Jessica Blaum

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Dean Brand

2023-10-19

Time stamps reference video recording.

**DB**: Dean Brand

**JB**: Jessica Blaum

[00:00:00]

**DB**: This Dean Brand, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives Cyclone Marching Band oral history project. Today is Thursday, October 19, 2023. I am interviewing Jessica Blaum, Jessica is in Bettendorf, Iowa, and I am in Mitchellville, Iowa. Well, thank you, Jessica, for taking time out of your busy schedule as a schoolteacher to be part of the oral history project. It's been fun to interview the folks that I've had a chance to interview before. They kind of hit just all different. From my year, where I actually overlapped one, to someone that’s pretty current. Let’s begin by telling us a little bit about your early life, where you grew up, anything about your family, that kind of thing. To give the folks looking at this some kind of an idea.

[00:01:30]

**JB**: I grew up in Bettendorf in the Quad Cities. I attended Bettendorf High School, played the clarinet all through middle school and high school, high school marching band. I had two younger sisters. I was involved in other activities, rode horses, did art classes, and was heavily involved in the drama club in high school. Played in the Quad City Youth Symphony Orchestra during most of high school. So, music was always a big part of my life.

[00:02:15]

**DB**: So how did you come to be at Iowa State, when, and what was your major while you studied--or maybe you had more than one. [laughs] College students have been known to do that.

**JB**: I was never sure where I wanted to go to school. Both my parents had attended the University of Illinois, but then had moved to Iowa. So, I visited several schools. When I visited Iowa State, I had many friends there and was able to spend a night in the dorms with one of them. Overall, [I] just really liked the feel of the campus. Just everything seemed to kind of click. So, I chose Iowa State and decided to go there. I actually began as a music major. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. It was kind of between music and teaching for the most part. I auditioned and did get a partial music scholarship so I thought I might as well try that one. But that only lasted until about October of the first semester. I think I found pretty quickly I liked it more as a hobby than as something that was going to be a career. But in most of my music classes there had been so many people who were studying to be music teachers that did really kind of help fuel the passion for teaching. Just hearing so many professors speak so passionately about teaching. I didn't really want to teach music though, so I switched to English education and that one stuck. So, I became an English teacher but got some additional certifications as well. So, I actually teach French now.

[00:03:54]

**DB**: When were you a student at Iowa State? What years?

**JB**: From 2008 to 2013.

[00:04:08]

**DB**: What bands were you involved with and was it the whole way through with each of them or?

**JB**: Yes, I was in the marching band for five years and I was in the wind ensemble those years as well. The first couple of years I was also in the clarinet choir. I was in the women's basketball band for one year, I believe. Then, after my undergrad, I did some grad classes for a year and played in the concert band while I was doing that as well.

**DB**: I'm going to assume that you were in the clarinet section in the marching band then?

**JB**: Correct. In all of the ensembles.

[00:04:57]

**DB**: Is there anything interesting that you'd like to note about the section while you are a member of it?

**JB**: [laughs] In the marching band in particular? Yes, we called ourselves ‘The Woodies. There were some really fun section t-shirts based on that nickname every year. I think during my time there, kind of our section identifier, that we came to embrace, was the fact that we always had snacks at rehearsal. So before or after rehearsal or during breaks, somebody always had snacks to share in the clarinet section. Then our section pregame ritual was the ‘woodie coaster’. So, while we were waiting to go into Jack Trice Stadium [Football stadium for ISU], our section would be sitting at the top of the hill towards the entrance. There would always be a point before we went in where we would sit in rows on the hill. Our section leader would stand in the front, and we would pretend to be a roller coaster, basically. So, we'd have our clarinets like the lap bar of the roller coaster and lots of *Ah! Ah!*, hands in the air [Brand laughs] leaning this way, leaning the other way. It was always a spectacle for the people going into the stadium to stop and watch us just doing our bit of silliness.

**DB**: They're probably wondering, I wonder what they teach these kids at school here? [both laugh]

**JB**: Meanwhile, the saxophone section would be nearby in a circle singing “Afternoon Delight” [song by the Starland Vocal Band**,** released in 1976]. I don't know what the other sections were doing.

[00:06:32]

**DB**: What was your process, in your time there, for learning and performing a show? How did you go from getting the drill to learning the music and putting it all into that performance?

