Martin “Marty” Province

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the audio recording.

**MP:** Martin Province

**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 Wednesday, November 1, 2023. I'm interviewing Marty Province. Marty, welcome.

**MP:** Hi, good to see you, Jay.

**JC:** Good to see you too.

[00:00:26]

**JC:** Alright, well, let's just start here. Could you begin by telling me about your early life, where you grew up, your family, that kind of thing?

**MP:** Sure. [I was] born in east Tennessee and moved to western North Carolina when I was only eight. So, I grew up most of my life just in the foothill of the Appalachian Mountains. Went to elementary school there in our little town, and participated in band starting in fifth grade, and chorus after that. Then on to college where I stayed active in the music programs from then on.

[00:01:03]

**JC:** How did you choose to become a band director? How did you get to that as an area of interest?

**MP:** Well, as a high school student, I was a student director with the band, not a drum major, but I directed the basketball pep band and occasionally got to direct the concert band. It was something that interested me and once I got to college I had not planned to major in music. I had no plans. I was one of those “undecided”. Started taking a few music classes and it seemed to be one of the few things I could excel in. So, I stuck with it and had both my high school band director saying, “You shouldn't do this.”

My mom, who was involved in education, saying, “You shouldn't do this.”

I said, “Yes, but I'm having a good time.” Luckily, they both came around and said, “Go for it.” It was just something that I had I had always done and always enjoyed, and I guess I just couldn't see myself not doing it at some level.

[00:02:04]

**JC:** That's great. How did you come to be at Iowa State University?

**MP:** I did several years [of] public school in North Carolina before Wake Forest University which was my undergraduate school--called and needed a person very fast. They had a late resignation. My college band director resigned, and they needed somebody who could get a marching band on the field quickly. So, they called me and gave me a one-year contract that went on for fourteen years. [Chapman laughs]

During that time, I took a couple of years off and went to the University of Colorado. Actually, at the end of my first year of my master's program, I talked to Joe Christensen [Joseph Christensen, Director of Bands (1980-1998)]. It was suggested that he called me for an opening. They were interested in me. That was, I guess, 1986. But I had another year of my master’s to go, and I said, “I really need to finish the program.” He tried to talk me into thinking about coming to Iowa State and finishing in the summers, but I thought, That's not going to be the kind of education I want. So, we parted, and I said, “Good luck with your search,” and then I went back to Colorado in the nineties to get my doctorate, and the position came open again. And the same person--I guess I have to thank Wayne Bailey [Music (1973-1977), currently Emeritus Professor at Arizona State University], who was a former drum major with the Iowa State Band--who was one of my professors at Colorado in my master's. He had moved on after that point, but he had recommended that Mr. C [Joseph Christensen] call me in the eighties, and then he recommended it again that Mr. C call me in the nineties.

At that point I was going to be finished with at least my residency for my doctorate, and I was interested in moving to a larger school, and the Iowa State Band. Again, that position came open and I interviewed, and I was fortunate enough to get the job. I remember telling Mr. C after he sent me a videotape from the band the year before, I wrote him back, I said, “Okay, my goal is not to screw this up.” [Chapman laughs] Because the beginning was really, really, good before I got there, and one reason I felt so fortunate to get that position was because of the long history of the band. Again, it was an outstanding band. I was showing it to my colleagues in graduate school, and they said, “That's going to be *your* band?”

I said, “Yeah, that's going to be my band, starting next year.” So, it was really fortunate for me that that job came open at a time when I was available to take it.

[00:04:34]

**JC:** Sure. When you came to Iowa State, were you involved in any other bands besides the marching band?

**MP:** Oh yes. I did the second concert band, the symphonic band, and the marching band, and, of course, the basketball pep band. Then when Mr. C passed away, I did the wind ensemble for a year while we searched and before we hired Mike Golemo [Michael Golemo, Director of Bands and University Professor of Music (1999-present)] to fill that position. I also was involved in the music education program, teaching the--I think I may have taught percussion methods for a semester even--but the marching band techniques class and then there was a lab band that all the music majors took, and taught, sort of, a beginning band. They actually taught it, taught one another, and I observed. So yes, I was pretty heavily involved in the music program.

