you know, and then in 1961, when the Beatles started getting played on the radio, you know. [0:45:00] But, I mean, there were those moments: the Ed Sullivan Show with Elvis Presley when I was a kid.

SK: Yeah.

BC: Every girl in town is—you know, all the other eight-year-olds were just—you know. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Right, wishing they were thirteen.

BC: [Coughs] Right.

SK: Thirteen-year-olds wishing they were eighteen.

BC: Right. And so, music—it’s just a completely different level of power.

SK: Right.

BC: But I was in—my personal music taste was much more esoteric. I was into things like Edgard Varèse, you know, unusual strange-sounding music, and stuff like that, which we never played on WDBS. [Laughs]

SK: Um-hmm. So, what about television? Were you a TV watcher during the sixties? Were you getting civil rights news from television? Or was it mainly through radio?

BC: I was a media fanatic. And, you know, I never was able to really read McLuhan without going to sleep—

SK: [Laughs]

BC: [Laughs] But I got the gist of what he was saying. And in 1971, a friend of mine named Andy Berlin, who was the editor of the 1968 Duke yearbook, which is the very—it's the only one that there are no copies available of. It was the two-volume blue book, in which, you know, there was nudity and drugs and, you know, this whole thing was—it's artistic statement. And the trustees went nuts! They tried to confiscate the copies of it.

Anyway, Andy and I went to Terry, Mr. Sanford, and asked him—told him that we thought that Duke ought to have a media center. And he gave us like half a million dollars to set up a film and video production company within the University. And we had a film lab, and we had Oxberry animation stands, and we built a big recording studio in the new music building.

SK: Wow.

BC: And I was the director of that for a year. Andy was the director for a year, and then I succeeded him. And then, that was the last time I ever worked for anybody other than myself, which was in '72.

SK: So, that was after you graduated?

BC: After I graduated. I was guess it would have been ’73 that I left the media center. But, you know, video didn’t really exist at that point, because television equipment was phenomenally expensive. A videotape recorder was a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, two-inch wide tape.

SK: Wow. It cost more than a radio station.

BC: Yeah. And so, nobody could afford—and the quality wasn’t even that good. And a portapak, which was the portable—well, it changed in about ’73, when Sony came out with the half-inch black and white portapak cameras, which were four or five thousand dollars, which you could carry a recorder. And that began to change it, but—and then, three-quarter-inch came out. But it was still pretty funky until, I’m going to say, mid-eighties, when the digital editing came out, Avid and all that stuff.

SK: Right.

BC: And then, digital photography didn’t really come out until the mid-nineties, or even later. But now, everybody [empowered] by their iPhone.

SK: Yeah. [empowered and maybe snared], to say the least, right?

BC: Yeah. So, you know, I had all these theories about how media was going to be liberating and how there would be a thousand channels on cable TV. And we were the—Joel Fleishman got us a grant for four hundred thousand dollars to pick the operator of the Durham cable system, and we did this big report on the future of cable, [narrow casting], and there would be a thousand channels someday. Everybody was laughing at it. Of course, there are now.

SK: Oh, yeah.

BC: And I don’t know. And computers didn’t exist.

SK: Right.

BC: There was one computer at Duke, and it wasn't even at Duke. It was out in the Triangle, and there was microwave linkage to it. It was called the Triangle University Computation Center, TUCC [pronounced "tuck"]. It was an IBM 360. And using a computer was doing punchcards in those days.

SK: Right.

BC: But, you know, ultimately when the PC came out, which—gosh, I'm going to lose my train of thought here, but I'm thinking that my first—early eighties, maybe?

SK: Sure.

BC: The first Apple was maybe '82, something like that?

SK: I'll buy that, yeah.

BC: And, you know, I was really into the theory of the future, which—and I would say, "Well, you know, someday all the information will be in the computer," because we'd sit around and put stuff into the computer. That's what you did, you know, built databases and—you know. Now, all the information [0:50:00] *is* in the computer with the internet, you know.

SK: Right. Did— this is a little—well, it's not quite off-topic. But, speaking of entering information, saving information, did stations like WDBS and others generally record their programming?

BC: No. We had to keep a paper log for the FCC.

SK: Okay, right.

BC: But it didn't have anything other than when an ad played and confirming that you gave a station ID every half-hour and that you read the frequency meter for your transmitter every hour or something like that.

SK: Can you explain why you have to do that?

BC: I don't think they have to do it anymore.

SK: They don't?

BC: I think that they finally made them stop doing that. But, you know, and there was always this fear that the FCC is in town, and they'll take your license away. And they walk in unannounced and they look, "Let me see your logs." And so, you know, the chief engineers put the fear of God into you that you had to take those meter readings. And it was the power and the frequency. But I think they stopped that years ago, because they're so stable now. There's no need for it. There was really no need then. And I would suspect that most of the stations have complete logs of—actually, you could in those days make a tape log. You didn't have to do—you could have kept the tape\.

SK: Right.