**JB**: We'll see what I remember of it. I imagine it was fairly standard. I remember starting out with music rehearsal to kind of get a feel for the music typically. Then as we were learning drill. We’d get drill charts that were like printed out packets that had the grids where you could see the full formations and you'd have to find yourself in it. We’d have rehearsals where you had to go set to set, finding your dots and practicing running through them. We had flip folders during rehearsals, so we would pretty quickly start adding music in. But eventually we would have music checks where we were expected to have the music memorized and had to stop using flip folders as we got closer to a performance.

[00:07:36]

**DB**: So, you still had the music memorized for performance, but you--

**JB:** Correct, we performed memorized during performances, but as we were first learning drill, we had flip folders as we were working on memorization during rehearsal.

**DB**: Okay. So, you're kind of that transition from being all paper and flip folders to include the performance to now where everything's electronic and basically it's all memorized.

**JB**: Do they not have flip folders anymore? Wow.

**DB**: Only if you're old, like me, when we go for Alumni Band. Yes, everything is done on--

**JB**: Do they have iPads now? I think that's what I remember hearing.

**DB**: I don't know if they've got iPads. All the current band, they're carrying a cell phone with them and there's an app, I think, that they use. The first time I saw them do that at a homecoming rehearsal I-- holy cow!

**JB**: Wow. Yes, I guess that makes sense though, you wouldn't really need the printouts.

[00:08:53]

**DB**: Yes. So, anyway. Okay, what time of the day and where did your practices take place?

**JB**: From what I remember, which I think I'm remembering correctly, we rehearsed from four thirty until 5:50, Mondays through Fridays. I was in kind of the transition where my first year, or maybe two, we rehearsed on the field between the Design Building [ISU College of Design] and, what I just remember referring to as the Titanic. Because that was what the skyline of the buildings that were in front of us looked like was the Titanic. So that's what it was referred to, but then after my first year or two, they moved us to the field kind of back behind where the armory is.

**DB**: Okay, to the current practice field.

**JB**: Is that where they still are?

[00:09:45]

**DB**: Yep. So, when the university finally gave the band a place that they could call their own, I guess you'd say. Did you practice five days a week then?

**JB**: Yes.

**DB**: I'm assuming probably, like we did then, if the team had a bye week, you had two weeks to learn a new program. If they played consecutive Saturdays, you were jamming it all into that next week.

**JB**: Yes, so the shows where the team had a bye week were the ones where we had many more drill sets or much more complicated music to learn. Compared to the ones where there was one week in between and sometimes those were a bit simpler to make it more doable.

[00:10:48]

**DB**: Do you recall any of the shows that you performed? Do you have a favorite one of all the shows that you did?

**JB**: I mean, I could list a lot of them probably. Some that stand out are--I always remember my first show as a freshman. I don't remember the whole show, but I know we performed the theme from *Iron Man* during that performance. Some that stand out are we had a show that included the song “Single Ladies” ["Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It),” Beyoncé] and that was one where they had us dance. So, there was kind of a break where we sat down instruments and did the “Single Ladies” dance. That was a huge crowd pleaser I think we repeated a couple times that season. So that was a lot of fun because it got such a reaction from the crowd. Who would have thought band members dancing [Brand laughs] would be what people get excited about?

We did a Disney show that included the music from the movie *Up* when it was still fairly new. I remember we got to form a house on the field and then like make it fly up into the sky, like it moved up the field. So that was fun. There was a year or two where we were able to actually change into Halloween costumes for our halftime show. I don't remember what we played for those shows, but we had a member in the clarinet section whose name was Kevin [Kevin Lainer]. He let us make him a costume to dress him up as Kevin the bird from *Up*. There was somebody in a different section who was dressed as Russell [character from the movie *Up*]. So, it was cute. We had a bunch of *Up* characters out on the field.

I remember lots of themed shows. I think there was a *Les Mis* [The musical Les Misérables] show. The show that I was not there for that got talked about still the whole time I was there was when they did the *Pirates of the Caribbean* show. I think I missed it by just a year or two. Everybody who was there for it just remembered that it was at an away game. They all would say how they got booed when they marched on to the field but by the time they finished their *Pirates of the Caribbean* show and floated a pirate ship across the field the crowd was cheering as they left. [both laugh]

[00:13:00]

**DB**: Yes, those were fun. What was the culture of the band at that point in time?

**JB**: I think the best word to sum it up is just family. You know, you would get told at the beginning of the year, especially for new members, “Hey, you just made three hundred best friends!” You never could know everybody in the band. But anytime you ran into somebody on campus who had their marching band swag on it was like--you had a connection. I think there was enough tradition and ritual steeped into the band that it just made that bond. That you kind of knew that you had an understanding with each other. I think it was a really positive place to be a member of. Lots of social activities and people just glad to be spending time together doing music.

