Shawn Blaesing

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the video recording.

**SB**: Shawn Blaesing

**JC**: Jay Chapman

[00:00:00]

**JC**: This is Jay Chapman, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band Oral History [Project]. Today is Friday, January 12, 2024. I'm interviewing Sean Blaesing via Zoom. Thanks for joining us, and I'll just start off with this question, could you maybe tell me a little bit about your early life, about where you grew up, your family, and that kind of thing?

[00:00:37]

**SB**: Sure. I have lived, I would say, two-thirds of my life in Iowa. [laughs] So, mostly eastern Iowa. I was actually born a Hawkeye, like, on the University of Iowa campus. My mother was a Hawkeye and had just graduated. I was born in the University of Iowa Hospital. So, we don't talk about that much, [laughs] but I was raised a Hawkeye all the way until I graduated from high school at seventeen in Cedar Falls. I decided to go to Iowa State because I--and this is a stupid reason to go to a school--but I had an advisor who said, “You will never make it as an engineer,” and I thought I wanted to be an engineer--and I really liked Iowa State's campus. When we came to visit Iowa State's campus, it was right around VEISHEA [annual student-run festival celebrating Iowa State departments (1922-2014)], I think, and it was beautiful and green and had the big open spaces. It was very walkable and kind of all-in-one spot. When I visited the University of Iowa it was cold and dreary in, and probably January. And the campus was so spread out, and I was like, Uh. I just don’t want to go there*.* I had grown up in Cedar Falls, so, I'm surrounded by UNI [University of Northern Iowa] and all the things UNI, and I didn't really see a place for myself there, you know, academically, so that's how I ended up at Iowa State. I did not become an engineer, but it wasn't because I wasn't smart enough, I just came to my senses and found a path that made more sense for me. [both laugh]

[00:02:12]

**JC**: Right, certainly. So, once you got to Iowa State, what bands were you involved with, and what years were you in the bands?

**SB**: Right, so I got to Iowa State the summer of 1992. I had always been a very mediocre performer of band, but I had always loved the marching band. Cedar Falls has a pretty large marching band too. They're up over two hundred for a high school marching band and did competitions and the whole nine yards. But I played in all the bands through high school, and even in the orchestra band my last year in high school. I was mostly just having fun. I wasn't trying to be the perfect musician. [laughs] So, when I came to Iowa State, I had to decide do I walk on the swim team--and I actually met with the swim team and their coach--or do I do the marching band? They're both right outside my back door because I lived in Helser [Student Dorm at ISU]. Ultimately the band sounded like more fun. [laughs] So, I picked the band, and that's how I ended up at Iowa State. I pretty much just did the marching band. I played a couple of seasons in the women's pep band, and I was an alternate in the men's pep band for a couple seasons, but it got more and more competitive from year to year, and, as I mentioned, I was not the most stellar musician. So, you know, you work with what you got. [laughs]

[00:03:42]

**JC**: So, what was your section in band? What did you play, and maybe tell me a little bit about what was interesting about your section in the band?

**SB**: Well, that's a complicated question. So, my freshman year, I started as an alternate because there were too many clarinets, and they didn't have room for me in a clarinet section, so I kind of moved around. They put me wherever they wanted me the first couple of weeks. Ultimately somebody dropped out in the trombone rank, and I actually spent my entire freshman season surrounded by trombones. That was awesome. I had a super fun time. There was like one other female in the in the trombone ranks, and so I was like the lone freshmen bebopping around with all these dudes in the trombone section, and I just had a blast [laughs]. So yes, I spent my whole first year in the trombone section. So, I knew the clarinets because we practiced together and did the music together, but I didn't march with them, so I didn't really make those connections until my sophomore year when I did actually spend the rest of my marching band career in the clarinet ranks, kind of just dorking around because I was, like I said, no, very good at the music, but had a lot of fun. I mean, I liked the marching. There was something very systematic and organized about the marching, and back in the day, Cichy [Roger Cichy, Marching Band Director (1986-1995)] would come up with these amazing different performance things that we do. To this day, my favorite is still the one where we look like a giant Argyle sock on the field because you're just zigzagging these beautiful symmetric things that required a lot of technical expertise, to be fair.

I think part of why I was drawn to that particular—and he did it several times over the time that I was in the band where Cichy was our director--I got to go to California when I was a senior in high school. We performed in the Rose Bowl Parade and got to go to the game, Texas A&M and BYU [Brigham Young University] were playing each other. Texas A&M's marching band is something to behold, and so, as a senior in high school, I saw them march. It's kind of a military band so they're very systematic, very structured, very symmetrical [laughs] in all of the things that they do, and that's kind of what drew me in. So, I was super excited to go do that in college and be part of really a stellar band. I think Iowa State was very unique in how we performed just with the high stepping, because everything was all high stepping back then. There was very little glide step happening on the field. That really made it so that you could clearly see who was doing it. [laughs] But also, it made it look very sharp and kind of cool to watch. We would always mock the Iowa [University of Iowa] band when we go to Iowa because they just look like a bunch of bozos out there, low stepping everywhere all the time. [laughs]

[00:07:02]

**JC**: So, you talked a little bit about the formations that Roger Cichy designed, some of the diagonals, some of the line drills. Can you talk a little bit about the process of learning a drill, and ultimately getting to a performance on something like that?