[00:05:20]

**JC:** Right. So, kind of back to the marching band side of things. What was your process of coming up with a show and deciding what music to play? How did that all work out?

**MP:** Well, first year I came in and, you know, I got there in June, and came in, and hit the ground running and said, “All right, here's what we're going to do next year.” That had not been the way I had done things at Wake Forest, so once I got there and had a chance to meet with the students, from then on, every spring, we would get together. I would invite anybody who wanted to come from the marching band and say, “We're going to have a meeting, and you're going to tell me what we're going to do next year.” We always did five different shows and I said, “Okay, you can choose four of them. I'm going to choose one, and long as I can either find musical arrangements or I can write musical arrangements, that will work. We will do whatever you want to do on the field.” My main feeling about that was not to disregard the alumni and the paying people in the seats, but I really, really wanted the band to be popular with their colleagues. When they went to class on Monday after a football game on Saturday, I wanted them to hear,

“Hey, the band was really great on Saturday. I enjoyed what you did,” rather than, “What the heck was that?” [Chapman laughs] I was an old fart, even at that point, so I didn't want to make those decisions about what the band was going to do. I just thought if the band wants to do it, that is stuff they come up with, and the student body is more likely to enjoy it as well.

[00:06:58]

**JC:** Maybe talk a little bit about once you decided what a show was, how did you piece together what the drill would look like and get that to fit with the music?

**MP:** Yes. So, when I taught the marching band technique class, this is sort of where we started with the class. The very first thing you do is, well after you come up with the overall theme and the specific tunes, is you start to break down the tunes into their form. You got this much of an introduction, you have the first statement of the theme, you may have some transition, you got a restatement of the theme, and find out where do those breaks come, because you always want the music or the drill to accent what the music is doing. That was the first step. I always did what I called “a count sheet.” You just hear these measures, these counts. Here's what's happening musically. Here's who has the main theme. Here's some supporting stuff. Is this main theme material? Is it transitional material? Because if it is main theme material, we want to be coming right at the sideline. If it's transitional material, we might want to be moving away, expanding, contracting whatever. Then you just sit down in front of a blank computer screen. A lot of times I would come to the major, the first hit in the music, and actually write that form. Then I would write backwards from that to get back to the beginning of the tune and then, you know, forward from there. It might even be that I would write the very last hit of a song first, because I know I want to be at this point in the drill when we get to this point the music, and then write backwards from there, and then forwards into the second and third, fourth tunes. It was just a matter of staring at a computer screen, and at some point saying, “Okay, I'm going to walk away from this computer screen now, and come back to it and see if I can come up with anything.” It's just like anything, you get writer's block. So, had drill writer’s block. [both laugh] One of the nice things about Iowa State was the size of the band was set. We knew we were going to get X number of students every year. We knew what the instrumentation would be, how many trumpets, trombones, clarinets, flutes. So, I could write the drill as soon as the music was selected in the spring. I would start writing the drill. Rather than when I was with a smaller school, and until you got the band into the room and knew exactly who you had, I couldn't write drill. That's a much scarier place to be [Chapman laughs] than Iowa State because I knew exactly the size of the band. The tuba section might change, the percussion section might change, the guard, but the three blocks of the band were going to be consistent from year to year. That was a great, great, advantage to have that I had never had before.

[00:09:41]

**JC:** You mentioned sitting in front of a computer screen. So, was a hundred percent of your drill written via computer as opposed to by hand as the old style?

**MP:** Yes. I wrote drill by hand through probably about 1987, 1988 when there was a company in Texas that came out with a program that I really liked. I got in sort of at the ground floor with them. I was one of their beta testers, every time they came out with a new version. So, one of the nice things is I kept getting it for free. [Chapman laughs] Didn't ever have to pay for it. No matter where I was, they would send me a copy to beta test. When I taught marching band techniques, I taught students to write drill by hand. The first drill they wrote had to be by hand, because that slows you down. The computer is a great tool, but it's so easy that once you have ideas, it's easy to get things to go where you want them to. I wanted them to have to slow down. So, the first thing they had to write—and again, maybe it was my own bias because I had to do it--the first thing they have to do is write it by hand, and then I would give them a promotional copy of the software with which they could work and do a drill. But yes, everything I've written since 1988 has been on a computer.

