Audrey Miller

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the video interview.

**JC:** Jay Chapman

**AM:** Audrey Miller

[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 Wednesday, November 1, 2023. I'm interviewing Audrey Miller. Audrey, thanks for joining us.

**AM:** Of course.

[00:00:23]

**JC:** Let's start by maybe could you tell us a little bit about your early life, where you grew up, your family, that kind of thing?

**AM:** So, I grew up in Dubuque, Iowa. I'm actually a third-generation alumni. My grandpa went to Iowa State. He ended up going to the vet school as well and went to become a vet. My dad went to Iowa State, and one of my two uncles went to Iowa State. So, you can kind of say it was in my blood. [laughs]

Dubuque is a very Hawkeye territory, so I was kind of an outlier when it came to supporting the Cyclones. I remember going to as many football games as I could. Went to basketball games. I walked around the campus with my grandparents. It was just kind of always seeing that I was always there. That’s my background. Yes, it was kind of just always in my blood. I grew up and loved going to Iowa State, loved going particularly to the football games, and I always, in particular, loved the band. Even as a little kid, I always wanted to see them over getting anything at halftime. I loved watching the band. I loved hearing them. I just loved everything about it.

[00:01:41]

**JC:** Sure. So, which bands were you involved in at Iowa State?

**AM:** I was only involved in the marching band, but I loved watching the pep band at basketball games and any other sporting events that they had the pep band, I always loved that, but I was only ever in the marching band.

[00:02:00]

**JC:** [Do] you maybe want to talk about which years you were in band and add a little bit about your section, your instrument, your group that you were a part of?

**AM:** Sure, yes. I was in band. I auditioned in the summer of 2009. Back then, I don't think it was as intense as it is nowadays. I just think there's so many more people auditioning, nowadays. But I auditioned, and I got second trombone.

I started playing trombone in fifth grade, which was when my school let us join our little band. For the Catholic school program, it started in fifth grade, and that's when I started playing. I played trombone just like my dad. [laughs] I played all through high school. In high school, I played jazz band, I played marching band. We did concert band. I was in the orchestra.

Then, in college--I graduated high school 2009--auditioned for the marching band in 2009 that summer, and then had my first ever band camp in August of 2009. So that was a lot of fun. I played four of my five years--I guess four of my four and a half years of college--my last semester, I took off just because I was graduating and had a wedding to plan and all that stuff. So, I basically spent all of my first four years at Iowa State involved in the band, at least the first semester involved in marching band. Played trombone, second trombone all the way through, and was a guide at one point and got to just experience all the greatness that is the band. [laughs]

[00:03:51]

**JC:** Can you talk a little bit about band camp and what that was like?

**AM:** It was intense. It's a lot of fun, but it's intense. There's a lot of things that, you know, a lot of muscle memory that you kind of forget, and then you get back into the swing of things a year later, and [you’re] like, “Oh yes, I remember how to do this,” and, “Oh yes, pregame is so athletic.” It changed a few times while I was in band. Pregame got changed around while I was there. We had a couple of different directors. Band camp was always a lot of fun but was always exhausting. [laughs] That first year I was in the band, I ended up also rushing, so I went to go look at all the sororities out there, and I never ended up joining one because band was more than enough. But it was a lot of fun. [laughs]

[00:04:44]

**JC:** So, who were your directors while you were there?

**AM:** Oh, my goodness. [I’m] trying to remember. I know it was--Mr. Smith [Matthew Smith, Associate Director of Bands (2002–2010] was one of them, and then his assistant was--I can't remember her name. She [Natalie Steele, Interim Associate Director of Bands (2010-2011)] did a year, and then it was another Mr. Smith [Stephen Smith, Associate Director of Bands (2011-2017)] who turned, I think he became a Dr. Smith. Either him or the first Mr. Smith became a Dr. Smith. I can’t remember. He was the director for the last two years.