**SB**: I would say lots of highlighters and pencils were involved in all the things. You get a book of performances to figure out, so not only do you need to know where you are, where everybody around you is, and whether or not your high stepping or low stepping, or if you're going forwards or backwards, or sideways or diagonally, but you also needed to know where to hit in the music. We would mark all of our stuff on the plan sheets with our Sharpies so we could find ourselves quickly in the schematic. We're not a small band, as you know, we were well over three hundred when I was in the band, and I think we were like a six-bus band back then. I think they're bigger now. Trying to get all those people on the field and figuring out where you're supposed to go and what your movements are required a fair bit of studying the plan sheets, so you knew where you were going. Then also on the music, marking the, Okay. Back four. Ahead sixty-four. So you kind of know your directions, as you're learning the music in front of you also. I like that stuff. I'm a very data-driven person, so I liked kind of working through the data of how you put the music together with the marching and work through the performance. I enjoyed it.

It was a lot of hot sweaty days on a field, and we had, I think, three different fields that I marched on. I was in the band for five years because I switched majors and got an extra bonus year of education. We started on Clyde Williams [Clyde Williams Field, an outdoor football stadium], which was behind Helser, right next to the Old State Gym. Then they made that into a parking lot, and then they tore bunch of that stuff down and built some other things after I left. We started outside of my dorm. So, the first two years, I marched on that field, so we'd run over to the music hall and get our instruments and then run back and perform on the old football fields. Then I think they had us over behind the design building [ISU College of Design] for a year on a field kind of on the other side of Beyer Hall, and that was a lot of fun because, again, that was still pretty close to the music building, but I feel like my last two years they had us off somewhere else, so it was harder to get to where we were, and I can't remember where that was for the life of me. We had a band director [John LaCognata, Marching Band Director (1995-1996)] I did not like my second to last year. We basically ran him off, because he tried to change all of our history. I talked about the high stepping, he tried to make that go away and there was a coup. It was not the happiest. We have traditions for a reason, and we like what we do, and you can't just come in and change all the things because that's how you did it down in Louisiana. So anyway, he did not stay long. Then we got Marty [Martin Province, Marching Band Director (1996-2002)], and Marty was great, he brought everything back and listened to us, we all got along just fine. [laughs]

[00:10:42]

**JC**: You talk a little bit about traditions. What were some of the traditions that, maybe, started to go away or were things that at least are there now and were there then?

**SB**: Like I said, I think they still do the same pregame that we did twenty-five years ago, thirty years ago, because that's just core to who we are as a band, and everybody expects us to march out in the ISU, and then flip the ISU so you can read it from the other side, and it's always high step, and it's very sharp. We’d cyclone onto the field. That was always fun. There were a lot of pre-game things that we did. So, if we had a game on Saturday that was a home game, we were always out on the field at like eight a.m. whether or not we partied too hard the night before. It didn't matter. We'd be out on the field at eight a.m. and running through the forms one last time on the official turf, and doing our things. This is before they did the Step Show in the Alumni Band, so way back in the way back. We'd march over from where we'd stage over at Scheman [Scheman Building], kind of under the walkways, [laughs] so we’d parade through down the center corridor and do all of our different chants and things, and get everybody pumped up before the game. Then we'd march into the stadium. They had us on the far end zone, I think when I was in the band. So, we’d basically march past all of the concessions around the one side to get to our seats, and then I think towards the end, we were at the other end because they had built the new facility on the one side closest to the tailgating parking lots. So, then we would march all the way around the stadium, get everybody fired up, and stage into our seats, kind of on the one side.

Then before pregame, there was always the looking for the seed corn hats. The trombone rank did this every year, the clarinets not as much, but a lot of the brass section would get together in groups, and you would look up into the stands, and you'd try to find the people with their big, brimmed seed corn hats. It was always exciting to see who was going to find one first. You know, it's Iowa in the fall. There are many, so it doesn't take too long to find one. You were always grouped with whoever you were going on the field with for pregame.

The other thing that was always fun was the ways we would come on to the field. I’m trying to remember if pregame we usually just staged in the end zones or if we ran on in cyclones. I don't know. I should have gone back to the film before this [laughs] because I still have it all on VHS somewhere in my house. But, coming on in our little cyclones of chaos and hooting and hollering, and then, kind of, getting into formation and marching in. That was always fun. All of those prepping to come onto the field activities that made it a part of a really fun community of people to be a part of. Yes, you do your pregame show, and again, I said, we’d march on with the ISU and probably do something, I think we made a cyclone, and then we go back to the ISU, and then we'd march back off again. We always played “For *I*, For *S*” and “Rise Suns,” and don't even get me started on those. [laughs] I still hate playing them to this day in the pep band. It is cool to be part of something bigger than yourself and part of this grand tradition, when they announced, Here comes the ISUCF’V’MB [Iowa State University College Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band], it was pretty exciting.