[00:13:52]

**DB**: How do you think that culture was shaped by the members, the band, the drum majors, the director, or the university? If you had any knowledge of that, you know, “echelons above reality” as we say in the military.

**JB**: At university level, I guess, all I would have knowledge of to share is that we were really supported by the Athletic Department. We would go perform--I remember multiple times performing at Jamie Pollard's [Director of Athletics at ISU] house and even being invited inside to play within his house. He had people over, excited to hear the bands play. So, we’d go around to a lot of the athletic people's homes. I think that was around Halloween, that we’d go for like-- It wasn't during trick or treating but something themed for that or maybe it was homecoming. But just feeling supported in that way.

Overall, I think everybody had something to do with the culture, obviously, and directors are a big part of it. But I had three different directors in the time that I was in the band and that culture never really changed, though. I think it was so embodied in everybody in the band that-- not that the director didn't make a difference. But it didn't need to be any specific person to support that positive energy and camaraderie.

[00:15:15]

**DB**: Who did you have as directors then? Because I had three directors too.

**JB**: Did you? I had Matt Smith [Matthew Smith, Marching Band Director (2002-2010)] my freshman year. I think he was only there my freshman year. Then when he left, we had an interim director, so we had Natalie Steele [Natalie Steele Royston]. Then Mike Smith [Stephen Smith, Marching Band Director (2011-2017)] got hired after that and was there for the remainder of the time that I was there. So, I think Natalie Steel was assistant director when Matt Smith was director, but then Bill Staub [William Staub, Marching Band Assistant Director (2010-2012)] got brought on for a while. I think he was the assistant director the rest of the time. So, two different people.

[00:16:02]

**DB**: Did you have a favorite marching band tradition?

**JB**: There are so many traditions that were special. [both laugh] Let's see, I think I jotted down some ideas. We talked about the “woodie coaster.” On the march into Jack Trice, there was a drum cadence. I'm sure they still do it. I don't know what it's called. I think it was just the clarinet section that would play rock, paper, scissors. There was a part where it went *boom, boom, boom* and we didn't have to be playing at that point. So, it was rock, paper, scissors games, maybe everybody did that. I know the clarinets did.

Dismissal from rehearsals was always fun. Leading up to the Iowa – Iowa State game, that dismissal always included a Hawkeye joke. It always included asking who had a birthday that day. The band’s way of singing happy birthday at dismissal was kind of unique. It was just kind of shouting, Happy Birthday to you, and instead of a name, *Blah!* [both laugh] Then we would have those dismissals after games as well. I don't know how long this tradition had gone on, but the drum majors would always have, kind of, a poem prepared to recite. They had to be ready for it to address whether we had won or lost, but it was always fun to hear the poem that they read to us. I remember family members would come to the dismissal to kind of hear that and the birthday song. Those are the main traditions that come to mind.

[00:17:41]

**DB**: You talked about the “woodie coasters” as kind of a pregame ritual for the clarinet section, were there any others besides that one?

**JB**: Pregame rituals for other sections?

**DB**: Or just for your section or--

**JB**: The “woodie coaster” is the main one for my section that I recall. Lining up to march to the stadium as we got into our ranks to parade down the street, the guides on the ends of the ranks would run back and forth high fiving everyone. You knew it was getting started when that happened. They would feed us, usually, before the games. It had to have been a funding thing of just whoever was going to give the best deal of box lunches that they could feed us. But there was a year where I swear it was almost every single game, they fed us Jason's Deli. Which was good sandwiches, but for lunch every weekend. Then there was a week where the wind ensemble also had a concert where we were fed dinner on Friday night and guess what they fed us? [Brand laughs] It was Jason's Deli. [laughs] So, we had a lot of turkey sandwiches that year. I think after that year it seems like there was an effort to provide a little more variety. But being fed was nice.

