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P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0009

Tom Campbell

22 August 2014

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ABSTRACT – TOM CAMPBELL

Interviewee: Tom Campbell
Interviewer: Seth Kotch
Interview Date: August 22, 2014
Location: The Regulator Bookstore, Durham, North Carolina
Length: Approximately 1 hour and 3 minutes

Tom Campbell is a co-founder and co-owner of The Regulator, an alternative bookstore in Durham, North Carolina, which opened in December 1976. Born in 1946, Campbell grew up primarily in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, before moving to Durham to attend Duke University in 1966, where he quickly became involved in The Duke Chronicle, the student-run newspaper on campus, rising to role of managing editor by his senior year. In the interview, Campbell recounts how journalism and activism led to a career as an independent bookseller. Topics include: the general operations of running a daily collegiate newspaper in the late-1960s from typesetting each page by hand to manual deliveries to a printing press in Mebane, North Carolina; newspapers Campbell read as a Duke undergraduate like the New York Times, Durham Herald, Durham Herald-Sun, Protean Radish, and Anvil; political activism at Duke during the period like the student occupation of Douglas Knight's house and the 1969 occupation of the Allen Administration building by black students, which resulted in a campus riot after North Carolina State Police used teargas on mostly white sympathizers camped out at the entrance of the occupied building; a meeting Campbell attended with Duke President Terry Sanford on Sanford's first day in the position; race and gender dynamics at the Duke Chronicle; ties between Duke students and North Carolina Central University students; the need in Durham for an independent bookstore in the mid-1970s; opening The Regulator before Christmas 1976; positioning The Regulator as a commercial entity interested in politics, alternative energy, and feminism; The Regulator as an activist space; the pros and cons of the internet in political organizing.

TRANSCRIPT: Tom Campbell

Interviewee: Tom Campbell
Interviewer: Seth Kotch
Interview Date: August 22, 2014
Location: The Regulator Bookshop, Durham, North Carolina
Length: One audio file, 1:03:41

START OF INTERVIEW

Seth Kotch: Alright, my name is Seth Kotch with the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [Laughs] The date remains unknown to me, as it often does. August—.

Tom Campbell: August twenty-second.

SK: August twenty-second, thank you very much. August twenty-second, 2014, and I am here at the Regulator in Durham, North Carolina, with Tom Campbell, the co-founder and co-owner of the Regulator. Mr. Campbell, thank you very much for joining me.

TC: Thank you. Glad to be here.

SK: [Laughs] You know, imagine we're on television.

TC: [Laughs] Right, right, yeah.

SK: So, I just wanted to ask you a little bit about your early life, about the sort of path, long or short, that eventually led you to Duke.

TC: Right. Well, let's see, early years I was an Army brat. My father was in the military, (Second World War). I was born in [19]48. He went back into the Army after the Second World War, fought in Korea. My earliest memories are in Japan. Then, we eventually found our way back to Philadelphia.

SK: And is that where you were born?

TC: I was born in Philadelphia, yeah. And my father left the Army for a second time and stayed out [laughs] this time. And he went to work for United Airlines, and we lived outside of Philadelphia. I grew up there.

Came to Duke in 1966. Mostly I wanted to go to a school in a different part of the country, see something different. [Sound of siren] My father had been in North Carolina, [laughs] basic training at Fort Bragg, in the early forties, and liked it. And so, we came down to see Duke, and I—anyway, I ended up coming to go to school here. I was the first—my sister was the first person in our extended family to go to college. I was the first male in our extended family to go to college.

SK: And did you—had you been to the South before you made that trip?

TC: No, no, not really. And, you know, clearly got some indications that things were different down here in some ways, I mean, obviously. I remember on the drive down stopping at a gas station somewhere in Virginia and going in, and there were signs for, you know, “colored” bathroom. Right? They had been painted over, because the law said they needed to be painted over, but it was just one coat of paint, and you could still see the lettering. [Laughs] And I went, “Agh, okay.” [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Quite literally following the letter of the law.

TC: [Laughs] Well, yes, yeah.

SK: So, this was in 1966 that you would have made the visit, and sort of immediately after—?

TC: Well, yeah, [19]65, I guess, and then—yeah, yeah.

SK: Okay, sure. So, were those kinds of visible signs, both literal and figurative, of racial segregation—I'm assuming they were less evident in Philadelphia.

TC: Oh, yeah, there were less overt signs.

SK: Right.

TC: There was still, you know, obvious and large amount of racial segregation, racial prejudice, racial tensions, etcetera, etcetera. Yeah.

SK: And were your parents newspaper readers or television viewers, or were you?

TC: Yes, yeah. They read newspapers all the time, watched news a lot. And my father, in particular, was a really—I think maybe from his experience in the war, wars, whatever—he was a very open person, open to all kinds of people, and I think taught me a lot about, you know, just approaching people for who they are and not getting caught up in labels, whether it be race, religion, anything like that.

So, I came to Duke. The sixties started happening. I mean—[laughs].

SK: [Laughs] Right.

TC: There was a war, and there were obviously, you know, issues of race that were more apparent here than there had been in Philadelphia. And I think it was the war, in particular, that got me involved and engaged in thinking about—[0:05:00] just thinking about things and starting to take a different look at what was going on.

SK: Was that because of the—I mean, the draft hadn't come along yet.

TC: Right.

SK: But was that something, because you felt a sort of personal sense of risk, or was there something else there?