BC: We had one that would run at [1-7/8] ips and had an 18-inch reel or something, and you could get like twelve hours on it. But then, what do you do?

SK: Right, yeah, exactly.

BC: [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] You start over from the beginning, right?

BC: Right. So.

SK: So, I think it's so interesting that you went for a for-profit commercial model.

BC: There actually were four or five stations in the country that were our models. And they were WDRB at Dartmouth—WDCR, Dartmouth College Radio at Dartmouth, which was a commercial AM, and I think they might have FM also—WYBC at Yale, WPRB at Princeton, WHRB at Harvard, and WTBS at MIT. And Ted Turner bought their call letter for like a half-million dollars, because he wanted WTBS, so I don't know what the station at MIT is anymore.

And the whole idea was you were not accountable. You didn't have to beg. You didn't have to have a subsidy.

SK: Right.

BC: Like, WXY—excuse me, WXDU now is part of the Duke Union. And we, as WDBS, never wanted to be part of the Duke Union, because student politics was so vicious, and we had a lot of fights with the student government. We tried to get a subsidy from them, and they would—you know, it was just political football. "Why are you playing classical music for an hour every day? Nobody listens to that," you know.

SK: Right. So, well, on the subject of advertising, did you get advertisers? Who advertised with you?

BC: Yeah. We had a lot of good advertisers. We had—probably our biggest advertiser was the Record Bar, corner of Church and Parrish Street in downtown Durham. And then, the Record and Tape Center came in. And then, Schoolkids Records came in. One of our big advertisers was Phil Harvey. You know who that is?

SK: I should. It rings a bell.

BC: He's the like porno king of America. He's out of Hillsborough, PHE.

SK: Oh, man! I feel like I'm reaching back in memory to some, you know, *Indy* piece on him years ago, or something like that.

BC: Phil Harvey opened America's first erotic boutique on the corner of Columbia and Rosemary in Chapel Hill, and he sold patchouli oil and other erotic things.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: I think that was about the most erotic one. But he went on to be a gazillionaire. He runs that whole Adam & Eve.

SK: Okay! Okay, so he's the Adam & Eve guy? Okay, okay.

BC: He's the guy—but he came out of UNC. He was out of the population program at UNC, a grad student.

SK: [Laughs] No irony there at all, right?

BC: And we had Alexander Julian was one of our, was Maurice Julian's son, who became a famous fashion designer.

SK: Um-hmm.

BC: And, oh, gosh, who—[0:55:00] the Ivy Room, which is no longer here in town. You know, all the restaurants, and there weren't that many that catered to kids: Topp's Drive-In, which was here.

SK: Um-hmm, yeah. [Breeze picks up]

BC: And White Star Laundry was too. So, I think we grossed maybe [a/two] hundred thousand a year. And in those days, it was considered a standard rule of thumb that a radio station really had to gross three hundred thousand a year in order to have paid staff. But we didn't have any paid staff.

SK: Right.

BC: So, you know, I got paid eight hundred dollars to be their station manager for a year.

SK: [Laughs] Were you a salesperson? Who was selling ads?

BC: Yeah. I did a lot of selling. I hated it, you know.

SK: Yeah.

BC: It was just—[laughs] it was so awful.

SK: Yeah. [Laughs]

BC: And some people had a knack. Every now and then, we'd find a natural-born salesman, and our revenue would triple, you know.

SK: Right, out there. So, who made decisions about what to play?

BC: The program director had total autonomy. The station manager, although I had my own show, mine was after midnight on Saturday nights, and nobody was listening.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: Although I had interesting people, you know, showed up for it.

SK: Sure.

BC: One of the—let me digress for a second—one of the guys that showed up later became a famous country music writer and made a fortune, from Durham, Don Schlitz. He wrote "The Gambler".

SK: Oh, wow.

BC: He would come every Saturday night, bring his guitar and sit in the other room, and after—like three in the morning, I'd mic him up and let him play. You know, we'd do crazy things. But, anyway, the program directors—the two main ones when I

was there were Ken Ross, and he had a friend named Kathy Dunn, Kathleen Dunn, and they had the "Ken and Kathy Show". It was the morning show, and they were *great*, really great. And Kathleen Dunn has been with the public radio station in Milwaukee for like forty years now. Look her up on the internet. She is like one of the political powerhouses in Milwaukee. She does like the Milwaukee's version of the "Diane Rehm Show".

SK: Oh, yeah?

BC: And Ken works in Hollywood. He works for one of the big hospitals out there and runs the national telethon that's on every year. I forget what it's called.

And then, probably the best was Bruce Babski. And then, we had George Graham. And if you look up George Graham, he has a website and he's got a lot of stuff from WDBS on his website.

SK: Yes! I was just looking at that this morning, actually. And part of the reason I was asking about ads was, I think through that site, they have a lot of recordings of sort of spoof ads.

BC: Fake ads.

SK: Yeah.

BC: Well, that was—most of those were done when it was an AM-only station.