[00:19:07]

**DB**: Yes, definitely. What can you tell us about the band's uniform while you were a member?

**JB**: I was there for a couple of different uniforms. I won't remember them in great detail. But at first it was the-- kind of red pants with the white coat with the “bird in the blender” on like the—what do you call the cover?

**DB**: Oh, the overlay?

**JB:** Yes, the overlay. Then eventually they got new uniforms for us. Those were like the dark red--like the whole uniform was solid red with the spats. That was the first year we had to wear spats and we all thought they were awful. I think we switched from the white Dinkles [brand of marching band shoes] in the first version of the uniform to the black shoes with white spats after that. A thing I always remember about the new uniforms we got is that the pants were so much thinner than the older uniforms. Which was nice on hot days. But when we first got those new uniforms, we were told “You need to go out and buy some spandex and you need to wear it every game,” because you could just see clothing lines right through them. [Brand laughs]

**DB**: You probably had to go out and buy Under Armor and whatever else to stay warm.

**JB**: Yes, we needed more layers. [laughs]

[00:20:42]

**DB**: I'm assuming the band got to travel while you were part of it?

**JB**: Yes.

**DB**: [Do you have any] experiences that we can talk about?

**JB**: There weren't too many that we couldn't talk about. We were on a pretty tight leash when we traveled, the expectations were pretty high. No drinking, no partying. But we did get to travel a lot. I think I got to go to three different bowl games in the time I was there. Then obviously we traveled to Iowa City for the Iowa – Iowa State game. There were a few other extra performances we did for high school exhibitions or things like that.

So, specific travel memories. My first full game, we got to go to Tempe, Arizona for the Insight Bowl. The trip on the bus was actually the most memorable part. A little backstory that adds to it is my best friend, Sarah [Sarah (Buck) Van Woert, 2009-2014, Phychology and Criminal Justice], who played clarinet with me in high school and then at Iowa State as well. Starting in high school, we just had an on-going joke that when the two of us were on a bus together, the bus was going to break down. I think it was her fault actually because there was a high school trip when her bus was the one that literally the engine caught fire.

The trip to Tempe, we were on the bus together, and, of course, it's a long road trip to Arizona. So, we're sleeping through the night, but start to become aware that the bus keeps coasting to a stop on the side of the road. Then going onto the road again. It just kept dying, the engine, and eventually the driver had to open up the engine to get it running. I don't know what they did. They had to drive with the cover off so it wouldn't overheat, and it was kind of jerry rigged with bungee cords and duct tape. You could see it because they had to keep the panel off. So that was how we made it to Tempe, Arizona [Brand laughs] with an exposed, bungy cord rigged up engine on our bus. They actually ended up having to send--they tried all week that we were there, the whole time, to fix that bus and didn't succeed. At the last minute the tour bus company had to send a new bus with two drivers alternating to get it there in time to get us home. In Tempe it was so exciting for us that it was warm there and the hotel had an outdoor pool. So even though it was January, the whole band was in the pool and hotel staff, you know, to them it's winter. I just remember them shaking their heads. It was not terribly warm. It was probably in the sixties, but that was swimming weather to a bunch of Iowans.

Then another bowl game trip memory is when we went to the Pinstripe Bowl. The tour company for whatever reason--for the one of the buses--I think they had overbooked some of their buses. They were so apologetic that they had to provide one of the fancier buses that the staff ended up riding on. [laughs] And, it was like, Okay. So, the bus that the staff, student staff and drum majors were riding on had, like, bunk beds and TVs in it. Just everything we heard about this bus was that it was so fancy. This was the year that the like the Wall Street demonstration were going on. So, throughout the trip, that bus got called--it was not bus one. It was bus 1 percent. [Brand laughs] One of the people on it was just doing a live feed. Just live updates on, I think, Twitter of every fancy thing going on their bus. All the band members on the other buses were seeing these updates of what a great time they were having on bus 1 percent. It was just a fun ongoing joke throughout the trip. We did get to perform on Yankee field or the field of Yankee Stadium that trip, which was a cool experience. Yes, I guess those are my travel memories.

[00:25:06]

**DB**: So, you performed Jack Trice the whole time, didn't you?

**JB:** Yes. When I saw the question about what stadium it threw me for a second because it hadn't occurred to me that anyone would have performed anywhere else.

**DB**: That would be me. But, anyway, okay, what was that like to perform at Jack Trice to you as--and you come [from Bettendorf]. For those that aren't aware, Bettendorf is a larger high school when it comes to Iowa class sizes. Larger schools tend to have larger stadiums and that kind of thing. But how did Jack Trice strike you for performing in?