Back then, we were still building our relationship with the Athletic Department. My first couple years, half the time they were like, You’re going to do the tunnel, or you're not going to do the tunnel. Because they weren't sure, they wanted us to do the tunnel for the team to run through when they came onto the field. By the time my five years were done, we had a pretty solid commitment from the Athletic Department, which I think still stands to this day and is even stronger than it was, to support the band, and we're just part of the landscape now, whereas we had to kind of fight for that back in the day. So, it's cool to see the relationship that the band has with the Athletic Department these days. But I also think that that strong relationship has taken a little bit of the fun out of the band, to be fair. [laughs] They've gotten a lot more strict about their policies, whereas we were more of a drinking band back in the day. I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about that. [laughs] But part of our pre-pregame was everybody meeting at the band house, because when I was in the band, there was a band house for all five years. So, the Friday nights before the games, we’d all meet at the band house, and there'd be singing from the band Bible, which I still have a copy of in my basement somewhere, with all the crazy songs that we used to sing. It just really helped us build that community. Everybody was invited. It didn't matter if you were a freshman or a senior, you just had to know what the address was of the house and find a way there. So, we would come in mass, and it was a great opportunity to get to know people. I think that that made transitioning in as a freshman so much better for me. My daughter's a student now, and until you find your people, it's really hard, you’ve got people before you know you’ve got people when you start with the marching band because you're doing it a week or two before classes even start, so you've already got this community of three hundred people that are just amazing. You get to know each other and your ranks and musicians that are like you, but also just as part of the bigger community, so that just made starting school a lot of fun. It is also part of the reason why I got to do my freshman year twice. [laughs] It was all good, and I don't regret any minute of it. So, we had the band house, we had the band Bible, which was just a tome of songs.

I remember doing the homecoming parades, and that was always like the Thursday night of homecoming, and then there'd be a pep rally. There was always a streaker, so we’d just wait until some crazy person went running by with no clothes on [laughs] and then go to the pep rally and rouse everybody up. Other traditions, one of my favorite ones was always closing out the season--because we never went to a bowl game when I was there at Iowa State. It just wasn't a thing. We went 0-10 in one my freshman years, and we wrote a song about that, too. [both laugh] Usually, the season would end in mid-November, and then we'd have the Band Extravaganza, and we’d get to go and show off how loud we could be in a small space [laughs] and play all the songs that we play. Another band tradition--I still have a cassette tape of “Coach,” [the theme song from TV show “Coach”] also, in a box somewhere in this room, I think, because that was like the joke. That predated me, the recording of “Coach.” For when the Iowa State marching band was on that TV show [“Coach”] that I can't remember the name of, but I still have the cassette tape because they would give those out as like awards at the annual ceremony at the end of the year. That was always fun, too, because you’d get to dress up all fancy and have a really nice dinner with all [of] your giant family of band friends, it was just really cool to close that out. You’d get to watch the videos. I actually have tons of great pictures from the year end gala thing that we had. I have tons of pictures from the band buses, too, so many crazy memories of the buses, trying to write messages and masking tapes so that you could read them from outside of the bus is really hard. [laughs] I think I have pictures of some of the masking tape art and all the crazy things that we would do to keep ourselves entertained.

I never got to go super fun places. We went to Oklahoma twice, I think, and Kansas once. The University of Iowa three times, but we always hated going to Iowa because their fans were just really not nice to us. So, I can remember them throwing octopuses at us and throwing like marshmallows with pennies inside of them at us, and so they never let our band go anywhere near their student section. Like, we wouldn't even come on the field on that side. It was always from the other side only. Wild adventures.

I remember very vividly my first away performance. It was in Oklahoma. Again, I was marching in a trombone rank. I think I came on with the mellophones or something, and I immediately broke my reed. You know, as a clarinet, you need that to make music. So, then I'm dinking around with my reed, and I remember we were playing “Centerfold” [1980s pop song played by The J. Geils Band], and there's a lot of power in that song, and you got to have a functional instrument, so I just kind of squeaked my way through that adventure. But it was all kinds of fun. Back in the day, we used to go and perform at a high school when we were in travel band modes. We’d go perform at the local high school at their halftime or whatever. Then the band families would adopt us, and we'd go stay with the band families. So, when Cichy was there, that was a thing. So that was always fun to meet all these new people and get to show what the Iowa State Band does in another state to some kids just like I was a few years earlier and have those experiences. It was always a lot of fun. Then the second night we would always get to stay in a hotel after the football game, so then there was all kinds of shenanigans related to that. Like trying to cram sixty-nine people into a hot tub so there was no water left in it when we were done, things like that. Trying to cram as many people as you could in any phone booth you could find. I remember coming to an Alumni Band thing, probably twenty years ago, and they had taped the perimeter of a hot tub onto the floor, and they had taped the perimeter of a phone booth on the floor. So, we actually actively tried to get sixty-nine people inside the tape to see if we could still do it. All kinds of shenanigans, but that was just part of what made the band so fun. Like I said, we had all these crazy traditions that were carried on from year to year, and I have no idea if they do any of that stuff anymore. I know they're a dry band now, so a lot less hangovers for Saturday morning practices these days. [laughs]

[00:22:32]

**JC**: You mentioned going to Oklahoma, performing for the high schools, and performing “Centerfold” there. Do you have any other favorite shows that you maybe did, either home or away, and maybe any other fun stories from travels?

