Robert Lindemeyer

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Michael Belding

2023-04-26

Time stamps reference the video interview.

**MB:** Michael Belding

**RL:** Robert Lindemeyer

[00:00:00]

**MB:** This is Michael Belding, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives ‘Varsity’ Marching Band Oral History Project. Today is Wednesday, April 26, 2023. I am interviewing Robert Lindemeyer in person in a podcasting studio in the Student Innovation Center on the ISU campus. Robert, thank you for joining us today. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind beginning by telling me a little bit about your early life, things like where you grew up, what your family was like, that sort of thing.

[00:00:45]

**RL:** Sure. I grew up in Iowa. In fact, I was born in a little town called Charles City. Went to high school at Clarion, Iowa, and graduated in 1954 and then enrolled at Iowa State University, where I studied general science with a specialization in film and television production. I graduated in 1954 [1958] and, having been in the Navy ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] program when I graduated, I was commissioned an officer in the Navy. I spent several years in the Navy at the Navy Photographic Center in Washington, D.C., making training films for the Navy. A wonderful opportunity to professionalize my career, certainly. So, my service in the Navy was very valuable. I worked commercially making films after that, and then I went to graduate school at the University of Buffalo, University of New York at Buffalo campus. In 1971. I finished a master's degree in Instructional Television and Instructional Technology. And joined the staff at Iowa State, came back home, if you will, to Iowa State, and I spent thirty years on the campus, retiring in the year 2000.

[00:02:11]

**MB:** Okay. Would you mind reminding me what years you were a student at Iowa State?

**RL:** Yes, it was from 1954 to ’58.

[00:02:20]

**MB:** Okay. All right, very good. So, you were a member of the marching band during that time?

**RL:** Well, I wasn't a member of the band. I was actually the voice of the band.

**MB:** What does that mean?

**RL:** Well, that means I was the announcer that announced the game programs. And I spent a lot of time with the band. Whenever we would travel, I went with the band. I got to be up in the press box as opposed to down on the field, certainly. Those are interesting days. I don't want to jump in on your questions, but--

**MB:** No, go ahead.

**RL:** For example, every other year, we made the semiannual trip to Iowa City, where the Cyclones played the Hawks [Hawkeyes, University of Iowa], and we would go in about five or six buses. The band was big. The band was three hundred members. Typically, like sixteen sousaphones and--not a hundred score like they said in *The Music* *Man* [culturally significant 1950s musical and 1960s musical film set in Iowa and with book, music, and lyrics by Iowa-born Meredith Wilson]--but certainly maybe thirty trumpets and thirty trombones. It was a big band. When we would arrive in Iowa City, we would have to march into the stadium through the tailgates, the Iowa Hawkeye tailgate area. So, the band compressed itself down into the width of a street and marched. When we were marching, there was a little chorus that came up that said, “Hawks suck, Hawks suck.” [laughs] That was great fun because the people in the tailgate were not very impressed, to say the least.

[00:04:21]

**MB:** Do you play any musical instruments yourself?

**RL:** Well, I played the trumpet in high school, but they didn't take me in the marching band.

[00:04:31]

**MB:** How exactly did you get recruited to be the voice of the band? Could you talk about that?

**RL:** Well, I was involved with a lot of voice operations. I had worked at the university radio station, and I was a night announcer at the television station. I ended up being master of ceremonies at a number of concerts and alumni event programs. As part of my work, because I was involved in film and television production, I frequently recorded narrations for the programs that we were making, and so I had some experience with the voice. And my friend Jimmy McKinney [James McKinney, Marching Band Director (1972-1983)], who was then director of the marching band, came to me and said, “How about being the announcer for the band?”

And I said, “That sounds like fun, let's do it.”

[00:05:24]

**MB:** And just to be clear, did you do that while you were a student or during your later career?

**RL:** That was later career, after I was back at the campus in ’74.

[00:05:34]

**MB:** Okay. All right. Were you only involved with the marching band doing that, or did you kind of have this role with other bands at the university?

**RL:** No, just the marching band.

[00:05:49]

**MB:** Okay. What experience did you have with the band's members?

[00:05:57]

**RL:** Well, when we would travel, especially, it was interesting. The band was always a great camaraderie between the members. If you know from being involved with the band, everybody has to show up at the same time. Otherwise, you can't operate. The band can't play, the band can't march unless everybody is there. So that develops part of that spirit and camaraderie, that they cooperate with one another. Of course, they do a lot of rehearsing. Interesting moment about rehearsals. I frequently went to the final rehearsal each week before we would do the program in the stadium, just so they would be familiar with my announcements between numbers, and I would be familiar with what the marching was going to look like and what the tunes were going to sound like. At the end of each rehearsal, the drum majors would call all the members of the band in from the practice field to gather around the stand, where we were, where the announcers were and the directors were, and they would ask this sort of informal question, What Big 12 marching band is going to take it to the Hawks this weekend? For example, and the response to every one of those questions was, Iowa State! Iowa State! That was how each rehearsal ended, with a question from the drum majors, and the answer was always, Iowa State!