SK: Right. That's what I figured.

BC: And they wanted ads, because the format required ads, and so they made up products. And they had products like the Wellington Raffelator [also spelled Raphelaytor], which was a product that made your car—you could jump over the Grand

Canyon, you know. And they strapped somebody to a torpedo, and the torpedo went much further with the Raffelator in it.

SK: [Laughs] Right.

BC: And then, they had M&M&Ms candy and all kinds—they were really well-done. And you can hear them now. [Laughs]

SK: I heard a couple, yeah. I heard one for Magellan, which was a petroleum-free gas.

BC: Magellan! Petroleum-free gasoline, right. [Laughs] A lot of humor. And then, Bruce Babski, B-A-B-S-K-I [sound of breeze hitting mic obscures quite a bit of conversation]. And Bruce, he had an encyclopedic knowledge of great music and knew all the artists, and his taste was so impeccable that, just listening, you didn't want to turn off the radio. And Bruce dropped out and became a Buddhist monk later on, and I don't know what he's doing now.

SK: Yeah. Where did you get your music?

BC: Mostly it would come in the mail. And then, the Record Bar—and then, also, Sam Goody opened a store in Raleigh at Crabtree Valley. And all these record stores would give us as many records as we wanted. And so, new records like—I remember the first Monty Python record that came, you know. It came in a—[1:00:00] the album cover looked like Deutsche Grammophon *The Berlin Philharmonic plays Beethoven's Ninth*, and it's got magic marker on it, and it says, "Another Monty Python record." [Laughs] You know?

[Sound of especially loud bird singing]

Bruce Springsteen made a big push. I mean, he sent people down, and, you know, we got all these special, like suddenly, like , “He’s here! He’s now Number One!” It’s like, from a promotional standpoint, I never saw anything like it. And then, we got a lot of stuff that nobody would ever know about or probably ever heard again. And I used to love playing those things.

SK: Yeah. That’s what—I deejayed at WXYC, and that’s very much their mentality, is to play things that the listeners haven’t heard before.

BC: Yeah. Yeah, that was—so we had probably three or four thousand records, all alphabetized or categorized some way or another.

SK: Wow, yeah.

BC: And there was not really a playlist. There was a playlist that you had to play at least two songs off the list, but everything else was up to you. But—an active news department. We would throw festivals now and then. We had the Homegrown Festival on the main quad, which was cool. I was really into live music. And so, we would go to—there was a restaurant in town called the Bluebird Café, that became SomeThyme, that became AnotherThyme. Every Friday night, we would have “Live from the Bluebird”, and that—I always—I wasn’t really into canned as opposed to live. I liked live much more.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, were you there, or was your staff there with a device to broadcast?

BC: Yeah, we’d send a little—we had a remote board, like four pots on it and three mics. The trick in those days was you had to run everything through the phone company, so you had to order a line. And Evans Wetmore, our chief engineer, was just a

genius at intimidating the phone company, you know. You know, he would get them to perform, because he knew the tariffs.

And when we moved the tower from WSRC out to Rose of Sharon Road, to our new tower that we built, when we did the cutover, the switchover, it was this horrible hum and buzz on the wires. And within about four hours, we had seventeen General Telephone trucks, you know, out there. I mean, I called the president of General Telephone at his home number in Stamford, Connecticut, on a Sunday morning, you know. We had a lot of fun with that stuff. [Laughs]

SK: Right. [Laughs] So, when first Steve Roberts and then Ralph Williams and Robert Spruill sort of voiced their opposition to you taking over WSRC, sort of what was—your response was to sort of bargain with them, and the result was they get WAFR, Steve Roberts gets a program on WDBS. I'm sort of wondering what their objection was when they came to you and said, you know, "We're going to oppose this."

BC: Well, they had a very legitimate objection, which was there was no radio service for black people in Durham after sundown, when WSRC-AM went off the air. And you couldn't argue with that.

SK: Yeah.

BC: I mean, I felt bad about it. And so, I was just thrilled when they showed up, because I knew that there was a license available.

SK: So, even though WSRC was playing this sort of canned Top Forty garbage—

BC: Yeah, it was pretty bad.

SK: [Laughs] And even though it was owned by white owners, there was a sense that, at least, this is aimed at a black audience.

BC: Right. It's like one of the owners of the station that was a dentist in Durham, and actually ended up becoming my dentist, Dr. Willis—he's no longer alive. But when Jim Mayes asked him to invest in the station, he said, "Well, why should I invest in the station?" He said, "Well, go take your car and have it washed. And when you get it back, turn on your radio and see which station it's tuned to." [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, yeah. I like that. Yeah, yeah. So, did you have a relationship with WAFR and with those guys after you helped them, you know, acquire the license for WAFR?