**JB**: Yes, I mean, it’s definitely--even having gone to 4-A school with a decent sized stadium, Jack Trice is still huge in comparison. A much bigger crowd. I'm not personally actually a huge sports fan. So, I don't know if I ever thought it was quite as awesome to be on the field in Jack Trice as a lot of people did. It was definitely an experience. Something that always I remember being a big difference from my high school stadium is just the expectations of the band. [At] high school football games where we would perform and then in the stands, we might be able to get concessions or family could at least bring us concessions. We'd sit, we'd watch the game. I remember going into my first game in Jack Trice. We got to the stands after pregame and sat down. One of my friends around me who was a year older [said], “Oh no, we stand for the whole game,” and I learned that we sure did. [both laugh]

**DB**: Yes, more or less three hours later.

[00:27:00]

**JB**: Yes, I remember that first year, oh, my feet would hurt so bad. It was never so bad ever again after that. I think it just took getting used to standing for that amount of time in the stands. That reminds me of another clarinet section tradition was there would always be one game of the year, I think it was probably the last game, where guides or section leaders would bring candy necklaces. We'd wrap them around the barrel of the clarinet and munch on them throughout the game. It's like a snack that was right there ready for you.

That also reminds me of the tradition of wearing everything backward after a win. I think my freshman year was not a great year for the team. I think our first game was a win and I got to experience that tradition of marching out with coats and shakos [a tall, cylindrical military cap, typically with a visor] on backwards. I don't think they won a home game again all the whole rest of the season. By the next year, I think everybody in my grade had forgotten that that was even a thing that we did. [Brand laughs]

[00:28:08]

**DB**: How was it different to perform in Jack Trice as opposed to other stadiums you performed in. Of course, you got to go to a couple ball games, you talked about--

**JB**: I think probably just the crowd in Jack Trice made it special. Having it be your home crowd and your home traditions. We had our hill to do our “woodie coaster” on and everything was for our team. But also, we had pretty good support in the crowd, I think, for the band. There were people who were there to see us. So, it was always special performing at Jack Trice. It was fun to go other places, but it was never quite the same as being at home.

**DB**: Yes, I think the crowd in Ames does appreciate the band for the most part.

**JD**: Yes, I’d agree.

[00:29:05]

**DB**: Did you have any special events? You talked about the couple of bowl games--parades, concerts, or anything like that that you performed in? I guess you'd mentioned early on about a couple of high school marching band performances that you did at contests or festivals that they had.

**JB**: I think we maybe did one in Ankeny, an exhibition. There was a year when the Iowa game was in Iowa City, and I think hotels were going to be an issue. So, we did an exhibition in Muscatine and then actually families put us up for the night because it was a morning game the next day. So, it was cool to have high school band families that were excited to take in the little orphan college band students [Brand laughs] and look after us.

Actually, that was a funny thing where my friend I mentioned and I ended up, without knowing it until till we met her--we were saying with the mother of our high school principal. We put it together that we had that connection. I think I mentioned the bowl games. There was always Band Extravaganza every year. It was a very special event to do. My family usually made the effort to come up and see it. It was all just a fun thing for the crowd to see all the bands perform. But the marching band was like the high energy fun part of that evening.

**DB:** Oh, definitely. I got my tickets today. I went to Ames and bought them.

**JB:** Awesome. I haven't been since I graduated. That would be a fun event to go to Ames for.

**DB**: Yes. Get your tickets early though. Unlike probably in 2013, they sold it out last year.

**JB**: Did they? That's awesome.

**DB:** Yeah. You can't pretty much walk up and buy a ticket like you used to be able to do.

**JB:** Yeah, you got to plan ahead, huh?

[00:31:21]

**DB**: Yes, definitely. What do you think sets the ’Varsity’ Marching Band apart from other marching band programs that maybe you got to observe or interact with?

**JB**: When I saw that question on the list, I was like, I'm not sure I'm going to know how to answer that one. Other band programs we interacted with, it seemed similar, in that band members seemed to have a good bond with each other, have a good energy of school spirit and were enthusiastic about being in the band. I think obviously Iowa State has its own traditions like any school does that make it unique in its own way. Maybe even has more traditions than some programs do, but I can't say for sure. I almost feel like it's more of a question of what makes band programs similar to each other. Just the way that music brings people together and how that creates such a cool experience for people in a marching band.