TC: Well, no, it wasn't—at that point, it wasn't a personal sense of risk. But it was, you know, it was very much consuming the country. And, you know, every time you turned on the news, there it was. And it just didn't seem—I don't know. The more you looked into it, the more it was like, “What are we doing? Why are we doing this?” kind of thing.

And I remember my father, even—this was about 1968—*he* turned against the war, which was—he was, you know, he voted Republican, was certainly pro-military. But what was happening, there's a big military hospital at Valley Forge, and so they were bringing wounded soldiers back to be treated there. But they didn't want people to *see* that there were all these wounded soldiers coming back. So, the planes were landing in the middle of the night and out in a deserted part of the airport at Philadelphia where he was working.

And he was just—this made him really, really angry. I mean, he felt that these people should be honored for what they had done, and if the government felt they had to hide this, these people, from notice, that there must be something wrong with, you know, what we were doing. So, that was—I remember that was a big surprise, because we would argue about the war. And then, all of a sudden, he was like, “Yeah, I've had it.” You know, enough. [Laughs] (0:07:06)

SK: When you came down to Durham, did you seek out sources of information, or were they plentiful? That is to say, newspapers, radio, TV?

TC: Um, well, yeah. I mean, I read the local papers, read the *New York Times* every now and then.

SK: And I'm sorry—the *Herald-Sun* or the *Herald*?

TC: The *Herald*, yeah, and the *Herald-Sun*. And then, you know, there were starting to be alternative papers, the *Radish* and the *North Carolina Anvil*, that I read a lot. And the *Duke Chronicle*, which, you know, reprinted both *New York Times* wire service things, as well as their own reporting. And I think it was second semester of my sophomore year I went up to the *Chronicle* office and said, “Hey,” you know, “I’d like to work, be interested in working here, doing some things.” So, and—yeah.

One thing I remember, and it’s too bad that apparently all these tapes were destroyed. Many of us—well, Jesse Helms was on WRAL.

SK: Right.

TC: Right, as a commentator. And many of us would take time out just to go listen to him, because he was so outrageous, and it was so obvious, you know. His coded racist things were just *barely* coded. I mean, anyone with any sense could tell what he was talking about, what he was saying, and we were just, you know, amazed to watch him. But somehow all those tapes just disappeared.

SK: Somehow. You know, I will say that the transcripts are in print at UNC.

TC: Oh?

SK: So, they won’t carry the same kind of power.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

SK: But, you know, the words are there. At least, that's written.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

SK: Did you ever listen to J.D. Lewis, the broadcaster who—sometimes he would have been on before or after Jesse Helms. And he was an African American, who—they walked the same halls but had very different political perspectives.

TC: Yeah. I don't remember him. Yeah.

SK: So, when you approached the *Chronicle* your sophomore year, at that point, were you studying—I believe you graduated with a degree eventually in environmental management.

TC: Well, that was a master's degree.

SK: Oh, okay.

TC: My undergraduate degree was in American history.

SK: Okay, so you were studying history?

TC: Yeah.

SK: They took you on, [laughs] I imagine.

TC: Right, right.

SK: Do you remember some of the early stories that you did, or what your beat was?

TC: Oh, yeah, there wasn't "a beat".

SK: Um-hmm.

TC: Yeah, I mean, I just did general reporting on all kinds of things from student government to—I remember going to [0:10:00]—I think the first story I wrote was about

a meeting of a group that was kind of into this—I guess he was a Hindu spiritual leader called Meher Baba. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

TC: So, I reported on that, which was, you know, “Oh? Hmm, not what I expected to be doing here,” but, you know, people liked the story. So, yeah.

SK: Around then, it must have been before or after, there was the Vigil following the assassination of Martin Luther King.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

SK: And the occupation in Douglas Knight’s house. Do you remember that?

TC: Yes, oh, yeah, very much. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I was involved in that as a participant, wrote a little bit about it. And, yeah, that was—I remember Knight was trying to be—everybody marched out to his house.

SK: Um-hmm.

TC: And the four demands—I can only remember a couple of them right now. But there were a couple of them we thought were just slam-dunks, you know: having him resign from the Hope Valley Country Club, a segregated country club; and, you know, beginning to *talk with* the people who had formed a nonacademic employees union. And we thought, “Okay, they don’t have to *recognize* the union. They don’t have to—you know. And resigning from this country club,” and we were amazed that he wouldn’t do any of it.

But he was, I don’t know, a polite person. And so, when everybody got out to his house, he invited people in, which is how we ended up kind of occupying his house the

first night. [Laughs] Because we got in and went, “Okay. Why don’t we just stay here? If he’s not going to say yes, we’ll stay here.” So, yeah.

SK: Someone had told me about he had greeted students in his robe. Maybe it was evening. And then, at some point, sort of disappeared. And it turned out that he was ill, but there was a rumor that he had sort of scurried away to conceal himself.

TC: Yeah, I think he wasn’t feeling well, you know, somehow. Yeah, yeah.

SK: Not quite as dramatic a story as one might wish. [Laughs]

TC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SK: Do you remember the Vigil after the death of—?

TC: Yeah. Well, the Vigil, we marched back to campus and then set up on the quad. Yeah, yeah, I remember a fair amount about that.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about what stands out for you as you think about it?

TC: [Laughs] I don’t know. That just—it kept going on. And there were people, I think—one’s memory at forty years, forty-some years [laughs]. Pete Seeger came to town for something, I think. Was it the Vigil?