**MB:** Ritualistic enthusiasm.

**RL:** Yes.

[00:07:49]

**MB:** Okay. What other things did you notice or have you noticed over the years about the culture of the band?

**RL:** They have a lot of affection for one another. I don't mean sexually affectionate.

**MB:** Sure.

**RL:** But they were they were always with great buddies. The individual units of the band. For example, the trumpets would all practice together with their music for a while before they took their efforts into the marching areas. And so, there was a camaraderie among the players of the same instrument. Of course, there was lots of fun, and joking, and kidding. For example, the clarinets always joked about “having wood,” because you have a good clarinet if it's made of ebony wood.

**MB:** I see.

**RL:** So, their expression was, “Got wood?”

[00:08:54]

**MB:** Kind of a crude collegiate double entendre there.

**RL:** Exactly. At the end of each season, when I was the announcer, I would present the Lindy Award at the final home game. And it was just me selecting what section of the band was going to get a special nod. And, of course, we passed that around from one section to another. But it was always fun to separate out each of those sections.

[00:09:29]

**MB:** How did the culture of the band change over time?

**RL:** I guess it was always pretty much the same. There was a lot of kidding and a lot of fooling around. Let's see if I can think of a story. Oh, well, typically when we were on road trips, if we spent an overnight at a motel, literally half the band would end up in the pool, including the assistant directors and the announcer being thrown in the pool. [laughs] I don't think the spirit changed over the years. But it was fun how it kept refreshing itself. Three or four-year members of the band would show up, especially in the final rehearsal before a stadium game, they would show up in weird costumes. And that was kind of a tradition that developed. Frequently, the costume was long johns and weird hats, and they got to separate themselves from the rest of the band on that day.

I guess my experience was reinforced with how terrific the students were. To participate in, especially in marching band, you had to dedicate a lot of time. And so, while you got studies to take care of, you've also got to spend a lot of time in rehearsals and participating. A little personal note, when I retired in the year 2000, Marty Phillips,[Martin Province, Marching Band Director (1996-2002)] who was the director of the marching band at that time, got together a pep band of about twenty-five or thirty pieces, and they came marching into my retirement program playing the fight song, and sort of brought the house down with all my friends who were there to participate in my retirement program.

[00:12:06]

**MB:** Can you explain how your being the voice of the band fit within your other work for the university?

**RL:** Well, it was fun. It was kind of an adjunct to what I was doing professionally. It took a little bit of time for me--not so much, I guess, when we traveled, it was a little bit more time. We frequently went to an out-of-town game or two, every year. I remember the year we went to Oklahoma, the University of Oklahoma at Norman. I got to fly back with the team that day because I had gone down on the bus with the band, but I had some obligations that I needed to get back to, and they were going to spend an evening in the hotel and then drive back the next day. I got a chance to fly back on the airplane with the team and the coaches. But usually, I went both directions with the band. And it was always fun. Frequently we'd have to leave very early in the morning, and everybody showed up, and there we were on the bus, and they were singing the whole time and having just a marvelous esprit together.

[00:13:30]

**MB:** What do you recall about some of the most memorable shows you saw the band give?

**RL:** I think the most memorable to me was--well, a couple of them. One was a trip we took to the University of Missouri at Columbia. At that time, Iowa State did not have a big video screen in our stadium, but Mizzou [nickname for University of Missouri] did. They had a big Jumbotron. The final number that we played lined up all the brasses in a line from yard one to yard one hundred across the middle of the field. They were they were all playing this tune. I don't remember the tune, but it was great and it was powerful. And I looked up at the band on the Jumbotron and thought, Boy, this is really something. I remember being very impressed with them at that at that moment.

[00:14:50]

**MB:** What are some of the more memorable trips you took with the band?

**RL:** Well, those trips to Iowa City were always quite exciting. We won but one game when I was the announcer that we won in Iowa City. And the rule in the press box, where I was sitting, because that's where the microphones were--the rule in the press box was you couldn't show any emotion about what was happening on the field because it would interfere with all the reporters who were there to listen to the to the announcers and make their notes and so forth. So, I'm sitting in the back row, and Iowa State is winning the game for the first time in forever. And I was jumping up and down, trying not to make a noise, but I was really excited about the Cyclones winning that game. In fact, the fans went out on the field afterward. Was a pretty exciting day. I don't remember when that was. Somewhere along in the eighties, I think. Another thing I remember, or recall, was the band took a trip down to Ankeny. Not a very long trip obviously, to Ankeny, but it was to be the featured university band in the high school marching band competition that they ran at the Ankeny football stadium. Typically, the high school bands were maybe fifty to, the biggest ones, the big city schools, maybe one hundred fifty players. And here was here was the Cyclone Marching Band with three hundred members and a huge, powerful sound when they played, and I think the high school kids were just knocked out by our performance. I guess a lot of them ended up coming to Iowa State.