BC: We had a major fight, because I worked down there on Pettigrew Street for about a year in the background, trying to get grants—and we got [1:05:00] like a fifty thousand dollar grant from the Reynolds Foundation and we got a few other grants—and rebuilding the studios. And then, Evans Wetmore came in, and he was their chief engineer and he spent a lot of money making it the most deluxe studio you've even seen. He was really a, you know, gear-head and electronic nut. Evans, by the way, has been in Hollywood for the last thirty years, and he's won two or three of the Oscars for technical—not from Oscar, but from the SMPTE, the Society of Motion Picture Technical Engineers, or something like that, and Television Engineers.

SK: Right.

BV: And he restored all the old Fox MovieTone News, saved them from disintegrating.

SK: Wow.

BC: Evans is a very neat guy. He lives in Manhattan Beach, California. [Clears throat] But then, there was some sort—we had a Board of Directors, and they were not

keeping any books, or to the extent that they were keeping books, they were somewhat primitive. And I got involved with the bookkeeping and I said, "You know, we really have to start having board meetings." Bill Bell was on our board, a few other people, a guy named Lee Noel—anyway, we ended up having a board, and Ralph and Robert broke away and said, "But we've got the key to the station." And so, they fired the board.

And so, I went to an attorney friend, who was a recently minted Duke lawyer, and we filed a lawsuit, which we ultimately ended up winning. And I can't remember exactly how it played out, but what happened was Ralph and Robert, who's no longer living, really got into the how-cool-it-was-to-run-a-radio-station, and not into—and so, sort of the thing that was—sort of the thing that I thought was most indicative was that they had a Miss WAFR contest. And Robert picked—[sound of train whistle] and the women sent in head shots. They were like somewhat risqué, [train whistle] you know, beauty queen [ ]. And the prize was a trip to Africa with Robert Spruill. [Laughing] [Train whistle] And so, I mean, like, come on! You can't be that blatant, you know.

But the death knell of the station was [clears throat] Ben Perry was the head of the Redevelopment Commission, [train whistle] and he tore the building down. And they had nowhere to go.

SK: Wow, with all that top-of-the-line equipment in it?

BC: And they put all that equipment in storage. And I thought for years that WNCU got a bunch of that equipment. But Jim Davis tells me they did not, but that the equipment actually just disappeared.

SK: Right.

BC: But WNCU got a lot of the staff, like Don Baker.

SK: Right.

BC: In fact, WNCU was pretty much WAFR under stable management. And I really felt like AFR gave birth to NCU in a lot of ways—if, for nothing else, that almost all the staff came out of WAFR.

SK: Right. So, you were involved in setting up WAFR. You were briefly involved, at least, in trying to get a license for the Triangle Women's Radio Network?

BC: [Laughs] Oh, I totally forgot about that!

SK: I'm kind of—I can't find anything about the existence of that network.

BC: [WTRW], Triangle Women's Radio. WDBS had a woman's show every Sunday afternoon from one until five, or one until four, and it was Julia Brown, Chris Carroll—

SK: Who is Christine.

BC: Christine Carroll, C-A-R-R-O-L-L, and Celeste Wesson. And Celeste is still in public radio—she works for "Marketplace".

SK: Right.

BC: And she was with NPR for years, and she's in the West Coast bureau. [Clears throat] And they came [1:10:00] to me and said, "Okay, well, you showed the people at WAFR how to start a station. We'd like to start a woman's station." And I said [laughs] the same thing I said to WAFR, "You've got to have a license, and there's actually one available, which is WUNC."

SK: Oh, um-hmm.

BC: 90.5—91.5.

SK: Right.

BC: And—

SK: I'm sorry. This is very detail-oriented, but how did you know there was a license available?

BC: Well, [clears throat] I subscribed to *Broadcasting* magazine and I bought the *Broadcasting Yearbook*, and I talked—I could probably name half the stations in America. If you'd name a city, I could tell you what station it was. You know, Fort Wayne, WOWO, I mean, just on and on.

SK: Yeah.

BC: So, in commercial broadcasting you have something called minimum operating requirements, and if you do not operate the minimum amount of time, you lose your license. I don't know what it is—twenty hours a week? Something like that. Educational FM does not have minimum operating requirements. So, WUNC, which was controlled by something called the RTVMP Department, Radio, TV, and Motion Picture Department, which was a dreadful, awful place in every way.

SK: Was this the academic department at UNC?

BC: Yeah, awful! Since abolished, which was, you know—waited too long.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: But I referred to it as the place where all the doors are locked and everybody says, "No!" You know, because we would go over there occasionally and say, you know, "Hey, we're into media!" And, you know, *slam!* door, you know. It was a totally ossified academic department, which is sad, because it had some good graduates who had come out of it. Like, John Ehle was a graduate.

SK: Oh, okay! Yeah! Yeah, because he did *Radio Plays*.

BC: Right. But at that point—and so, we said, you know, "UNC's license is expiring, and they have to reapply. And they haven't operated for five years. They've missed one whole license—" I think licenses are three years or four years. "And so, they have no basis to get their license renewed. [Laughs] They haven't done anything."