SK: I think it might have been.

TC: Yeah, I think it was. He was close by and came by. Yes, it was the Vigil, yeah.

SK: I spoke to Arnie Katz about that, and he said that Pete Seeger was—he was sort of surprised to hear him say that he was angry and that he had a rock in his guitar case, that he was sort of ready to stir something up.

TC: Right, right. Yeah, yeah, I don’t think he was actually throwing rocks, but—[laughs].

SK: [Laughs] I doubt that, too, although I like that image.

TC: But he was saying he was angry that nobody was paying attention to us because there was no violence, is what he was saying. That only—you know, you have to be violent to get attention, and that was wrong. And, you know, so I think he was saying, “So, I’ve got a rock,” you know.

SK: Right. Sort of a funny parallel to “I’ve Got a Hammer”.

TC: Right, right, right. Yeah.

SK: So, obviously, you were connected in some degree with some kind of activist community or activist impulse at Duke?

TC: Yeah, yeah. The people around the newspaper were close with the people, the activists, and, you know, it was—we did journalism but sometimes, I mean, we were—we had a point of view, I’ll say. [Laughs] And we promoted that, certainly, through what we covered, the way we covered it.

SK: So, when you—you became editor?

TC: Yeah, yeah.

SK: Would that have been your senior year?

TC: My senior year, yeah.

SK: So, 1970?

TC: [19]69-[19]70.

SK: [19]69-[19]70, okay. [0:15:00] So, an interesting time in following the turmoil and the sort of peak of activism in 1968, but also maybe building towards something with the war.

TC: Well, yeah. And in the spring of [19]69, the African American students at Duke, the black students, took over Allen Building, took over the Administration Building. And, you know, that led to this huge riot on the quad, with state police battling white students on the quad. And that was something where the connections between the *Chronicle* and activists came into play, because the black students told Mark Pinsky the night before—have you heard this story?

SK: Um-um, go ahead.

TC: Okay. They told him that they were going to take over the Administration Building the next morning at six o'clock, right, seven o'clock, I think, when the doors opened. And they wanted him to tell the five or six of us, the top staff of the *Chronicle*, so that we would be able to be there and get on the phones right away and let the national media know that this was happening, because they thought if there was national media attention, it would be less likely that Duke would call in the police right away. They thought that would give them protection.

So, Mark got us together like at ten o'clock at night and said, "This is going to happen tomorrow morning." So, that was pretty—an interesting situation. I mean, we all kept it, [laughs] nobody told anybody else, and very unusual for students, we got up at like six o'clock the next morning and, you know, were on the phones at seven o'clock.

SK: So, were you in touch generally with the national media?

TC: At times, yeah. I mean, certainly, there were some reporters for the *New York Times* that covered civil rights issues and that covered the South that we knew and, you know, they knew us. And when they would come to town, they would always come by, you know, and talk. So, yeah.

SK: So, in this particular case, did they take your call? Did the strategy work?

TC: Oh! They took the call. Yes! I remember being in an administrator's office at nine o'clock that morning. You know, the black students had taken over the first floor of Allen Building. And he had the radio on, and the news came on. And the story was on the national news on the radio. And I remember him turning his head to the radio and going, "Damn!"

SK: [Laughs]

TC: And I thought, "Oh, good!" [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

TC: But it didn't work in that they called in the state police at—you know, they came along at two o'clock in the afternoon to evict the students. Luckily for Duke, the students went out—the state police came in a side door. The students went out another side door. They had word that this was going to happen and they left the building. And then, the state police were in the building.

And the building at that point was then surrounded by white students who had been there to kind of help protect the black students. And, anyway, then the state police were just as angry at the white hippies and, you know, political folks. And a riot, teargassing and stuff, up and down the quad, ensued. So.

I remember going to—I think it was just a year ago, a year and a half ago—an anniversary thing about the takeover of Allen Building, and I was very surprised that everybody was saying how well Duke responded to this. And afterwards, you know, six months afterwards, Duke did, started to respond well. But their immediate response was disastrous.

And if the black students had not left the building, Duke today would be a very different place. I mean, they would have gotten—you know, people could have died, I'm sure. The North Carolina state police in 1968—yes, that would have been an incredibly ugly situation. People would have gotten really hurt badly. And, you know, so it was lucky for Duke that the students left. If they hadn't left, you know, [0:20:00] I think Duke's effort to become a national university would have been really set back.

SK: So, I may be asking you to state the obvious here, but it sounds like the—it would have been normal for you, even as a white student, and others to expect for the state police to come ready to use violence to control or to sort of handle the situation? That was something that was sort of an assumption or an expectation?

TC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think, you know—I mean, look at what's happening in Missouri today, even, police and minority communities, there are issues. Well, the North Carolina state police in 1968, I think, you know, it was—[laughs] to say there were issues would be putting it mildly.

SK: Right.

TC: Yeah, yeah. Because it was an absolutely all-white force and, you know, and integration was fairly new, a new idea. So, yeah.

SK: Sure. Yeah, you know, you reflecting on what's gone on in this area, just thinking of the way in which these issues—it feels like they bubble up fairly frequently. But then, it still feels to some extent like it's surprising to a certain community that, for instance, African American parents have their talk with their sons or have more of a sense of threat from police. Whereas, I have a young son. It hasn't struck me to, you know,

have a talk with him about how to interact with a police officer in order to preserve his physical safety.