[00:05:21]

**JC:** Okay, so what was practice like? Like, where did you practice? How did you go about learning a show?

**AM:** Well, we were on the field behind the Communications Building. They had everything. The field would be painted all at the beginning of the year, like a full-size football field. We had our little trombone tree that we would meet at before rehearsals. The practices--we'd start in an arc, kind of like a concert arc, and we would warm up, and then we would do a block warm-up with marching steps. Then, as you do with marching band, you get your grid and your number, and you find where you're at, and you mark it, and just go back and forth and practice. Like, Okay, this set is from here to here, and this is the music from here to here, and we're just going to go learn it until we know it. Then add on another one, and add on another one, so then you learned it. It was, it was a good day when you had two weeks to learn a show instead of just Monday to Saturday [laughs] to practice and march. It was always a good day when we had an away game. [laughs]

[00:06:44]

**JC:** Sure, sure. How did you go about learning the music separate from the drill or was that all kind of integrated? How did that process work?

**AM:** It was kind of all integrated. Obviously, you would practice the music separately, but we had our--why am I blanking on the name--the music holder [marching lyre] that we would basically read while we're marching. [laughs] Then, the songs were enough so that we could memorize them. Toward the end of my time at Iowa State in the band, we actually had memorization tests. So, one of the guides would come around, and you'd have to play the song for them, so you knew, and we didn’t have to have music. If we had a five-day show, generally, we had to have music.

**JC:** That sounds awful. [both laugh]

**AM:** It is! That sounds awful to have to test in front of the guides. But it made it great because we didn't have to use music then. I mean, we still used it in the stand-for-stand tunes. Generally, if we could memorize a show, we would do it. So, either, we would practice on our own and memorize music and then put it together with the drill.

[00:08:00]

**JC:** How long did the typical practice take? Like a given day, when did you start, when did you typically end?

**AM:** What time did we start? We started in the evenings, and it was four to six, or four-thirty to six. So, we had a solid hour, hour and a half. Band camp days were obviously a lot longer where you'd have time with your section and time with the whole band, but overall, the days--because we had to fit it in and get it in before dinner. So, I remember storming the dining hall after marching band because we were all starving, and it was like six o'clock or five-thirty or six o'clock. It could have been like four to five-thirty or, I think it was like four-thirty to six is what our general practice was.

[00:08:50]

**JC:** Sure. Do you recall any specific shows that you performed or maybe if you had a favorite show that you did that really sticks in your mind?

**AM:** I always like the movie show. But one of the shows that we did—Halloween fell on our homecoming weekend, so we got to wear costumes for the halftime show. We played a bunch of Halloween songs, and it was either an all-or-nothing. So, the entire band dressed up in costumes and performed on Halloween at halftime in costume. Our pregame was all in our uniforms, and then one by one, row by row, we all got to go back and get dressed and changed and wear our costumes on the show, and it was a lot of fun. I think we played the Ghostbusters theme that weekend. Since it was homecoming, I think the Alumni Band was also there too. I don't think they actually dressed up, but we did. My boyfriend and I went as Team Rocket [a fictional crime syndicate in the Pokémon franchise], so here I am standing out in half of Team Rocket with red hair and a Team Rocket shirt, and [laughs] that was a lot of fun. I will never forget that. Being able to do that, that was fun.

But I always liked the movie shows. One year, we did girl band. We played “Toxic” by Britney Spears, that was fun. Anytime we could get down and dance for the crowd, people always loved that. So that was always a fun thing to do.

[00:10:39]

**JC:** How did the dancing get incorporated into the practice? How did you guys go about learning how to dance?

**AM:** Usually, it was the color guard that taught us, [laughs] and the color guard and the drum majors would teach us. You know, there would always be some sort of section that either the drum line would play, or somebody else would skip dancing and we would lay down our instruments and do a little dance and then pick them back up and start playing. It kind of just depended on the song. But usually, the color guard taught us. [laughs]

[00:11:14]

**JC:** Sure. You mentioned earlier about changing out of uniforms. What were your uniforms like? What did they look like? What did you think of them?