**SB**: I remember one show I hated. I think it was the year that Skippy was there. He did a Disney one, and the music was just really hard. I just was like, I'm just going to focus on the marching for this one, I'm going to let these guys play the music. We were all struggling. It was super complicated music. I remember doing *Jesus Christ Superstar,* and that was an interesting marching one, too, because I feel like we came in from the corners of the field. Like, blobbed into the field that way with a weird zig-zaggy thing. I guess, for me, I liked the shows that had the most cool patterns cause I found that the nebulous designs are hard to see what's going on, you can't really tell that they're making something that's interesting. But I loved all the shows where we were doing cool patterns, and those challenged you as a marcher too. The Argyle sock one you literally peel off, and then you start getting farther apart and farther apart, and zigzagging back into each other over and over again, and it just requires a lot of precision, and because of that precision you're really proud of what you're creating because it just looks really neat from the stands. There are a handful that kind of stuck in my mind, but there were so many. I mean, it's over five years of doing this, and it's been thirty years, like I said, I should have gone back to the tape.

[00:24:37]

**JC**: So, you mentioned homecoming parade and performing at high schools. Were there any other performances that were maybe outside of a game day that you did? Maybe a university function or something along those lines?

**SB**: Yes, they brought us in for different [events]. We would come and perform for the Alumni Band every year around homecoming so that Friday night before. There were some things where it wasn't the whole band, it'd be a subset of the band or things like that. Yes, I can remember performing for the Alumni Band. It was always cool to have the alumni show up on the field for Friday night practice, too, because then you get to see some people that you know, in some cases, and they just get it, you know. We're a huge community of people from tens of years. I don't know how old the band is anymore, but it's pretty old, so it's really neat to see that multi-generational fabric woven together. I don't march homecoming anymore. I would love to, but it's just a really long day for me, physically. But it was always really fun when I was in the band for the alumni to come back and march with us. I feel like at least once a year, we would have high school bands come and march with us, and that was usually one of our later games in the season. I’d say we'd have, I don’t know, between one and five high school bands show up, march onto the field with us, and play some music, so those were always fun. You know, it's cool to see the next generation doing their thing.

I've got two kids. I’ve got one that was in the band and choir all the way through [high school], but doesn't play much, except in our Alumni Band as an honorary member. My other child never really got into being in the band or the orchestra or anything. He plays the piano beautifully, but he doesn't do anything else. [laughs] So, kind of sad for him because that community through high school and college was just a really great group of people to be able to spend time with and have instant friends to know and go on adventures with. It's just a powerful thing.

[00:26:54]

**JC**: When you started in the band, did you get advice from upperclassmen about what to do, what not to do? You know, you talked about when you first started you instantaneously got hundreds of new friends. Did you get advice from upperclassmen?

**SB**: I think the biggest thing was learning how to march in formation when we're parading, you know, because there's all these different things. Like, trying to learn all the horn movements for all the different chants and songs. Learning kind of how the ranks work. So, we're always in groups of eight with a right guide and a left guide, and the right and left guides were usually upperclassmen that would help keep you organized. I think I already knew how to do the marching band stuff, the on-the-field stuff, and we had done some parade stuff in high school, so it wasn't completely foreign to me, but there's a lot more rigor to learning it at the college level because of all the traditions, and all the horn movements, and all of the chants. Trombone cheer and the drum line stuff, when they do their different chants, trying to learn all that stuff. One thing that is cool is that Ames High [School] has commandeered one of the drum line chants, and they use that for their high school stuff too. I think that was a Barry Larson thing because I think he used to work with them, too, back in the day, and so he taught them the chant that we did. Help me, Jay, what's it called? The one where we---

**JC**: You’re talking about Cowbell?

**SB**: Cowbell, yes! Trying to get that out of my brain. Yes, so Ames High does Cowbell. So, for me, as a parent of an Ames High march band kid, it was really cool to see the next generation carrying on a tradition, and then those kids go up to play at Iowa State, and we send a fair number of our kids to Iowa State to be in the marching band. So, it's cool to kind of see it happening. Seeing how we've grown beyond our band and other bands are kind of learning some of [the] cool things that we do and experiencing them, and seeing the joy that comes to their faces too when they participate in Cowbell, and the chanting, and the *hoop-hooping* and it's all really fun.