TC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SK: And obviously, you know, forty years ago—very different in some ways, very similar in others. But I was wondering if that sense of threat was just maybe spread out a little bit more, whereas in an odd way, it would feel like in a more racially segregated society that white people would feel less at risk, whereas here—anyway, I'm obviously rambling.

TC: Well, I think that there was some feeling of threat among, you know, if you were young, white, had long hair, were involved in—you know, in that situation, all these people were there obviously to support the black students who had taken over the building. So, yeah, we were seen as somebody other, as well.

SK: Um-hmm, right, right. When you were sort of operating during this crisis, this situation, were you—[laughs] I may be asking you to not only remember an incredible degree of self-awareness, but also to have had it during this time period, but were you sort of trying to juggle your role as the editor of the paper, versus an activist, versus just a Duke student, versus someone who is just kind of maybe caught up in a quick-moving scenario.

TC: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I was very close to one of the doors of Allen Building, because I was there to report on what was happening. I wanted to see what was happening. I wanted to be as close as I could. And then, when all of a sudden, the police started teargassing people, you know, I realized, well, they're not going to exactly be able to recognize that, "Oh, he's okay because, you know, he's a reporter." [Laughs] That

wasn't going to—you know, at that point, I needed to take care of myself. But I still wanted to be able to see as much as I could of what was going on.

So, I was trying to stay out, you know, not just run away, but not be directly in the kind of line of fire. I mean, the—you know, they never took out guns or anything. But they were very angry, obviously. And, you know, when the Kent State shootings happened a year later, I kind of went, “Oh, yeah.” I could see, you know, that kind of thing *could* have happened, you know, at Duke, you know. I could see that, you know, this was National Guard troops, but those people get so angry that they could just go, “Okay.”

SK: Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about what the day-to-day operations of the paper were?

TC: Well, it had just—[0:25:00] my junior year, the paper went daily for the first time. It had been three times a week. And the editor that year, Alan Ray, was—he was a great editor and incredibly organized and really [laughs] made that happen. And then, that all got worked out very seamlessly, and I luckily inherited that. I inherited, you know, staff. Like, my managing editor was a guy named Bob Ashley, who is now the editor of the *Herald-Sun* in Durham. He stayed in journalism. And I had some—I didn't have as much experience with the day-to-day operations as other people did, having just started, you know, my sophomore year. But there were people that, you know, just made everything happen. We had a couple of employees who worked in our offices who did the layout and, you know, it was all done by hand, mocking up things. And then, those were taken over to press in Mebane, driven over there at eleven o'clock at night. And the press

in Mebane printed the newspaper, and somebody went over there early the next morning to pick them up, brought them back to campus and distributed them.

I remember, you know, I went over there a number of times just to, “Oh, this person couldn’t make it. Okay, I’ll drive it over,” or pick them up and drive them back. And there was—I mean, everything was written on typewriters, right, [laughs] triple-spaced. You’d type things out so that there’d be lots of room for writing in edits and changes in the space between the lines. And then, they would be typeset. Those articles would be typeset and then pasted up into a pasteup of the pages of the paper.

There was a *New York Times* wire—linotype machine, maybe it was called? No, I forget what it was called. Anyway, it was a machine that fed—you know, it clattered like a typewriter and just fed lines and lines of stories. And I remember two interesting things about that. One, when there was a really—(since it would)—when times were slow, it would advance like obituaries of people that were still alive. I mean, they have obituary writers, and that’s what they do, right? But it was like, “Okay, if this person dies, then, you know, you’ve got this,” you know. So, you had a stock of these written obituaries, [laughs] right, of people. Now, they just have that at the *Times* and they send it out.

But if there was—since it was pretty much constantly advancing stories, if there was something really important that happened, a bell rang on this machine. And, you know, then it was like, “Oh, pay attention! What’s coming next is a big story.” And so, that was, you know, that was kind of exciting.

I remember, I guess, in the early nineties walking into a newsroom and, you know, it’s totally silent, right? I mean, people are typing at their computers. There’s nothing—you know, in the newsroom I worked in, everybody was pounding on

typewriters. There was this, you know, *Times* machine spewing out things. [Laughs] It was, you know, it was a cacophony! And it was like, “Oh, this is exciting!”

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah.

TC: [Laughs] It *sounded* exciting, right?

SK: Right.

TC: Whereas, a newsroom today is just quiet, you know, so.

SK: Well, there’s something to be said, maybe, in a variety of formats, about the sterility of communication and how it’s gotten a little bit less romantic and a little bit cleaned up over the years.

TC: Yeah! Yeah, I think, you know, I mean, this was some of the heydays of journalism, if you look at it from that point of view today. But, yeah, I think, there was sort of a romance to it that was good. I worked for a little while the summer after I graduated on the afternoon newspaper in Greensboro. There was such a thing then, the Greensboro *Record*.

SK: Um-hmm, right.

TC: And I remember at one point covering a school board meeting, [0:30:00] and the meeting ran late, and I got out late and, you know, got on a phone. There were no cellphones then. Called the editor and I said, “Not going to make the deadline. The meeting just ended.” And he said, “We’ve got fifteen minutes. Just dictate the story.” And I said, “I haven’t written it.” He said, “Just take a minute and then start telling me the story,” you know. “I’ll type it.” And I went, “Huh?” [Laughs] Really?