**AM:** Oh my gosh, so that was the other thing. I feel like we had a lot of changes in my year. We had a change in director, change in pregame, change in uniform. That was another one. I remember, the first year, our uniforms were white, and they were really, really heavy, and on the front, they had--so there is a little panel that you could flip, and there are two sides. One was the Cyclone side, where it's just “CYCLONES” written across the chest, and the other side was “bird in a blender.” One side was more for pregame, and one side was more for halftime. In my career, at that point, it was, “Hey, we got to flip the bird!” [laughs] So we’d unbutton it and flip it around and show the “bird in a blender.” Then that was called “flipping the bird.”

Either my second or my third year, we got new uniforms, and they were red and gold. I don't think they lasted as long as the other ones did because I think now, they have new ones. But then again, this was 2010. So, ten years ago. But they were red and gold, and they didn't have the “bird in a blender.” They incorporated the new Iowa state colors. It was about the time that Iowa State changed their graphic from “bird in a blender” to the block Iowa State. So, our colors matched that. The logo matched that. We didn't have the flip. I remember they seemed to be a little bit lighter, as light as a marching band uniform could get. Because the other ones were so stinking hot. Then I remember our new raincoats were gray because Dr. Golemo [Michael Golemo, Director of Bands and University Professor of Music (1999-present)] called them Steele Jantz gray when Steele Jantz was the quarterback because we thought that was a big deal back then. They were gray, and they had Iowa State on the back--or on the hood, and I wore those the rest of the years.

The old uniforms, they turned them into bags and laptop carriers and so I have a tote and a laptop carrier from the old uniforms. I just remember the Steele Jantz gray. Steele Jantz gray raincoats. [laughs] Underneath, you obviously always had your marching band shirt, whether it's like “Iowa State Marching Band Member” or the game day shirt that we would wear. So that when it was warm enough, you could take off your jacket and you would be in your game day t-shirt, and we'd still look uniform in the stands as opposed to everybody wearing like different color t-shirts in the stands.

[00:13:56]

**JC:** So, can you talk a little bit about the culture of the band? Something along the lines of, how did certain members of the band shape that culture, maybe the drum majors or directors or maybe some external factors? What would you say was the culture of the band?

**AM:** From my time, from what I remember, “Work hard, play hard.” [laughs] That was about it. “Work hard, play hard.” I remember the guides and the leadership always had a great way of making sure we were having fun, but at the same time, we were working hard. Whether that's the drum majors, whether that's the older members of the band that aren't guides. They just always made sure to pass down little traditions that we would do as part of the section, little chants and stuff that we would do. They made sure to pass that along to us younger ones that had just started, and of course, the drum majors were always there to be serious but also have fun. They were known to be making sure that you were listening, especially watching for queues when it's game day, and you're trying to get a call-out for a song and then you need to watch them. But I would say it was definitely “work hard, play hard,” but it was a lot of fun, and you didn't really realize you were working really hard until the end of it, and you’re like, “Oh, I'm exhausted, [laughs] but I had a lot of fun.”

[00:15:33]

**JC:** Do you recall who some of your drum majors may have been?

**AM:** I think it was my second year, it was Sara Bergman was one of them. Kevin Freeman was one. I think he was my first year or second year. Dan Hines was another. I think it was my first year because I remember the D Hines 57 [reference to Heinz 57 steak sauce]. That’s the nickname that stuck with him. I’m trying to think. Rob Mayor was another one of mine. I think he was like my last year. Oh goodness. I'm friends with a lot of them on Facebook and if I pulled it up, I bet you, I could tell you.

**JC:** Sure. Sure.

[00:16:19]

**JC:** So, you talked a little bit about the older members passing down traditions or rituals or whatever. What were some of your favorite things that were maybe unique to your section, maybe unique in the whole band? What were some of those fun things that you did?

**AM:** Oh, boy. I remember, for the sections, it would be homecoming t-shirts. So, your section would design a shirt and wear it for homecoming, and it would be the whole like--so the trombones would have a whole t-shirt, and we'd all come up with the design together. My mom actually made a quilt of all my old marching band shirts. So, I have all of my old t-shirts from marching band, homecoming shirts is what we called them.