[00:29:21]

**JC**: What do you think makes the Iowa State Marching Band different from other college bands?

**SB**: Well, I think there's probably a few things. Like I said, just the support that our university gives us. I mean, it's pretty huge. We're a big band. We've been a big band for a long time. We have these traditions that we maintain, like literally doing the same pregame for decades. It's unique and different, with the high stepping and the stuff you just don't see other bands doing. I don't know how much high stepping they do in the current band for halftime performances, but that was, for a long time, something that set us apart, but I think the band, especially now, musically they're so strong. I mean, it's just really cool to be near them when they're performing because it's just such a strong presence that you hear when you encounter them, and I think people appreciate that. I don't think all the college bands that are out there are anything like us. I think we're just such a high-caliber band in how we perform and the crazy things they do, like the dinosaurs. I mean, that got national attention when they had fifty dinosaurs running around on the field a few years back. Then the Metallica thing, like competing in this contest with Metallica and being one of the top five bands nationally that is performing Metallica music and trying to win an award from Metallica. Top five bands in the nation! We're constantly setting the bar high as an organization. It's cool as an alumni to continue to see that growth in the Alumni Band and the participation after the band because you make such an impact as an undergrad that you just want to continue to participate because it was such a great experience and you met all these wonderful people, and I love going and playing on the pep band with you because I get to see all my friends. There’s a strong showing from my generation, and now I'm starting to see our kids in the band with us, and it's just so cool. I don't know how many from my group had kids in the band or have kids in the band now, but it's somewhere in the dozens of kids that now are second generation or third generation in some case in the Iowa State marching band because it's just such a strong connection and it's just such a cool thing to see. I get a little teary-eyed, to be fair. [laughs]

[00:32:14]

**JC**: Well, you talk a lot about the fun of the band, the great times you had, were there any times where there were maybe some challenges or maybe you had some sort of a hardship or a difficult time while in the band?

**SB**: Well, my freshman year, I was on crutches for a while. So, I broke my foot the week before I came to school here [laughs], and I didn't know it. I just knew my foot hurt. So, I tried to march on it for a couple weeks. I had a few weeks where I was like, No marching. And that was a huge bummer. But then I was right back at it with my trombone rank, and it was all good. Because I marched in a different group my freshman year, it took me a while to kind of build that community with the clarinets. I was in the band, and I knew all the things, but then I was not really in the band because I wasn't with the group I was supposed to be with, and honestly, I'd have marched with the trombones all five years if they’d let me. [laughs] Still to this day, my trombone friends are part of the community that is still strong that I keep in touch with, but I still have a lot of clarinet friends too, and saxophones, and all the things. So, it's, you know, it's just part of the, oh, this thought is something else. I'll talk about that in a minute, but. I think because of that disjointedness, I would never [have] had an opportunity to be a right or left guide. I had underclassmen who were right or left guides. They never picked me because I had flown under the radar for the last four years as a clarinet, and so when it came time to pick, C didn't remember that, Oh, I have an upper-class man that has never had a leadership role in the band. So, that was a huge bummer for me. I just have to say. But I was happy for the people who were, we still had a great season, and it was good even with a new director.

The other thing that was hard was losing Cichy because he just was so amazing in his orchestration of music, like we still play songs that he composed. The crazy creations he made for us to march were just always so wonderful, and I thoroughly enjoyed darn near everything he threw at us. He was constantly challenging us as a band, so it was heartbreaking when he moved on. Then, I think, we had Dr. Christensen [Joseph Christensen, Director of Bands (1980-1998)], who was the leader of the band the whole time I was there, and it was so tragic when he passed away. Then when, Barry [Barry Larkin, Associate Professor of Music (1991-2009)] passed away suddenly, too. Losing our leaders, our mentors, it's not easy. Then, also, losing Gail in the pep band. I wasn't even in the band when Gail was in the band, but he was just such a kind and generous person. He was one of the first people I met when I came back and started doing Alumni Band, and so, it’s sad to lose the people that you build these great communities with, and I imagine that's going to continue as we get into middle age and beyond. But it was wonderful to have known all of them, and it's great when Cichy comes back and does stuff with the band still to this day because we were such an important part of his life, too. It’s just really neat.

**JC**: We mentioned you had something you wanted to come back to. Were you able to touch on that?

**SB**: No, I can't remember I should have written it down. What were we talking about when I

**JC**: Alright, well, if it comes back, we'll get back. Well, I, we generally talking about hardships and you were talking about, you know, some of the things that had happened that were maybe not, you know, happy go like in moments as part of being in the man.

**SB**: Yeah, I can't remember. It was, it was just a funny story that was unrelated, but I can't remember now.

**JC**: I'm sure if it comes back, No. A quick question just about the uniforms.

**SB**: Lost lost to history.

[00:36:24]

**JC**: Quick question just about the uniforms. Can you maybe talk about the uniforms that you wore when you were there, the pluses and the minuses on those?

**SB**: Yes, we actually had two uniforms while I was in the band. I had one set that we wore the first four years, and then we got a new set because, like I said, when McCarney [Dan McCarney Iowa State Football Coach (1995-2006)] came, I think he was a big part of kind of bringing the band in. He wanted us there. He wanted us participating. [They] got rid of Walden [Jim Walden, Iowa State Football Coach (1987-1994)] after the 0-10 in one year, and McCarney came in, I think, right after that. We got a new logo, and, honestly, I love that logo, it was navy and red and white instead of maroon-y red and yellow. So, we got this cool bad-ass cyclone guy for our logo, and so we got new band uniforms. This would have been like 1996, I think. The old uniforms were gross and red. A lot of red. But they flipped, so you could be one color for pregame, and you could flip it be a different color for halftime, so I think we usually did. Then we got new uniforms--it must have been my first senior year--that were cool and bright and fun, also red and white, but with the cool new logo on them. I should have brought it down. The alumni band made those uniforms into bags. To this day, if I'm doing like an overnight somewhere, I put it all in my little tote that is my old marching band uniform. [laughs] That was a really cool idea. I wish they'd made a bunch more of those because they're really neat. They were wool, and they were heavy, and when it was hot, you would just sweat your tooshie off because they were wool. But in the winter, when it got hecking cold, they were roomy enough [that] you could get some long johns under them, and you had wool on. We had the jackets that were like waterproof on the outside and fuzzy on the inside, and those were great in the wintertime. They made sure that we were warm enough and cool enough.