So, I went, “Okay, I’ll try.” And I did! You know, I just, “Okay, this will be the lead and then this—,” you know. And I was—it was kind of fun to realize that I could *do* that, you know.

SK: Yeah.

TC: You know, I had gotten to the point where I could just—I didn’t have to sit down at a typewriter. I didn’t have to, you know, edit. I could just—I mean, it wasn’t a very complex story, but still, it was neat, so.

SK: Well, the image in my head of, you know, a movie from the forties or something, with a newspaperman with that fedora on, banging on the phone booth to get in, you know—.

TC: Right. [Laughs]

SK: To get the woman and her dog or something off the phone, so he can dictate the story.

TC: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SK: I [laughs] don’t want to ask too much of the, you know, the twenty-year-old or twenty-one-year-old you, but when you were editor, did you have sort of a vision? Or when you were maybe trying to articulate why you wanted to be editor at the time to your peers—? Or, maybe let me back up and ask how you were selected as editor or maybe elected.

TC: Well, there were two people who had—Bob Ashley, who was the managing editor, being one of them—that were the more obvious candidates. And for personal reasons and things going on with them and all, they somewhere near the last minute just

said, “Uhm,” you know, “I don’t want to do it.” And then, people turned around, looked at me, and I thought, “Really?”

SK: [Laughs]

TC: [Laughs] So, you know. So, it was—I stumbled into it.

SK: Yeah.

TC: But I really—it felt like—I really enjoyed being part of—you know, it was kind of the nerve center of things that were happening. And there were a lot of things happening then. It was a good time for news.

And I know our approach—the *Chronicle* today—I picked it up yesterday. You know, it’s distributed here at the bookstore. You know, it’s—well, the lead story was about how more people that got accepted at Duke ended up going to Duke this year than in any year since 1979. And it was like, you know, it was all about how—and lots of their stories now are almost PR, kind of, for the university—and, you know, they’re taking pride in being there and what’s happening. And our approach was [laughs] pretty much a hundred and eighty degrees from that. You know, it was like, “Boy, there are things wrong here, and we need to let people know and try to and get them changed.” Yeah, so.

SK: Um-hmm. Did you have relationships with administrators?

TC: Well, with some professors, certainly. One of the big changes when—I mean, after the black students took over Allen Building, there was a struggle within the board of trustees that ended with Terry Sanford being selected as the next president. And he came along the beginning of my senior year, the beginning of the year that I was editor.

And I remember I got a call from him, from him personally, the first day that he was in office, asking me if I could come see him the next day to talk. And I was amazed,

because that kind of thing had never happened with any editor or—you know. And he was—I mean, he was a politician, and he realized that the *Chronicle* was an important, played an important role in lots of things that were going on on campus, and he wanted to, you know, set up some lines of communication and talk.

Went over, and he was a, you know, a good ole boy Southern politician. We spent the first fifteen minutes just kind of chatting about Duke, about our—you know, where I was from, what I was studying, just our stories, you know, getting to know each other a little bit before we brought up any issue of substance whatsoever. [0:35:00] And that was—that was refreshing. That was good, you know. So, yeah, so it was different.

SK: I can see how that kind of a meeting could be construed as intimidating by the student, but it sounds like—.

TC: Yeah, no, but he was not—he was not being intimidating, no. Yeah, and [laughing] we were cocky enough, I think, that we were not going to be—yeah. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Right, right.

TC: [Laughs] We were not going to be intimidated.

SK: [Laughs] So, he knew not to bother.

TC: Yeah. [Laughs]

SK: So, can you—you mentioned Mark Pinsky and Bob Ashley. Were there others that you worked closely with that you might be able to name?

TC: Yeah, sure. Clay Steinman, who was the editor the next year. Bob Entman, who I mentioned before. They were two people I was close with and worked with a lot.

SK: Were there many women or African Americans on the staff?

TC: Well, yes. [Sound of something falling?] So, this picture only worked because there was only one woman at the time on the editorial board, and she couldn't make it for that picture. I mean, we wouldn't have been able to do that. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Right. And we were talking about this before we turned on the recorder.

TC: And the board of trustees were all white males, and so were we!

SK: [Laughs] Right.

TC: Yeah, so.

SK: Well, it does make for a nice symmetry. But I should say that we were speaking about this before the recorder was turned on, and we have nostalgia dump yore. Is that—how do we pronounce—?

TC: Well, this is the Duke yearbook. I forget what it was called.

SK: Okay.

TC: But this is—they just put that on—there were two volumes of it.

SK: And can you—would you just mind just briefly describing the picture, the juxtaposition?

TC: Yeah. There's a page with the top half of the page, there is a picture of the executive committee of the board of trustees taken in a room that the executive committee met in. Below that is a picture of the editorial board of the *Chronicle* taken in the same room of the board of trustees room. We are all, as I said, all white men, and we have our shirts off with our clenched fists up on the table. And, yeah, I have a bit of a, like "I can't believe I'm doing this" smile on my face.

SK: [Laughs]

TC: But, yeah, it was—the editor of the yearbook had the idea of bringing us over there for the picture, and Bob Entman, as we were walking over there, came up with the idea of, “Let’s take our shirts off and have clenched fists,” so, yeah.

SK: So, as you were wrapping up your tenure as editor, were there other major stories that you sort of remember really delving into?

TC: Um, I don’t remember details of a lot.

SK: Sure.