Then sometimes for games, before the band was mic’d, because now we can't do this anymore, but the four ships was a big call if we disagree with it, but [you] obviously can't do that when you're mic’d, [laughs] so, that ended my third year. I think in the band, that ended. It was mostly, especially for pregame, it was like when you did the little tornado, and everybody does the hops. We had different--like dinosaurs was, *Rawr!* We had different whoops, is what we called them. We had the inverse whoop, where we go, *Boo!* [Chapman laughs] Then a slow--we would go, *Whoooop!* It was all those little things that made together your section.

One year, I think it was my second year, we had too many trombones and not enough trombone guides, and we had too few trumpets. So, there was a whole rank--we called ourselves Special K [in reference to Special K cereal brand] because it was K rank--and we had two trumpet guides, and the rest of us were trombones. I remember being told we were picked because they thought we would get along with everybody, and it worked. That was a lot of fun that year. That was a lot of fun with the rank, was our Special K. [laughs]

**JC:** Sure, sure.

[00:18:34]

**JC:** So, let's maybe switch to talking about a little bit of travel and maybe some of the performances outside of just the game day and other scenes. Talk a little bit about--did you travel with the band and all?

**AM:** Oh yes, I did. Yes, definitely traveled. Those were always fun but long, long, times. I remember the first year that I was in band was the first year Iowa State went to a bowl game in a very long time. So that was a huge deal, is that we got to go to Tempe, Arizona and play at the Insight Bowl. I'll always remember that one because A, it was my first year in the band, and B, my grandparents at the time lived near Tempe. We were already planning on visiting them over Christmas, so we flew down to Arizona to see them. Then I met up with the band and stayed with them, because we had rehearsals and everything, after that. That was the first and only time my grandparents ever got to see me march because they always spent the winter in Arizona, so they got to see me march in that game, and that was always super special to me.

So, one of the big things I remember were band bus trips, at least in high school. Those were always a big deal, and since I flew down [to Tempe], I rode home on the bus with the band. [laughs] I should have just flown home because we broke down at some point in New Mexico. “Like, well, okay. I guess I should have just flown home with my mom and dad,” but it was still fun. Just those big bus trips. We traveled to Iowa [University of Iowa] a couple of times. One year, we stayed with host families at Iowa. We played at a couple of different high schools. Like for Iowa weekend, we would travel, and we would play at a high school near there and kind of get the word out for Iowa State, and then we'd have host families. We traveled to Kansas City a couple of times for the Iowa State, K-State [Kansas State University] game. That was fun. We stayed at a hotel near the Plaza [Country Club Plaza, popular shopping and dining center in Kansas City] one year. The band trips were always a lot of fun.

I’ll never forget my first year at Iowa State, we had to travel for the Iowa game. Well, of course, people went out the night before--no, I think this was my second year--people went out the night before, and we had to be at the bus stupid early in the morning. We were getting ready to go, and time was ticking, and one of our trombones was missing. So, one of the guys looked up where this kid lived, ran across and got him. Like pounded on his door, grabbed him out of bed, and they sprinted back with everything and made it just in time. That was, again, the culture of leadership. Of course, the guy was pissed, but he still took the initiative to be like, Well, I guess I'm going to go get them, and I'm not going to let this hurt us and the rest of the band. Yes, traveling was always fun. I remember being surprised we got per diem [laughs] for food. The first time, I was like, Oh, I don’t remember doing this in high school, so that was a surprise.

Traveling, we went to Tempe, we went to another bowl game. What was the one we went to after that? I missed one of the bowl games because we had a prior vacation plan outside. Oh! We went to New York [Pinstripe Bowl]. That was another fun bowl game. I can't remember what the bowl was, but my uncle lives in New York, so he took me and some friends at the time around, and we walked around, and we got to see Times Square, Grand Central Station, and we just walked around the city as fast as we could. We had a very busy time, but it was a lot of fun. He pointed us out because everybody else ate on Times Square, and my uncle pointed us to this little restaurant that was out of the way, and it was like the best food. It was so good. So, that was a lot of fun being able to share that with him as well. I think he went to the game with my dad, and he got to see me march, so that was always fun, too.

[00:23:00]

**JC:** Was there anything special about any of those other stadiums that you played in, either in Tempe or in New York or Iowa or maybe some other Big 12 school? Was there anything special, or unique, or weird about the different stadiums that you played in?