We had some really fun band t-shirts in my years. I didn't even talk about that. Holy cow. The t-shirts that we wore under our uniforms were fun and different every year. The t-shirts that every rank had were a whole another thing, and I have an entire tote of those in my basement that someday I will make into a quilt to remember all of my band years. My roommate was a saxophone, and she was dating a tuba player. So, I have shirts from the clarinets, the saxophones, the trombones because I, of course, stayed tight with them the whole time, and then the tubas as well. So, every year each instrument would come up with some sort of crazy shirt that they would put together, and it would have everybody who was in that music type, whether it be clarinet or saxophone or whatever, their names were on the shirt, then you had some sort of obnoxious thing happening on the shirt and it had the year. They were all super fun. I think one of my favorite ones had Opus from *Bloom County* [American comic strip by Berkeley Breathed] on the shirt. It was always fun to come up with a snarky thing or whatever that you would put on your shirt each year. So, there was some pride in being able to wear other ranks shirts, too. It meant that you were cool enough to be part of the trombone group, or the saxophone group, or whatever.

I think I remembered what I was going to say before because this is kind of along the same line. So, you'd wear your shirts on like the Friday night before, and then you’d go to the parties. But the saxophones had their own special thing. Usually, once or twice a year, there'd be a special saxophone party, and they would make what was called a “Hairy Buffalo,” and they still to this day, guard that recipe with their lives, and there's only a handful of people who know what goes in it, but I'll just say it was a lot of different kinds of booze, dry ice, and anything gummy. So, it was like a giant slushy. We would come with our mugs, and you could usually only handle one because if you had more than one, you were not going to make it to the Saturday morning practices. But the “Hairy Buffaloes” are a thing of legend, I think, with the marching band. I think cause they're a dry band now, they probably don't even know about these things anymore, which makes me a little bit sad. But the nineties crew still knows the recipe because we had a band discussion about it on the Alumni Band Facebook group one day a year or two ago, and so some of my band friends from the nineties still have the copy of it. So, should we need to bring back an alumni “Hairy Buffalo,” we can do that. But, you know, every group, the rowdier ones, had their own traditions on top of the bigger band traditions, but the t-shirts were definitely something that was always fun to come up with every year and to see all the different designs and, like I said, I have a whole tote of them. I pull them out every couple of years and giggle and remember all the crazy things we did wearing them. [laughs]

[00:42:19]

**JC**: So, as you became an upperclassman,--you know, I kind of asked the question, did you get any advice from others--did you give advice to freshmen coming in? Like, “Hey, do this. Don't do this. Here's how you get in the band. Here's how you stay with the band.” That kind of thing*.*

**SB**: You know, like I said, I never had an official leadership role, but I was super serious about the marching, like, when we're on the field, you got to hit your spots, you know, and you got to be where you're supposed to be. I can remember, and we haven't really talked about this, but every Monday morning, we go back to the film. So, we would meet in the Music Hall, we would start working on our new music, but we'd also watch the film from the performance the weekend before. You’d be watching it, and you'd see somebody who did a “Hi, mom” because they didn't hit their spot. There would be an audible groan from the room because, you know, you'd get called out for not hitting your spot. There was a lot of pride in the marching. You’d get put on the spot more than once for not hitting your spot that Monday morning or Monday afternoon when we'd meet. They're going to start ratting you to get where you need to be when you need to be there. It’s super important when you're making a perfect arc, or making a straight line, or things like that. There’d be audible [groans] when somebody didn't hit their mark and had a huge “Hi mom,” and, to be fair, everybody has them. I was not perfect by any means, and I know there was at least one show where I was the audible [groans] because I didn't make my spot where I was supposed to be. I think part of the Monday sessions was kind of to drive that home. They expected a certain level of performance out of us, and peer pressure is strong when you have a group of three hundred people expecting you to hit your mark and know your music. If there’s enough of us who know our music well enough, we do okay, but making sure you’re in the right spot, people can see that. [laughs] We can't hear if you're playing or not, but we can see if you're not in the right spot. I think I spent a lot of time coaching the younger groups. *A*, on all of those things that I learned when we were marching in formation, and *B,* on how to read the charts, figure out where you're going on the charts, how to mark your music so that you followed the charts the right way, and things like that as we were getting ready. There was always great pride on the weeks where you could march without your music [laughs] and not have to be flipping as you go because you've practiced it enough that you had it memorized and knew which way you were going when you got where you needed to go. I think I spent a lot of time kind of coaching the next group and trying to hold them to the same standard that I was held to as I was coming up, and I think that's part of what makes the band so strong.