TC: I remember we had—you know, we went out into the Durham community some, and I remember going to interview—there was a man named Howard Fuller, who was kind of the leader of—he worked for Operation Breakthrough, I think, at the time. And he was a leader of the black community and lived right near North Carolina Central. Going to both interview him, but also to kind of compare notes about whether things that he was doing and people were doing at North Carolina Central, that activists at Duke could work with, and vice versa. Could we work together in some ways?

And I remember, in particular, that because—this would have been 1969—going to see him, he lived in an apartment that was in a house that was up—you parked down the street and then you had to climb stairs up the side of a hill to get to the house. And sitting in front of his house was another young black man with a shotgun across his lap, which I was like, “Whoa!” Was not expecting to see that.

But, especially having read some things just in the last ten years about the racial situation in Durham and this area of North Carolina around that time, it makes perfect sense to me now [laughs] (that he would have that), you know. And there were things that have come out about, you know, the police in Durham were, you know, they were not

likely to help him in any way, and the Klan was still very active, [0:40:00] and he was an incredibly public figure at the time.

SK: Um-hmm.

TC: So, yeah.

SK: Were there substantive connections between Duke and either other activist communities outside of Duke University or HBCUs in the area, like Central or elsewhere?

TC: Well, there were some ties with some folks at Central, not a lot, but some. Beyond that, not a lot. The people that worked and ran the North Carolina *Anvil* at the time interacted with people in the community and with people on campus, and they were, I think, more involved with making those connections.

SK: And were papers like the *Radish* and the *Anvil* distributed widely on campus, or read widely?

TC: Well, the *Anvil* was, yeah. The *Radish* not as much. I mean, it was seen as—it was out there.

SK: Um-hmm.

TC: Yeah, so.

SK: So, after graduation, do you go straight into your degree program?

TC: No, I did a number of things. I worked at a school—I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I worked in journalism for a while. Then I worked—I got a job, I was a teacher at a school for emotionally disturbed children, an assistant, you know, not a teacher. Then I was waiting tables, tending bar. [Laughs]

SK: In Durham?

TC: In Durham.

SK: Where?

TC: At a—it was a vegetarian restaurant called Somethyme on Broad Street. And then, I decided I'd go back to school and get a degree in environmental studies, and I was thinking of maybe doing environmental journalism (0:41:54). But, yeah, so. Then I got married. My wife was getting a degree in public health at UNC, a master's degree at the time. And then, I got my degree, master's in environmental management, a year before she was finishing. I couldn't find a job in this area with my degree. And our idea was, well, when she finished, we would go someplace and get jobs.

And meanwhile, some friends that I had gone to Duke with, a lot of us were still in Durham, and there had always been this pipe dream of, "Oh, somebody should start a bookstore in Durham. Durham needs a bookstore." So, we would always go to Chapel Hill to go to the Intimate to go to a bookstore, you know.

SK: Um-hmm.

TC: And that was, I mean, that was something we did on a regular basis. And so, what happened is the front third of the upstairs of this building came available, and one of the people put down a month's rent on it and said, "Well, here's a space we could open a bookstore," and called a meeting. And I said, "Well, I'm not doing anything for the next few months. I'll help out, help get it started." That was thirty-seven years ago. [Laughs] So, yeah.

SK: So, this was 1976 or [19]77?

TC: [19]76. It opened in December of [19]76.

SK: Okay. That's funny, because I've seen its founding stated as both [19]77 and [19]76, and it sounds like it was perfectly on the cusp.

TC: Yeah, it was right at the end of [19]76, yeah. We were desperate to get open before Christmas.

SK: So, how did you get your first—how does one acquire books to sell? I don't even—.

TC: [Laughs]

SK: I don't know today; I don't know then.

TC: Well, you know, then—I don't know these days.

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

TC: But, anyway, we were able to get a small bank loan and we got some individual loans. And we just had some money and we set up accounts with publishers. And we had to prepay our first orders and, yeah, and we got in some books and opened the door.

SK: Presumably, you were a reader?

TC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I mean, not—I still don't read—you know, I read three books a month, maybe. I mean, I'm not a voracious reader the way some people are but, yeah, I've always read a lot. Although it took me a few years, after I got out of college, to get back in the habit of reading, because I think college can destroy your taste for reading, because there's all this stuff you *have* to read. And enough of it is stuff that you'd rather not read, but you still have to, that, you know, reading can get a bit of a negative connotation. [0:45:00]

SK: Um-hmm. They say that with children, too, that, you know, sort of assigning reading can create that sense of obligation that later in life is unpleasant.

TC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I now, you know, think nothing of—I'll start four books and get a little bit into it and go, "No." You know, I'll just put it aside if it's, you know—I read for pleasure [laughs] and interest and to learn certain things.

SK: It's funny that you say that, because I feel like there's some point that one passes where one gives oneself permission to stop reading a book halfway in—.

TC: Yeah!

SK: Without [laughs] losing faith in yourself.

TC: Yes! Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] Well, you should. It's the way it should be done, you know.

SK: Right. So, when did you—did you have a point where you kind of realized that this commitment you'd made of a few months was going to turn into something more substantial?

TC: Oh, well, yeah, it just kind of evolved. My wife finished her degree, then she got work here. And I was really enjoying what I was doing. And, you know, things were happening, and the store was kind of part of a little community. And so, we just kind of went, "Well, let's just stay here." And, yeah, so.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about that community that the store fit into?