And so, we filled out the application, did this beautiful proposal, went to Washington, got NPR to agree to affiliate with us, and did the rounds, went to NAB, you know. We took the bus, Chris and Celeste and I on the Greyhound went up to Washington. It was quite a trip. And so, we filed.

And a professor at UNC heard about it, heard that we had filed. UNC hadn't even filed. They weren't even going to file. They just assumed they'd get an automatic renewal. Bob Gwyn—I don't know if you know Bob Gwyn. He was a nice guy. He later started the retirement community out on Weaver Dairy, whatever that's called.

SK: Uh—

BC: Yeah, anyway—

SK: I know it, but—yeah, we'll both remember when we turn the recorder off, right?

BC: Yeah. He was a Quaker, very sweet man.

SK: Carol Woods!

BC: Carol Woods. I mean, he may not have been a Quaker, but he seemed to be very gentle. Bob Gwyn spearheaded a movement to save the license. And either he or the chairman of the department [Wesley Wallace?] at the time always tells the story about "having to drive to Washington, D.C., at a hundred and twenty miles an hour, to get it into the FCC one minute before five p.m., before it expired." You know, so suddenly, we

were—we had two people applying. And because there was no law on the topic, UNC got it.

SK: Right.

BC: So, had we been quieter, and they had not applied, Triangle Women's would have gotten the license, which would have been quite a coup.

SK: Hm.

BC: You know, I did the same exact thing five years later. I got a phone call from this guy named Bud Cotton. This is totally off the point, but—and he had a friend named Bud Leathers, Bud Cotton and Bud Leathers. They said, "Can you meet us for breakfast at seven in the morning at the Carolina-Duke Motor Lodge?" I said, "Why would I do that?" And they said, "Well, we want to start a radio station." [Laughs]

And so, I met these guys at seven. "What kind of radio station do you want?" And they said, "We want a Christian radio station." I said, "Well, [1:15:00] there are no frequencies. You're not going to get one. *But* there *is* a TV frequency." I don't know why it just came out of my mouth. They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Channel 28, formerly WNAO, it's been off the air for fifteen years. It's allocated to Raleigh." Excuse me, Channel 22. Channel 22.

And darned if they didn't apply for Channel 22, and then, *God blessed them*, literally, within days of their deciding to apply for Channel 22. Channel 11 moved out of its studios out on Duke Street and *gave* them as a charitable tax deduction their studios.

SK: Wow.

BC: And Channel 28 decided their tower out next to the UNC tower on Terrells Mountain was no good anymore and *gave* them the tower.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: And so, suddenly, they started WLFL, which stood for With Love For the Lord. [Clears throat] And they subsequently sold the station for some twenty-five million dollars or something like that, these two guys, and they only put one condition, is that once an hour they have some kind of inspirational message for like ten years. So, for ten years, every hour, you'd see this little blurb, like, you know, "With Love for the Lord." And here's Bud—and Bud Leathers and Bud, they never even sent me a thank-you note. [Laughs] So, anyway, you pay attention, though.

SK: Yeah. So, you were still active in radio in the early 1970s, at least in—

BC: And then, in 1974, I started my own company, which is a film and video company.

SK: Right.

BC: Called College Reference System, later became Learning Resources Network. And I made promotional films and videos about colleges and universities, and I *totally* got out of radio. I was very disappointed with what happened with WDBS.

SK: Can you talk about that?

BC: [Sighs] I thought it was always essential for WDBS to be a student-run operation. It could be professionally staffed to some extent, if necessary. I mean, I hear people on WXYC that sound like they've been on it for twenty years.

SK: And they have been. [Laughs]

BC: [Laughs] Which is fine, I mean, they're good. But the general manager should be a student. But this woman named Kathy Stanford, who subsequently married Dave Birkhead, became the general manager, and she wasn't a student. And I said, "This

can't be. You can't be the manager. You cannot be the manager of the station if you're not a Duke student."

And they said, "Oh, we need to go off-campus. We need—" and they bought a building down here. And then, they started—they hired a professional manager to come in and run it. And they were just—the station went to pot. It was awful. It was as bad as everything it was trying to replace. This guy was an ex-Marine that Duke hired. Duke threw some more money at it, and then finally they sold it to Foxy 107, and I assume they got enough money to get all their money back.

In the meantime, there was an episode where Jim Heavner tried to buy the station, and I was very involved in blocking that. And when I heard that Heavner—how did that work? Oh. Oh, no, no, what it was, a Duke professor named David Lange, in the law school, who teaches communications law, made a proposal to buy WDBS and be the manager of it. Probably, in retrospect, he would have been a great owner. He was a nice guy. I think he's still around. I haven't spoken to him in years, because we became arch enemies. But it was hubris on my part, because I considered the station to be my baby. And suddenly, I'm hearing that Duke is selling the station to Peter Lange, not Peter—

SK: David.