**AM:** Well, the G.O.A.T. [greatest of all time] was that we got to play at Arrowhead [Stadium] when we played in K-State. So, I got to say that I got to march on the field at Arrowhead Stadium, you know, so many years ago. That was cool, being able to do that. That was like the peak. I can't remember where we played for the bowl game in New York. But we played Rutgers.

**JC:** It was at Yankee Stadium, maybe?

**AM:** Oh, maybe you're right. Yes, I think so. That was pretty cool, too. Yes, you are right, it was Yankee Stadium. So, yes, Arrowhead and Yankee Stadium were great. Those were very, very unique places that not a lot of bands say that they get to play. Especially Arrowhead. I know they have concerts, but how many times are you going to see a marching band on the field at Arrowhead? Not very many. Same with Yankee Stadium. I don’t think ever.

My least favorite times are probably marching at Iowa, at Kinnick [Historic Nile Kinnick Stadium]. Just because of the rivalry, there is a lot of--shall we say, precautions taken while we were at Kinnick. I never had an issue, but I've known people in the past that have had a lot of trouble at Kinnick. Yes. Other than that, I think Yankee Stadium and Arrowhead were two of the best places that we got the chance to march at, and not a lot of people get to say that they did that. So that's pretty cool.

[00:24:42]

**JC:** Were there any other performances that you did that maybe weren't associated with a game, so maybe a parade or some other function?

**AM:** One year we played, it wasn’t a whole band thing, it was kind of whoever could make it, but I remember Jamie Pollard's [Iowa State University, Director of Athletics (2005-present)] son was sick. He always loved the band, so we kind of threw together as many people as we could, and we went to play at Jamie Pollard's house for his son. So that was really special. Trick or treating, we would go, and we would play around at the different coaches’ houses and then end up back at the director's house for something. Again, that wasn't like a whole band thing but that was always something special. As far as performances go, performing for high schoolers was a lot of fun. We got to give them a taste of like, Hey, this is how hard we work, but look how much fun it is. Stuff like that. I remember the drum line always did stuff. Around VEISHEA [annual student-run festival celebrating Iowa State departments, (1922-2014)], the drum line would have a cool show to do. The drum line is a whole other life in and of itself. [laughs] Yes, playing for Jamie Pollard’s son and then off trick or treating and playing for very informally get togethers was a lot of fun.

[00:26:09]

**JC:** Were there any experiences that were maybe difficult for you while you remember? Any problems or issues?

**AM:** No. Just making sure you learn the show in time. That was always hard and balancing the time with the band versus studies versus anything outside of the band. That was always, you know, something hard for an eighteen-year-old to do, but I managed. [laughs]

[00:26:39]

**JC:** So yes, how did you manage? How did you get to a spot where you could manage both being in the marching band and the amount of hours it took to do that and a full Saturday, along with being able to still do your academic work?

**AM:** I think it's just about knowing yourself and knowing about how well you time manage, writing out a schedule, and sticking to it. Giving yourself time. Like, No, I need to study for this time. I have this coming up. I can't go do this. Or talking to other people in the band that may have been in the same class asking for tips. I know that there's always at least one person in any of the classes that you took that you can probably turn to and ask to study with and hang out with or share resources with. You turn to your friends in the band or look for people and be like, “Hey, I know you're in band, and I know it's like a three-hundred-person band, but can you help me out, or can we study together?” I always took fewer credits in the fall just to make sure that I had that time management and balance just because I knew band took up a lot of time, especially after my first year. Like, Wow. This is a lot more. This is a bigger time commitment than I thought. So, I ended up dropping one of my subjects so I could properly balance everything and then learn from then on, Okay, be careful how much you take in the fall, and then you can add a little bit more in the spring because you're not as busy.

[00:28:19]

**JC:** You talked about getting help with classes because maybe another band member had taken that same class. On a more broad sense, did you ever receive advice from other band members just in general on how to do things, how to make adjustments to being in band and academics? Or is there any information that you passed along to other band members yourself?