TC: Well, originally, it was a lot of folks like myself, who had gone to Duke but stayed in Durham, including John Valentine, my partner. He came on two years after the store opened and—but he had been a customer. He kept coming in the store, [laughs] and it was like—so, for a good many years, when we needed to hire somebody, we thought of

our customers first, you know. It was like, “Well, this person’s, you know, we know them, we know they’re into books,” and so, yeah.

But the store opened. I remember some of our early ads said that it was, you know, a new store with a focus on politics and alternative energy and feminism. And, you know, we were kind of trying to sell ourselves as just not another (Walden/wall of) books, which was what the standard for bookstores was at the time.

SK: Um-hmm. So, it was explicitly an alternative bookstore, even though it was also kind of the only bookstore?

TC: Hey! This is—.

John Valentine: Hi. John Valentine.

SK: Seth Kotch.

JV: Good to see you.

SK: Nice to see you, too.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

JV: And who are you with?

SK: Carolina.

TC: Carolina oral history. He’s—.

JV: Oh, great!

TC: We started with me and the *Chronicle*.

JV: Yeah.

SK: Doing a project on media and activism and alternative media and radio and all that kind of good stuff in the sixties.

JV: Yeah, it was great. We’re in such a supportive place.

SK: Yeah!

JV: Are you going to talk to Celeste Wesson? She's somebody on your list?

SK: I am emailing with her right now.

JV: Great.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

SK: I have to find a way to get out to L.A. [Laughs]

TC: Right, yeah.

JV: Yeah. Oh, you'll find a way! Where there's a will. Good luck!

SK: Nice to meet you.

JV: Yeah.

SK: So, were you, as the owner of this bookstore, in sort of conversation with other—with journalists or with activists or with others who might have been part of the natural community?

TC: Well, I mean, a lot of it was just those people came into the store, right?

SK: Right.

TC: They gravitated to the store. And I still, you know, working here, just being out on the sales floor, get to see all kinds of folks and, you know, renew ties with people and keep ties up with folks over the years. And, yeah, so that's certainly one of the great things about doing this.

SK Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about the role that a bookstore plays in keeping that kind of community alive, especially in comparison or contrast with more kind of overtly on-the-nose activist-style activities?

TC: Yeah, yeah. Um, yeah, I'm not sure how much I can talk about that, because I'm kind of from the inside, and how people see it from the outside—. I've often—one of the ways I like to think about the store sometimes is a very low-key, indirect kind of means of activism, which is, you know, people could come in here, feel comfortable, feel safe, and browse and maybe start to have an interest, start to get exposed to some things that they wouldn't have otherwise. And that's—you know, that may sound Pollyanna-ish, but I think it happens sometimes.

And I think that [0:50:00], you know—and I think that just providing, you know, for people that *are* into activism and politics more overtly, providing a place where they can find, you know, things that give them background, that give them depth, you know, where they can—and that we've—you know, we've gone out and kind of curated the collection of books we have here. And we still, you know, I still, when I'm ordering books and ordering new titles, you know, very often know a couple of people that, "Oh, this person and this person are going to be interested in that book." You know, that's something that they're going to want to look at, if not read. But, you know, yeah. And so, you know, we can order things that fit the community that we're serving.

SK: Right.

TC: Okay, yeah.

SK: Well, there's—I mean, there's plenty of academic work on how important space is for activism, period, just having a place to meet.

TC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, you know, certainly through—I mean, we do all kinds of events here, with all kinds of authors, but we get, you know, more authors that have something going on politically or socially or, you know, even with fiction, that are

doing something different. And that can provide a venue for people to come in and talk and kind of compare notes, as well.

SK: You've spoken a lot about the role of reading and books and bookstores, especially in contrast with internet shopping for books and things of that nature.

TC: Yeah.

SK: Do you feel that there's a—I think there are some ways in which the internet and those styles of communication have helped activist causes. There are maybe ways in which they have harmed activist causes. I don't want to ask you to take one side or the other necessarily, but I'm curious if you could reflect a little bit on the sort of role books play, in one form or another, in whether it's creating an activist community or educating an activist community, and maybe how you might have seen that change over time. I realize it's a very broad and rambling kind of question. I welcome a broad and rambling answer in response. [Laughs]

TC: [Laughs] Yeah! I'm not sure where to go with that. Yeah, I think—well, first, I think the internet, there are some things that it's great for and it does easier. But in some ways it, you know, promises more than it delivers in lots of things. I remember when like the Arab Spring was getting underway, there was all this stuff in the press about, "Oh, you know, the internet is making this possible!"

And I thought back to just my own days as, you know, going to political demonstrations. I mean, I went to a number of them in D.C., and the things we did at Duke. And it was, "Yeah, but are you going to, you know, go out there and risk your life with someone that you've met on Facebook, and you haven't spent any time with, and you don't know and you haven't built an actual human relationship with?" I don't think

so. There's only so far that that can go, I think, in terms of building a real community. I think people have to, you know, get to know each other, spend time together, do things together, and a step at a time, before you get to the point of—especially if you're doing any kind of activism where there could be some pushback and, you know, there may be some consequences for what you're doing. You really have to know and trust the people you're with. And that—there's a degree of which that's not going to happen on the internet. So, as far as—you know, you can't say that people who've read the same books are going to feel that way either, [laughs] you know, so.

SK: [Laughs] Right.