BC: David Lange. So, I called up Jim Heavner and said, "Jim, I don't want the station to be sold. I think it needs to stay as a student station. *But* I happen to know that tomorrow afternoon they are going to accept [1:20:00] an offer to sell the station for three hundred thousand dollars to David Lange. And because the station is owned by a nonprofit, they cannot sell it to anything less than the high bidder. And were you to put it in a higher bid, they couldn't sell it to David Lange. And you need to know, going in, I

am not supporting your getting the station. This is purely tactical. I hope you don't get it. But were you to make an effort, you would at least keep Lange from getting it, which would make me happy."

SK: And what was your reason for not wanting Lange to have it at the time?

BC: I think it was just the fact that I wanted it to be WHRB, WYBC—I wanted it to be a student-owned commercial FM radio station. And here are these people who are opportunistically grabbing it, and it just pissed me off, basically. But it was—you know, I'm sure had David Lange come to me and said, "Bob, here's my plan. Will you help me?" I probably would have said, "Oh? Well, you're so nice to ask."

SK: [Laughs] Right.

BC: You know? "It needs help. Tell me what you think you're going to do with it," you know, and if I'd liked it, I might have supported it.

But anyway, the next day, Heavner showed up with a check for three hundred and thirty thousand dollars, ten percent more, [clears throat] and handed it to Bill Green, who was the VP for public relations at Duke, who was running the thing at the time. And that threw it into turmoil, and one thing led to another. This is all written up in *The Sun* magazine.

SK: Okay.

BC: There is a *Sun* magazine article that David Searls wrote. Do you know David Searls?

SK: I don't. [Breeze picks up]

BC: David Searls moved to Silicon Valley and became a guru of high tech. He's called "Doctor Dave" and he writes these things called *Cluetrain Manifesto.* He's now on

the staff of Harvard as a disruptive technology guru. Anyway, he wrote this story about this whole episode, and Sy Safransky published it in *The Sun* back in—I'm going to guess this was like '76, '77.

SK: Okay. I'll look it up.

BC: You can look up *Sun*s? They exist somewhere? [Laughs]

SK: There'll be a record of it somewhere [ ]. Someone saying, "This doesn't exist anymore," but [they'll do it on paper]. Also, speaking of alternative publications, you had a brief piece in the *Carologue*—

BC: Oh, yeah!

SK: In the early seventies that was sort of just describing alternative radio in the region. And I won't ask you to, you know, restate that argument, but just along those lines, do you have thoughts on the role that WDBS and other stations played? And maybe how that role has changed or not over time? I mean, the transition of DBS to FOXY 107 feels fairly profound [laughs] in more ways than one. Is there still an alternative sort of radio culture out there?

BC: I think that this area for the last twenty years, going back to about 1990, or maybe even a little bit before, maybe twenty-five years, which would be 1990 [laughs], maybe even thirty years, has had the *best* radio in America. I think that the two public stations, NCU and UNC, are outstanding. And I think that the three college stations, the four college stations, SHA, KNC, XYC, and XDU, are *terrific* stations. I mean, I start listening to one of them, and I think, "God, what am I missing on the other ones?" You know? KNC used to be awful. It was all like metal, you know, stupid rock. But it became good four or five years ago.

SK: Oh, okay. So, I used to—I remember the metal. I haven't listened lately, but—[laughs].

BC: Well, they may have gone back to it, I don't know. But for a while, they had some really good people there. SHA sometimes is totally brilliant. And there's actually—well, there's a little high school station down in Wendell or someplace that's very cool. But anyway, but between XYC and XDU, they do the best radio done anywhere. I don't think anybody has ever done better radio. And the problem radio faces now is Pandora.

SK: Sure.

BC: I mean, because you—you know, you put in one group you like, and they make a station, and they do a pretty dang good job. And quite frankly, the sound quality is better. [Clears throat] FM radio, theoretically, is 15 to 15,000, which should be perfect, but coming out of my system, Pandora sounds better, and I've got a pretty good system. [1:25:00] I think the stereo separation is very marginal and very noisy on FM. That's one of the issues. And also, I think they tend to run compression on it to try to boost the signal, which makes it less lively than it should be. I think WNCU has the best signal, [laughs] because Jim Davis is the chief engineer.

SK: Oh, right.

BC: That's what he's doing. And—

SK: So, is radio becoming—has it become more passive? I feel like the style of radio that you're describing with DBS and these other stations, there's a sort of—some kind of rapport between the DJ and the audience, that the station manager and others are making these very active choices about what to play. You sort of imagine people sweating and laboring in the station to put a show on. And today that labor is being

done—well, I suppose I think two things. Maybe one is, you know, radio now is the thing you turn on in your car when you don't have anything else to listen to. And two, the labor is being done by people who are, for instance, making their Pandora playlist, or maybe just even selecting one band or song they like and letting everything else get sort of handed to them. So, I'm circling here, but I'm just kind of wondering if maybe—

BC: I don't know. I truly think that XYC and XDU are superb. And I think—I hear great stuff, and the fact that I can go online and find out the names of the stuff is wonderful.

SK: Yeah.