[00:32:34]

**DB**: You said you had a couple of sisters, were they in band or have been in band?

**JB**: They were both in band in high school. One of them continued a bit into college. I think she [Jackie Blaum, 2020 Physics and Computer Science] played in the wind ensemble at Iowa State, but she was never in the marching band. So, it was just me in the marching bands.

[00:33:00]

**DB**: When you first started in your freshman year, did you get any advice from the band members or were you able to pass along your advice when you became the upperclassman?

**JB**: [laughs] I'm sure there was. I remember a friend really encouraging me to make sure I had sun block. But nothing really comes to mind strongly in that respect of advice. I think you learn from observing and experience and everybody was there to help you out.

[00:33:37]

**DB**: How did you balance being in the band along with academics and whatever else you did for a life while you were in school?

**JB**: Well, social life was easy because band was my social life. It was much more vibrant than I'm sure it would have been if I hadn't been in band. So many friends. I'm not an especially outgoing person, usually have a few close friends--but so many people that I knew and became close with because of band. I never felt like I was being robbed of a social life when we had to spend weekends doing events because I was with my friends the whole time. For academics, I mean, those were just kind of the two things I balanced. Classes, homework, and band, that was, I think, a great a great mixture of things to keep my schedule busy. Yes, it was good.

[00:34:30]

**DB**: How do you think the marching band has changed over time from what you've observed and were part of for four or five years?

**JB**: I know it's gotten larger over time, and it seems like it's maybe become a bit more competitive, I think. I remember I didn't actually have to audition for it. I think it was maybe because of being a music major I was automatically accepted in. I don't think that's the case anymore. I think everybody has to audition. I think that just comes with having so many people interested in being a part of it, which is just great. I'm aware that they've started having almost like two bands or two tiers of the bands, maybe. Which wasn't the case, everybody got to perform every game when I was there. There were some freshmen alternates who would alternate between two games. I think maybe by the time I was a senior they had started instituting like star rank, or that might have started after I left. So just the kind of things that have had to go into place because of having so much participation that probably ups the competition level of it a little bit. But it seems like the important things are still there, seems like the traditions are still there and the enthusiasm for making music together and having a good time.

[00:36:03]

**DB**: I was on the Alumni Band board. It was maybe 2016. The band director at the time told us that they’d went to the band--because that was when they were starting to get more people than they had slots for. [He] asked the band leadership, the guides and drum majors and so forth, “Okay, we can do one or two things. We can do it like we have been where if you were in the band last year you've automatically got a slot, or we could do it like a sports team that you have to earn your spot every year in the band*.*”The leadership said, We'll earn it, so that's what they've done ever since and this year there was over five hundred kids trying to make that.

**JB**: That's right. I do remember hearing that that had been a change. I can see the reason for it. I do remember thinking like, oof, if I had been in band for a couple years and then not made the cut the year after that I would have just been devastated because it becomes such a big part of your life. But I guess that probably also encourages people to just really you know work hard and earn their spot.

[00:37:25]

**DB**: Yes, definitely. Do you recall were there any times while you were a member of the band that there were difficult times? You've always got the little things, but--

**JB**: I think as an organization the band was always doing well when I was there but, like you said, the little things or sometimes they didn't feel little. Conditions weren't always great, right? Like, I talked about our bus breaking down over and over again on our way to a bowl game. I always have a memory of a specific day of rehearsal where it was an outdoor rehearsal. It was pouring rain. I'm sure it was towards the end of the week. We had a show coming up and couldn't afford to lose the marching time and just had to power through in the rain. I think at one point the rain started pouring down hard enough that we had to all pile into the lobby of one of the academic buildings nearby. I always remember the squeaking shoes, just like three hundred pairs of wet feet piling into the lobby of this building because there were so many of us. I can't even remember which year this was and which director it was, but I remember them giving us kind of a pep talk before we had to go back outside just about the fact that like, Yes, it was rotten, but those are the days you're going to remember and look back on and smile or laugh. So as awful as it is going through it, that's what's going to bond you to each other and make memories. It's true because I remember that to this day. It is always like those worst days that you’re always like, “Oh, I remember the time that happened!” That was a good life lesson from being in band. You can just kind of take those challenges lightly and know it's going to make a good memory.