**MB:** It's a good recruitment, too.

**RL:** Yes, a good recruiting tool.

[00:17:10]

**MB:** Okay. Um, what – let me just try to organize my thoughts really quick here. These interviews, you know, they have the prepared questions, and I know that each interviewer may want to talk – or each interviewee may want to talk about specific things and trying to lend a coherent flow.

[00:17:36]

**MB:** Just to talk about to talk further about the experience of MCing the band performance at the football game is--basically what is it like to watch from--because obviously you're, you're not only interested in the athletics, you're, you're very clearly interested in the band as an organization, the camaraderie, the esprit de corps, the music as well, and that's important to you. What is it like as someone who's interested in the band also to be looking down at it from the press box?

**RL:** Yes, it is. It's kind of fascinating because you can really see the formations that are being marched, for example, because you're up high and have this long, long view of the entire field, and not only are you participating literally with your announcements, but you're hearing the music and you're seeing the marching formulas resolve themselves. It's kind of fun.

[00:18:43]

**MB:** How has the band been significant to you in your life broadly when it's not, you know, on the field, in a football game, anything like that. I see you've brought a few photographs and some things to show.

**RL:** Yes.

[00:19:00]

**MB:** Is it possible for you to, you know, to talk about this question that I've asked, of course, what the band means to you broadly speaking, but also maybe with reference to these specific artifacts, taking us through those and what their significance is?

**RL:** Well, the most important thing I can share this story is about the origination of the term “varsity,” that has to do with the name of the band. The band was always just the university marching band. Until this--I think it was in 1979. I'm not sure, the date may have been a year before or a year later. And, at that point, the members of the band were frequently involved in cleaning up the stadium after the Saturday game. They used that to make a little extra money to help with their road trips, for example. On this date, on a Saturday, a group from the band was in in charge of cleaning the stadium, and the next day we were leaving very early in the morning to go to Kansas City. The band had a gig to play the halftime ceremony with the Kansas City Chiefs football team. So, they got permission from Max Jurich, the athletic director, for the guys who were cleaning the stadium to get cleaned up--use the showers in the locker room at the stadium, to get cleaned up and get packed up and get ready to head out for Kansas City.

Into the locker room came Earle Bruce, the head football coach, saying, “You can't be in here., this is the varsity locker room!” And one of the band members--I don't know exactly what his name was, I think he was referred to as somebody named Jensen [Tim Jensen], and I don't know whether he was a drummer or a bass player or what.

He said, “We are the varsity band, Coach!” And so, that stuck. In fact, the next day, on a Sunday, when we were in Kansas City, it's the first time I used that expression with the announcement.

I said to the big crowd at Arrowhead Stadium, “Ladies and gentlemen, presenting the Iowa State University Football *‘VARSITY’* Marching Band!”

**MB:** I grew up around here, and nowadays, it's hard to imagine the introduction *not* being that.

**RL:** Yes.

**MB:** That's just part of who it is now.

**RL:** Yes, it's stuck. Everybody uses that expression now.

[00:21:57]

**MB:** What did the football coach think of that?

**RL:** I think he was a little bit honked that we were in the locker room. Actually, I was not in the locker room with the guys, but the cleanup crew was in the locker room. “The varsity locker room. You can't be in the varsity locker room.”

[00:22:15]

**MB:** What did he think of you calling it the ‘Varsity’ Marching Band?

**RL:** Well, I thought it was inspirational. And this is the license plate I wore on my Karmann Ghia [Volkswagen convertible car] for years. ‘Varsity.’ Nobody else has that plate. It's going to be an artifact that I'm pleased to donate to the archives, if you're interested. It was on my Karmann Ghia. Here's my Karmann Ghia.

**MB:** Shiny car.

**RL:** Yes. I sold it a couple of years ago after thirty years. Oh, here's a story that was in the Alumni Magazine, I think it was. About a member of the band who talked about Earl Bruce and ‘Varsity’ being the title, and he refers to a good friend of his named Jensen, who was the guy who said, “Coach, this is the varsity band.”