BC: [Clears throat] I wish XDU had a better signal. I wish we'd gotten the fifty thousand watter back in the sixties when it was available. And UNC, I have mixed feelings about. It's a little—it's not as exciting as it should be, you know, when they went all talk.

SK: Right.

BC: Not that their music was ever that—I just feel like they've always—it's always been sort of constipated, in terms of like, "Okay, how about cutting loose a little bit here, guys?" They've got tons of money. I mean, they've got two beautiful studios—

SK: Right.

BC: One in Durham and one in Chapel Hill, and a big staff and a big budget. And I listen to it a lot, because it's reliable and it has a huge range.

SK: Sure, yeah.

BC: It would be nice if they just, if they were a little less cautious. And that's why I like NCU so much—they're a lot less cautious. I mean, the gospel, you know, is fantastic, and Amy Goodman's stuff, whatever that's called.

SK: Oh, yeah. Is she out of Pacifica?

BC: Yeah. It's—

SK: "Democracy Now"?

BC: "Democracy Now", yeah. I think it's a great show.

SK: Yeah. And that's much more—I mean, I think I get what you mean to sort of try to place them politically, it's like WUNC is definitely more centrist. I mean, "Democracy Now" is pretty leftist, you know, government-focused, Democratic, big-D Democratic-focused, but definitely to the left of WUNC.

BC: Well, they cover a lot of stories that you don't hear anywhere else, a lot of stories. And I've never caught them—I mean, you catch their bias, but you don't catch their factual inaccuracy.

SK: Oh, sure!

BC: Like Fox News, a hundred percent factual [inaccuracy]—what, do you just make this stuff up? Come on! [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] There's actually journalism happening on "Democracy Now", right?

BC: Yeah!

SK: I felt like WUNC was trying to go national and become like a WBEZ or a WNYC with "The Story".

BC: Um-hmm.

SK: And then, that, I guess—I don't know if that folded—was it this year?

BC: Is it not on anymore?

SK: Yeah, they're done.

BC: Oh, no! I didn't know that.

SK: Yeah.

BC: I love that show!

SK: They picked up a couple of—"Here and Now", maybe, and a couple of other sort of national-scale programs.

BC: Yeah? That's too bad. And they have way too much BBC on.

SK: A lot of BBC.

BC: Why would you do this?

SK: [Laughs]

BC: You know, if you want the BBC, you can buy a shortwave radio and listen to it. [Laughs]

SK: Sure, sure,

BC: Good Lord!

SK: Well, I thought maybe we could just conclude—I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on how Durham has changed since you were a student at Duke. I mean, that's a huge question. But if there's a story that you see, as someone who's played a role in sort of change—

BC: Yeah, I think—I like that question because I think Durham has really begun to realize its potential, but it's not near where it should be. I think—I mean, Durham was a washed-up backwater industrial town in dying industries, tobacco and textiles. And

Duke didn't want to have [1:30:00] anything to do with Durham. And I—you know, they considered it a—their biggest liability was where they were, like—you know.

SK: Huh, yeah.

BC: And I take a lot of personal pleasure or pride in having, myself, been involved in a lot of the trend creation. And one—I mean, WDBS would have been a good example of that. The civil rights activities would be a good example of that. I was—I got involved with Dr. Walker, and we did the USA-USSR Summer Arts Festival back in 1974 in conjunction with the Russian track meet. And that showed Durham that we could put on a world-class arts festival, which was superb.

And as a result of that, I got offered the job of being the coordinator of the Durham Bicentennial Commission, which was a two-year job. And we had twenty—we had four main committees, and they had twenty goals. And we succeeded on all twenty of our goals, and eighteen of them are still going, like starting the Festival on the Eno, which Glenn Hinson was the program director of, the North Carolina Bicentennial Folklife Festival. It was much better than the festival now, because it had much higher—you know, Glenn has incredibly high standards.

SK: Right.

BC: If you didn't learn it from your granddaddy, you weren't going to be allowed to—

SK: [Laughs]

BC: But it was—and a subsequent mayor of Durham, Wense Grabarek, was interviewed in the paper, and I was reading the interview. And somebody said, "Mayor, when did Durham start to change?" And he said, "I tie it into the Bicentennial Festival,

when we showed that we could have a hundred thousand people show up in a brand-new park that didn't exist and nobody knew it was there, and then have three days of incredible fun together." You know?

SK: Yeah.

BC: And so, that was fun for me. And then, my wife was the person who invited the American Dance Festival to move to Durham, and we did the sales pitch on that. And that was a hard thing to sell, but we got Liggett Group behind them. And so, a lot of—I had the first company in Durham that had any venture capital. I had five venture capital companies were in the LRN.

SK: What company was that?

BC: It was called Learning Resources Network.

SK: LRN, right. Gotcha.

BC: And was on the—so, during the Bicentennial we started Preservation Durham.

SK: Right.