[00:39:12]

**DB**: Yes, definitely. What does the marching band mean to you, Jessica?

**JB**: A lot. My husband didn't go to Iowa State, wasn't familiar with Iowa State Marching Band. But he could probably tell you a lot of these stories because he hears them from me. He always jokes, “It's like you were in a cult [Brand laughs] that I missed out on,” and it kind of was. Just such a special connection you get with everybody. I did a study abroad in France the spring semester of my fourth year. I remember one of the people on the study abroad trip saying like, “Oh, isn't the best choice that you've made out of all undergrad, to study abroad?”

And I was like, “Well, it's a good choice, but, no, it's not the best one, the best one I made was being in the marching band.”

I remember they were incredulous. Like, “Really, you would give this trip up to be in your college marching band?”

And I was like, “Absolutely*.*”

[00:40:17]

**DB**: What's the most one of the most memorable experiences you had while you were in marching band? You obviously had a number of them.

**JB**: That's right, it's hard to narrow it down to one and I'm sure there's memories I'm forgetting about. Lots of times with friends. There [are] so many people I was friends with in band that I still keep in touch with now. Even if we've fallen out of touch, I know that I could contact them if I was going to be in the area. We'd meet up and it would you know be like just picking right back up.

But kind of a funny, memorable, thing that was kind of a tradition that happened. I was in Tau Beta Sigma, which was the band's service sorority. It's the sister organization to Kappa Kappa Psi, the service fraternity. We had a joint, yearly, kind of brotherhood-sisterhood tradition that was a game called Assassins. Pretty much everybody playing this was always in marching band. So, it was a big thing everybody in the band was aware of going on for the month or so that it always took place. Assassins was a game where everybody who signed up to play got a plastic spoon. We'd have a party to decorate the spoons. The person in charge had a spreadsheet where each person was given a target and they had to assassinate that target by tagging them with the plastic spoon. But if they had their spoon visible in their hand, they were immune. So before and after band was always a big time for people to kind of have an eye on their target. You couldn't assassinate people during classes or during rehearsal, but as soon as dismissal happened everybody was fair game. So, there was always somebody who forgot their spoon that day and they knew that somebody was after them. Dismissal would happen and as soon as the “Go State” at the end you would just see people sprint away from the field with somebody chasing them. We'd have trips on buses where you just had people constantly holding a plastic spoon in their hand for the whole bus trip. It was ridiculous. Some people would get tagged out right away, but as it whittled down to the final few people it would go for weeks of just carrying around [a] plastic spoon, trying not to get assassinated and trying to get your target. Just one of those things that like, again, where you'd see people who were in the band around campus and you had an understanding with each other because you've done some weird things but you knew what it was about. [Brand laughs]

**DB**: That's a new one, I hadn't heard about that one yet.

**JB**: It was a lot of fun. I won twice.

[00:43:03]

**DB**: Can you tell us about your involvement with the Alumni Marching band?

**JB**: Yes, I did Alumni Band the first year after I graduated and for several years in a row. I think right up until COVID hit in 2020 and I haven't been back since. It was a lot of fun always to go back and see friends from your time in the band and also to get to talk to people from other years. Just to swap stories and hear how things had changed and how things were the same. It was always a lot of fun. You probably know who she is, and I don't even know her name. But I know there was a woman [Lorna Livingston] who has been to Alumni Band quite a bit who was in bands in some of the earlier years who had a really cool story about how there were maybe only a couple of women in the band at that time. The band would maybe be announced as having X number of men in it or something. Then there was a game where they decided to stick it to them. They took off their shakos and had their hair down that day to make it clear that there were women in the band.

**DB**: Yes, I know who you’re talking about, but I don't remember who it is for sure.

**JB**: Yes, I don't think I personally heard her tell that story, but I know the story got around as she had told it at one of the Alumni Band events. It's just so cool to hear some of the band's history that way.

**DB**: Well, are there any questions I didn't ask that you wish I had asked, or they'd put on the sheet that we could talk about or--

**JB**: I think it was pretty thorough. I can't think of anything worth telling about that I haven't already. I mean I could go on for days about silly little stories, but we've done most of the big ones.

**DB**: Okay. Well, Jessica, thank you so much for taking your time to talk about your experiences with the Cyclone ‘Varsity’ Marching Band and we wish you a good day and we’ll end our recording.