[00:45:27]

**JC**: You talked about practicing the music. Like, how long was a practice? When did you practice? How long was it? You know, you talked a little bit about marching on Clyde Williams and design center [College of Design]. But how did music practice go?

**SB**: So, we would practice, I feel like, five days a week plus Saturday mornings before games for home games. So, it's pretty intensive, it’s a major commitment, and we would play two hours a day. So, if we had crappy weather, we'd all meet at the music hall, and we'd just work [on] the music. But when we were learning new music, a lot of times we'd have one at least one day in the music hall where we'd work [on] the parts and try to figure out the different things. But when we were on the field, we could work [on] the parts in our sections. So, we'd just get all the clarinets together and we'd work through different parts of the music. Especially if we had a particularly challenging section of music, “How do you finger that?” or “How do you do that?” and just work in your groups a little bit for part of the practice. We’d get into our first formation for a song, and we’d just stand in that formation and work the music, so we'd spend time as an entire band just working through what it's going to sound like where you're at on the field, so you can get a feel for what that feels like, and then we'd work through the steps without the music. So, it would be a lot of clapping and counting [laughs] to get to the next break. So, “Okay, we're going to go forty-eight steps and go!” and then they’d just have their metronome out there, and you’d be just marching to that at whatever pace the music was going to be for you. We did a lot of breaking it down, and some weeks we'd only have a week to turn it around. I mean, because we had another home game, or we had an away game that we were going to. That's a lot of pressure to learn an entire new set of formations and a new set of music. So, you'd have to work a little bit on your own to make sure you worked out any bugs in the music and they’d give us the charts on Monday at that review from the week before. So, you’d spend some serious time focusing on getting it all marked up, getting all the notations put into your music so that when you were on the field, you were ready to go. You'd show up, and you'd have all your rubber bands and your paper clips and all the things that you needed in your music because it's windy out there. So, we all had paper clips to hold the music inside the little sleeves, and then you'd have a rubber band on each side. I always had mine in a *V* shape with one flap up so you could always just pull from one side, but the other side would hold it down so your music wouldn't get away from you when you were playing. Just learning all the different ways to kind of be successful [laughs] on getting everything ready so that when you hit the field, you were ready to go. It was a huge commitment.

And on Saturday mornings, we'd probably march for an hour and run through music again. We'd run the whole pregame, and run the whole half time show, work out any last bugs so that when we were performing on the field later in the day, we were ready to. There were also a lot of fun things related to that, like Saturday morning practice there’d be a whole rainbow of Chuck Taylor's out on the field. I had red ones with yellow laces, and we had some people who like shared shoes, so you'd have one person with a yellow shoe and a red shoe and so on and so forth. Like, my trombone right guide had a trombone that had been electrical taped red and yellow. So, there were several instruments out there that had been enhanced, so they met the cyclone spirit. I, to this day, still have a sticker on my clarinet that's a little cyclone mascot doing his marching. [laughs] It’s always cool to see everybody come together Saturday morning in anticipation of the big game, to hit the field later in the day. But yes, it was a major time commitment. We [had], probably, ten hours of work every week, sometimes twelve, sometimes more, and we were just the regular band! The drum line, my gosh, the drum line, and the flag girls, and the other people who participated on the field with us, they put in a lot more work than we did. Props to all of them because the drum line is what held us together. All the work that they did was pretty tremendous.

[00:50:13]

**JC**: So, what overall would you say the marching band mean to you?

**SB**: When you think of the spirit of the university, and I'm probably biased because I was in the band, but if you think of spirit, and pep band, or rallies and things like that, you can't be successful in conveying school spirit unless the band is there. I truly believe that. I know you believe that. [laughs] You know, if you're having a pep rally or some sort of other activity and the band's not there, it's just not the same because you need that conveyance of spirit. That fight song, the cheers, and the chants, and all the things that come with the band. We drive a lot of other people's experiences. The cheer squads look to us for guidance in the music and things that drive their performance. I think we are the epitome of the spirit of the school because we pump people up, and we bring the music, and we bring the energy, and, you know, it's just a really powerful tool and something really cool that the other communities just can't do. I mean, the cheer squad, they could carry their little signs and things like that, but nobody's going to hear them because there's eight of them and there's three hundred of us. So, if you want that Cyclone power, you had better get the band involved. [laughs] I think the band just brings the spirit, we bring this great community and this great energy. It’s just such a powerful thing to be a part of, and now, as an alumni, to watch and get emotional about. [laughs] I think it's really cool, and I love to see how the band [has] evolved, in such that they've got the Storm [State Storm] now. So now they've got this performance pep band that goes out, and one of my best friend’s son is in it this year, and he's just having a blast, and he loves that it's a smaller commitment. So, there's still an opportunity to be part of that community of excitement for the university without having to put fifteen hours of time in every week. It's neat to see how the band is evolving and expanding and continuing to do really cool things.