BC: We started Community Gardens. We started Rails to Trails. We saved Stagville. Started the Historic Preservation Technology Center there. We started the Historic Preservation Society of Durham (now Preservation Durham). Published a book with a historic walking tour of downtown. Saved old St. Joseph′s AME, now Hayti Heritage Center. We saved the Carolina Theater. We started the Festival. We got the downtown, first historic districts in Durham. So, all this stuff began to—and then, I think the biggest change has happened—well, this is my project. I did this project right here that we're sitting in. This was like showing that you can do good infill development.

But the biggest change was, following on to this one, Duke jumping in with both feet in Durham. And Scott Selig, I met with him the other day. He's the head of real estate at Duke, and they're renting 980,000 square feet in downtown Durham, and they pay above-market rent. And Scott—his office is in American Tobacco, and he said, "The reason that we pay above-market rent is that we like the idea of having a river run through our campus." You know, it costs more. The [common area] maintenance charges are higher.

But Duke has just taken the bull by the horns, literally, and said, "What do *we* need to do to help make Durham a place that will attract smart people?" And he gives away this book, called *The New Geography of Jobs*, that says, you know, on the back blurb it says, "San Francisco, Boston, and Durham," [laughs] a list of the three as cities that are attracting smart people. And I meet—every day, I meet new people here in Durham, and I say, "Why did you decide to move to Durham?" And they say, "Well, I did my research." [1:35:00]

SK: Yeah!

BC: [Laughs] The same answer from everybody!

SK: Right.

BC: I don't know where they're looking, but wherever it is, it's saying, "Durham is where you ought to be!"

[Breeze picks up]

BC: And, you know, we've done the little area downtown next to Cocoa Cinnamon and Geer Street Garden and the Trotter Building, [the Central Park Charter School]. But look at American Tobacco! There's not a project like that in the whole

country! American Underground? I've had nothing to do with any of that, [though I may have been] in on some of the very early meetings.

But so, it started—I think the operant principle in Durham has always been inertia, which means that it's very hard to get anything going. But once it starts going, it tends to stay going, stay in motion. And one of my—two favorite quotes about Durham. Back in the Bicentennial days, this woman named Margaret Haywood, who just died about a year ago, six months ago, was the first president of the Preservation Society. And somebody was [doing something], and she turned to her husband, Bert, and she said, "Boit, and we don't even know them!"

SK: [Laughs] Right.

BC: [Laughs] That was the attitude of Durham in those days. The other side of the coin: I made this film called *Portrait of the Triangle* back in 1983 about what's going to happen in Durham in the next twenty years. It was a prediction film. And I interviewed Jonathan Howes. I said, "What's wrong with Durham?" You know Jonathan Howes?

SK: No.

BC: He was mayor of Chapel Hill and he was a professor of planning at UNC. He said, "What Durham lacks is it has no leadership cadre." You go to Winston-Salem meet with [seven people, and they can decide]. Want the School of the Arts to move to Winston-Salem? Let's get our seven people together and we'll decide. [ ] The same seven or eight people. Durham—for years it was baffling to people. They would move here, and they would find nobody in charge. There really isn't a leadership cadre. It's more fluid. And I think that's the cool thing!

SK: Yeah.

BC: That's what's really still true[ ] now, is it really has been a grassroots kind of thing. Now, the issues for the future in Durham are: We're leaving our young black male population totally behind. The gentrification—which I, as a developer, am all for because I don't think anybody should live in a crappy neighborhood, and [clears throat] on the other hand, we are displacing people. There's no doubt about it. Because when you have housing in Cleveland-Holloway go from thirteen thousand dollars to three hundred thousand dollars in a three-year period, you know, the word gets out. I mean, so affluent people of means want to live within walking distance of downtown. These shabby old crappy houses are rooming houses. You know, kick out all the tenants. Well, okay, how do we deal with that other side of the equation?

And I think I know—I have my own answer for it, and it's something I'd like to work on, which is I think we need to work really hard to get on a first-name basis with more people. Because we need to get rid of "they"; it needs to be "us". And I hate to—I sound to myself like I'm preaching, but—I have this one idea that I haven't attempted to do yet, which would be like a National Name Tag Day, where everybody would wear a name tag, [clears throat] and you'd be responsible for introducing yourself. You know, it's like when you go to a conference. It's great, because you can, "Oh, hi John! Good to see you again!" You know?

SK: Right.

BC: If we begin taking responsibility for each other—you know, I'm responsible for creating jobs. You know? I hire casual—people call me all the time, asking for work, and I always try to give it to them, even if it's just—I've got somebody in an hour doing an interview—even if it's just casual labor. But if we took responsibility for each other

and showed respect for each other as people, I think a lot of those issues would go away. Because what's happening still is there is an "us" and "them" mentality, and there doesn't need to be. Just take the extra time. So, that's it. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Well, I think that's a good place to stop. Thank you very much for sitting down with me.

BC: Okay.

SK: Okay.

BC: Okay. Let's get the National—

[Recording ends at 1:40:00]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council