**AM:** I remember when I was rushing that one of my guides suggested, not in a bad way, but I remember I said no to a sorority house, and I remember one of my guides saying like, “I think you made a good decision. That’s a lot to do for a sorority and the marching band.” I know people do it, and I know the band has their own sorority and fraternity, but I was glad I didn't end up joining a formal house just because there was always so much going on, and it would have been a lot harder to do both. That was the biggest thing I remember is that they never discouraged me, but they did say I made a good decision.

**JC:** Sure, sure.

[00:29:34]

**JC:** So, How do you feel the marching band has changed over time, and what makes the ISUCFB‘V’MB [Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band] unique?

**AM:** Oh, my goodness. It's changed in the way that I think they just keep getting better. I'm not saying we were bad, but I'm looking back now, and I'm like, man, the audition process for this year. For the band, you have to do band camp, to audition for band camp. I just think they just keep getting better and better and better. I'm sure each year has something that they add on and makes it unique. I know ours, our pregame got changed and I remember not being super thrilled about it because it wasn't what I started with. And okay, well, now I see it. Now I'm like, Okay, yes, I understand how we want to try to get everybody involved. The biggest thing is that we were only playing the one side of the stadium. So now at pregame, it’s all the stadium, and since the stadium got bowled at one end, even more so we get to focus on everybody else and everybody around the stadium. I just think they just keep getting better. Like I said, I'm not sure I would make it if I had to audition this time around. I'm glad I did. I'm glad I did it with my four years, but they just keep getting better and better and better. It's a lot of fun to watch and go back and be like, Oh yes, I remember having to put all this stuff together and learning a show in five days, and I don't know how we did it, but we did. But stuff like that.

[00:31:12]

**JC:** Sure. Well, what does the marching band, in general, mean to you?

**AM:** Family. Community. Fun. It gives you that first year when you're transitioning from a high school where you may have known everybody in your class to, Holy cow! Now I am at this thirty-thousand-person university. It gives you some people to connect with. It's like the family. Everybody looks out for each other. Everybody wants the best for one another. You have fun together because you spend so much time together you have no option but to just get close together, whether you want to or not, and you do because you like the people that you're with. It's a lot of fun. We all love each other, look after each other. I still have a lot of friends from band that I talk to. You know, you see each other and like, “Oh yes, this is great,” and some of the older members, not older members--but the year I got engaged, one of the first people to congratulate me was a member of the band that was back for Alumni Band that had recently graduated. So just, we share in each other's joy, and we share in each other’s sorrow, and you just become a family. It gives you that sense of belonging when you're transitioning, and you don't know where you belong. You always have a family in the band.

[00:32:42]

**JC:** You mentioned Alumni Band. What's been your participation or your involvement with the Alumni Band, so far?

**AM:** Oh. Unfortunately, I haven't done as much as I should. It just kind of sneaks up on me. I did it one year with my dad, but every year, my dad marched with me. Every year I was in the band, my dad did the Alumni Band with me. So that was always special. Then one year, we did it together after--well, my husband was doing his master's degree--and me and my dad marched in the Alumni Band together, and I got to see some of the guys that graduated before me at Iowa State and meet up with them, and “Oh yes, I remember doing this in the band. Oh, yes. I remember doing this in the stands.”

They're like, “Oh, we couldn't do that after so many years.” [laughs] So I haven't done it as much as I would like to, but I have a season of small kids. I'd love to do it more and, as our kids get older, start introducing that side.

**JC:** Sure, definitely.

[00:33:45]

**JC:** Well, are there any questions or subjects that I have asked about that you may have thought I should have or could have, and you wanted to touch on?

**AM:** I don't think so. I’m trying to think of anything else--like one of my first rehearsals, the director is like, “Take a look around. At least half of you will meet your spouse in marching band.” [laughs] I did not, but I know plenty of people that did. I don't think there's anything else. Going around to the different bars and playing for homecoming, and even just in general, playing for the campanilers [those that participate in an Iowa State tradition called campaniling, which means kissing under the campanile at midnight] at midnight on homecoming. That was always fun. So many good memories.

[00:34:48]

**JC:** Great. Well, I appreciate all of your insights and all of your memories.

**AM:** Any time. Thank you.