TC: But I think, you know, people that have done—you know, that read and that read not just in a narrow little sense but read somewhat [0:55:00] in a wider way—I don't know, that hopefully they've got some—that can bring some more depth of understanding and some more—take people out of a narrow approach to things. You know? I think that, you know, you have to be—to get things done, you have to be focused, obviously. And, you know, your activism has to be focused. But if you're, you know, if you're kind of in an ideological straightjacket that's usually not very helpful either.

And so, yeah—you know, from the sixties and seventies, there were folks that were, you know, “This is the way things are. This is the way, this is what has to happen, and *that's that*.” And, you know, it's like—*pfft!* It was hard to have a conversation with them, you know, and they weren't very flexible in terms of responding to the nuances of a situation. So.

SK: Where do you see—I mean, again, you’ve reflected on this publicly before, and so I don’t want to make you retread your steps too much, but can you talk a little bit about how books have changed since you first started running the Regulator to today, and maybe where you see bookstores going? Or maybe even just the Regulator going?

TC: Yeah, well, I mean, obviously, things have changed enormously. And the internet is the biggest change, and there are two things there. One, obviously, is Amazon. You know, you can buy anything, you can get it cheap, you can get it there in a few days. And so, that’s competition.

And I think, you know, again, there are things that you can’t do on Amazon, like, you know, the experience of physically browsing in a bookstore. You can’t browse on Amazon. That’s really hard to do. If you know what you want, you can go get it there. But if, you know, again, you’re not going to be exposed to things that you don’t know what you want, that you want them, before you went there, as much. And that’s a role that I think a good bookstore should play for people.

The other thing, though, I think, is that people—people’s time is so taken up now with being online, on their phones, on their laptops, on their computers at work, and their attention spans are so chopped up. And I’m—you know, I’m guilty of this, as well. I find myself, you know, “God, what did I do today?” You know, I did a little of this, a little of this, a little of this. And, you know, I didn’t really—I need to focus on *this*, but I keep not getting time to focus on this, because all this stuff keeps popping up that I feel I need to respond to.

But I think that people’s attention spans are sometimes to the point where the idea of reading a whole book is a challenge. And these are, you know, otherwise smart,

literate people who twenty years ago would have read more books. And I think they're not reading as many books now because they're just not used to it. They've gotten out of the habit of that kind of deep engagement with text and, you know, either the ideas in a book or the world that a fictional book is creating. So, I think that's as big an issue for bookstores in the future as anything.

SK: It's hard not to feel a little bit gloomy.

TC: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I mean, sometimes I feel like, you know, I'm doing a rear guard action here. But it's a rear guard action worth doing.[Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Right.

TC: And I think, you know, things may yet come back around. I think people may at some point go, "Huh?" And, you know, books may become a retro cool thing.

SK: Hmm, right. Vinyl had its biggest year in years last year, right? [1:00:00]

TC: Right! [Laughs] Yes! Yeah, there you go! Yeah.

SK: There's something about this sort of toil of doing activist work where I guess you never really get to stop and have a party.

TC: Yeah.

SK: You have to just keep pushing and pushing and pushing. Does it feel that way when you're working in this kind of environment?

TC: Yeah, sometimes, yeah. It's like, you know, yeah, there's always, "This detail, this detail, this needs doing, this needs doing." And it's hard to stop sometimes and, one, *appreciate* that, "Hey, you know, I'm getting to do work in this environment doing, you know, doing this general job. That's a great life! That's a nice thing to do, to have done, thing to be doing." So, yeah.

Yeah, we should have—we had a big party—I think it was, yeah, seven years ago now—for our thirtieth anniversary here. And the place was mobbed. We had like two hundred and fifty people. And I remember John Hope Franklin was—he was one of our customers, and, you know, we sent him a special invitation, along with a number of authors. But I thought, “Well,” you know, I mean, he was well into his eighties and, you know. [Laughs] He came! And he was just thrilled, and he was, you know, “Wow, I don't get invited to too many real parties these days!” [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Right.

TC: And so, it was like, “Okay. That was great!” So, yeah, we should do something like that more often.

SK:[Laughs] I'm wondering if you know or think why the Regulator has persisted when other stores, like the Intimate, for instance, is now kind of long gone?

TC: Oh, yeah. I'm asked that question sometimes and I don't have a—you know, some of it is, I think, luck we're in a good location, luck we bought our building some years back and so our overhead is manageable. Durham is a great community for supporting a bookstore, and that's certainly played a role. And, you know, we do an alright job running the store, so.

I mean, I know a lot of other booksellers. I was on the board of directors of the American Booksellers Association for six years. And, you know, there are some *great* booksellers out there that do all kinds of amazing creative things. And, you know, [laughs] sometimes I go, “Oh, wow, we don't do half of that.” But, you know, but I think we—you know, we've learned to kind of reinvent the place and, you know, so—to keep

it going. And we're—you know, we don't know what else to do at this point, so, you know, so keep going, you know.

SK: [Laughs]

TC: [Laughs]

SK: I think that's probably a pretty good point to end our conversation.

TC: Right, right!

SK: But I do want to ask if there's anything else that you wanted to add or that I should have asked you that I didn't.

TC: Not that I can think of. This has been pretty wide-ranging, so—[laughs].

SK: [Laughs] Sounds good.

TC: [Laughs] Yes, it's all over the place.

SK: [Laughs] Well, thank you very much.

TC: Okay. Thank you.

[Recording ends at 1:03:41]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council