[00:52:41]

**JC**: Shifting gears a little bit now to Alumni Band. Can you maybe talk about your involvement in Alumni Marching Band?

**SB**: I imagine my experience is a little different because I'm local [laughs]but for the first eleven years after I graduated lived out of state, and so I didn't get to participate in the Alumni Bands, we would do game watches and stuff out in Washington. The Hawkeyes are everywhere, and the Cyclones just really aren't, [laughs] so it's harder to find our people once you leave the metro. [laughs] I think it was really neat for me to come back as an adult and finally be able to participate. I remember coming back for homecoming games and I've done a handful of homecoming games. Bringing my kids and being able to experience it and watch [it]. I remember my first couple years that we were back in Ames, we got the half-season tickets for the football games, and I remember we always ended up having tickets for the senior game. [I’d be] talking to my daughter about it, like, “Oh, they're going to take their shoes off and leave them on the field!” That was something I didn't talk about. The last game of the year for the seniors who are graduating, leaving, and becoming Alumni Band members, it’s historical that they would leave their shoes on the field, and they would march off at the end without them. It just brings me to tears even to watch it now as an adult [laughs] if I’m at a senior game. It's the end of their undergraduate experience with the band, but now they get to be part of this great Alumni Community too that you are a huge part of making wonderful. So, you know, we truly appreciate everything you do for us today. I thoroughly enjoy being in the marching band as an alumni and in the pep band, and continuing to do rallies. I love it when they call us down to do rallies so we can fire people up as our old folk band. [laughs] I love being able to experience the basketball games, wrestling, gymnastics, and volleyball. I had never been to a volleyball game until this year because I got to go with the pep band, and it was really cool to see this team that's having such great success and being able to cheer them on, that was really fun. My health doesn't always let me participate the way I want to, but I do appreciate every opportunity I get to play with the band, even if I can't always be there. But it's a truly wonderful community of people, and being in the Alumni Band, your band has grown. So now you've got decades of people, to me, that's an adjustment because now we’ve got all of these younger kids that know all the other stuff, the new traditions, and we're all just like, What are they doing? That’s what the pep band does now and so we're trying to learn with them, advance our technological capabilities, and all the things. There's a little bit of pain and suffering for the old farts to kind of figure some of this stuff out, but it's still worth it to be in the band and be part of that community. It’s fun because I'll get text messages or Facebook messages from friends and family like, Oh, I saw you in the band! Or, I saw you on TV! [laughs] It's still really cool to continue to be part of that community as an alumni. People appreciate us, and they really love what we do and continue to do even though we're no longer part of the ISUCF‘V’MB standard. I really enjoy it and hope to be able to continue to do it for a long time.

[00:56:46]

**JC**: Well, are there any questions that I didn't ask that maybe you wanted me to, or any things that you wanted to touch on that we haven't yet?

**SB**: No, I think I talked about a lot of the things that I had in my notes. I think one of the stories I told in our practiced interview is [about] starting in the band. I was in Helser, which was the dorm closest to the field and so I can remember it was super convenient, but it was also really loud. So, I was constantly getting harassed by people who were on the band field side of the building because, Oh, you guys are so loud, can't you go play someplace else, [laughs] I'm like, No, we're in the band. We're going to do our thing. I can remember also I had a pickup truck like my junior and senior years when I was in the band. So, I can remember filling up my truck with as many band kids who needed a ride as possible. I was a frequent shuttle provider to the underclassmen to all of the things that were band adventures in town. So that was always fun. We'd always meet in the Helser parking lot and load as many kids in as we could, and go off to whatever adventure we were partaking in that day. Usually, Saturday morning rides over to the field to get to the stadium and stuff like that. Because my roommate also was in the band, we would shuttle as many as we could in our vehicles to get everybody to the Saturday morning practices so you didn't have to hoof it. [laughs] I just still have a lot of fond memories, even if they're hard to get out of my brain sometimes, but It was a great experience, and, you know, I wish I could have gotten my kids involved more so that they could be part of that next generation of future alumni for the band. My daughter is doing the choir instead at Iowa State. At least she gets to come hang out with us once a year and play in the Alumni Band, so it's always fun when she does.

[00:59:14]

**JC**: Well, anything else you wanted to touch on before we close out?

**SB**: Oh, I'm sure there's dozens of things I'm not remembering that'll come to me later, but I appreciate being asked. I think it was it was a pretty awesome experience and continues to be an awesome experience with the Alumni Band. It's just such a blessing to have this amazing community of people, many of whom I'm still friends with, and we still get together like Ohana-palooza, having dinner together at Christmas with a whole bunch of band people, and having a great Facebook community of people that I still continue to talk with. Being able to support each other through all the things. We had one member who was in the band who passed away last year who was from my generation who was also married to a band person, and so, you know, it was really neat and continues to be neat to see how the band community rallied around her and supported her and felt that loss with her I think too. It's cool to see how this community just continues to sustain itself and be amazing and [be] such a great group of people.

[01:00:29]

**JC**: I agree. Well, thank you very much for your time.

**SB**: I appreciate being able to do this, and for you taking the time to ask me all the questions.