**MB:** We'll have to check that out.

**RL:** Another interesting thing about the Band Extravaganza, which happens every fall, late in the fall. It’s a combination of all the bands that Iowa State, the jazz bands, the concert bands, and the marching band in a big Band Extravaganza. I was the master of ceremonies at that one. On that event, I conjured a little contest with the kids in the audience-- who would come up and try out to be the ‘Varsity’ Band announcer? Well, there were two or three kids, and they had little squeaky voices, and they were okay, but they weren’t it. But one kid--his name was Brown, I think his daddy was Hiram Brown--he'd been practicing, and he came up, and he spilled it right out--“*‘Varsity’ Marching Band*!” And so, the crowd applauded like crazy. And he won the award. I don't remember what it was, [laughs] but he was he was terrific. He was about this tall.

[00:24:31]

**MB:** For the record, you put your hand up to about the level of the table you're sitting at, so maybe thirty inches.

**RL:** Thirty inches tall. [laughs]

[00:24:40]

**MB:** Yes. Okay. Do you have any regrets about your time being involved in the band at all or any disappointments?

**RL:** Not at all. It was great fun. And I still get honked when I'm watching national television coverage of football games, and they come to the halftime, and there's hardly ever a time that they show anything other than maybe a little quickie bit of a clip of the marching bands. They don't show the band show at all. Even a huge band, like--a marvelous band like the University of Michigan, for example, which has a huge, wonderful band, they don't even show them.

[00:25:42]

**MB:** Have you been involved in the Alumni Band at all?

**RL:** Well, I've shown up at a couple of their events and I've announced the band a couple of times when the Alumni Band is here, but I haven't for a number of years now. I'm eighty-eight years old and that's a little hard to get out there and get moving like I used to. [laughs]

[00:26:14]

**MB:** And what about your own trumpet playing? Did you keep that up or –

**RL:** I don't even have the horn anymore. I lost my lip. [both laugh]

[00:26:25]

**MB:** Well, you invented the--I won't try to do the imitation “’Varsity’ Marching Band” [laughs] bit, which is very memorable, so, lip of a different kind, perhaps.

**RL:** Yes, exactly.

[00:26:38]

**MB:** Well, you know, since the structure of the questions mostly is geared towards people who played in the band in some capacity, and of course that's not your experience, in terms of prepared questions, there are not many things left for me to ask. We've kind of blazed through everything, but I want to make sure also to invite you to keep talking, to keep sharing any stories that are memorable to you. Is there is there anything you'd like to add beyond, you know, the few questions that I've given you? Anything I should have asked but did not, anything especially important for posterity, that sort of thing?

**RL:** I don't think so. I've looked through my list here, and I talked about the Extravaganza [Band Extravaganza]. That was always fun. The trips were fun. And I think I've pretty well covered it.

[00:27:45]

**MB:** Thinking about it more, there is one question that comes into my mind right now, which maybe as master of ceremonies, you would have a good sense of. What kind of sense have you gotten or did you get over the years for how spectators, the Athletic Department, the general public regarded the band? You know, how did, how did they think of it, and how did that change over time and how did they imagine it being part of the whole big production of a football game?

**RL:** Well, that's an interesting question because early on the band was, I think, a lot more important to what was happening in the stadium than it was later. For example, the Athletic Department in its brilliance, decided that what the team really wanted was to hear some pop music played during the time the team rushed onto the field. Although the band would line up and play “Fights” [“ISU Fights”], and as soon as the as soon as the team entered the stadium then, the PA system started to play some rock number. And I thought, That's not fair, let's leave it with the band. That's the only thing I remember.

Frequently the audience in the stadium, although there was always somebody getting up to go get popcorn or go to the bathroom, the audience liked to stay around and watch the halftime shows. Interesting you ask about the view I had from up in the stadium, up in the press box, of the band. We always had a student videographer up there who made a copy of the show. And immediately on the first rehearsal of the week, typically Monday, that got played, and it was sort of a critique that the that the band directors could use to talk about, This line kind of got wiggly and –

**MB:** Oh, so they had their own game tape.

**RL:** Yes, they had their own game tape of the performance of the band. It was always kind of fun for the band to see themselves, and it was also a good way to critique what they had done. The floating ISU, which was part of always part of the opening ceremony before the game started, when you’d come onto the field and get lined up and ready to play the national anthem, for example, when we floated in in the ISU letters. That was a lot of excitement that was being generated. Good vibes.

[00:31:06]

**MB:** Okay. Thank you for gratifying that curiosity. Unscheduled curiosity. Again, I'll offer you the last word. Anything to add?

**RL:** No, but I would have done it again in a in a million years. It was great. It was a lot of fun.

[00:31:25]

**MB:** Robert Lindemeyer, thank you so much for joining me today.

**RL:** Thank you.