[00:11:00]

**JC:** Sure. So, once you've got the drill designed out, what's your practice schedule look like? How do you introduce that and the music to the band to get them to a finished product?

**MP:** The first thing we do is we make a copy of that for everybody in the band. They all have a coordinate, A3, J7, whatever. Their goal is to mark every page of the drill with their coordinate. I even used a little coordinate sheet up in the corner where there was an empty space—"I am this many steps outside the thirty-yard line, this many steps in front of the back sideline, or the hash mark, or whatever,” so that they were supposed to fill that out as well. Then just say, “All right, everybody go to that first set, find your spot, and let's look at it.” Then we just go from one set to another, to another, to another. We used poker chips. Everybody got a red, white, and a blue one. That way we could have three drill sets down at once and get the paths muscle memory going from one set to another without having to reset it every time. You got back to drill one, you pick up that chip, and move it two or three steps ahead. It's just a process, at that point, of the students really taking over. I'm in the tower watching and seeing if I can help out, but boy, at that point, they're really on their own. Also, the interval sticks, I had never used those before. Mr. C introduced me to those. What a great advantage that was. Give every rank leader, right or left guide, a drill stick and they can just set those down real quickly and mark off steps. That was a great teaching tool that I'd never even thought about.

[00:12:47]

**JC:** Sure. Where did the integration of the music come? Did you learn the music first, then the show? How did that work?

**MP:** Weather permitting, we always would play the music first. That way they have an idea of--when they see a drill set, they know where in the music that's going to be, and also mark their music. "I'm at measure forty-seven. I need to be in drill set number six.” Always do the music first, break it down into sectionals so that they can have a little bit more time to work out their individual parts. Then we start putting it on the field without playing. We would also make a recording and record segments so that once they get the counts, they could start to hear how the music goes with the drill before they have to worry about playing and marching at the same time. But yes, music always came first. The drill is interesting to me and to the students, and nobody wants to see a marching band stand still for eight minutes, but the music was always more interesting to the audience, I think, than the drill. So, music had to come first. I don't think we ever had to do this, but if we ever had bad weather and couldn't get through the drill., fine. We're going to stand and play the music and at least entertain the audience with that. Music always needed to come first.

[00:14:11]

**JC:** Sure. How long were your practices and where did you hold them?

**MP:** Practices were an hour and a half, five days a week. We moved around from different places. I'm sorry, I can't remember the name of the field, but the field that we started on, they ended up doing something else with. It was touch and go for a while. It was the only time I had to get very, I guess, forceful when I was at Iowa–. Well, that and a couple of bowl trips, but when they couldn't figure out where we were going to be, and they wanted to do some things that were not going to accommodate our needs. I remember telling someone, “Okay, we need a field that's one hundred twenty yards long. Fifty-three and a third yards wide. It needs space on the sideline for a tower, and proximity to the music building is great because if we get bad weather, we need to be able to get inside before the tornado hits.” [Chapman laughs] They were having difficulties coming up with such a location. It was tongue-in-cheek for me, but I don't think anybody knew it when I said, “What about Central Campus?” They looked at me like I had just assassinated the president and I said, “Can't we just bulldoze that Campanile?” [Chapman laughs]

They said, “No, we can't do that.” We were sitting in the music building, and I pointed back over my shoulder to Lake Laverne.

I said, “What about that lake back there?” They looked at me again, really weird. I said, “Does that have to be there?”

They said, “Yes.”

I said, “Well, does it have to be that big? That'd be a great place to rehearse!” I knew that we were not going to bulldoze the Campanile, and I knew we were not going to drain Lake Laverne. But I also knew that they know how serious I am now about what we need. I ended up saying, “If we can't do that, then I guess we just can't have a marching band.” That was obviously not going to be an option either, so they finally came up with the field, and it's not where they practice now, but it was on a little bit further and they provided a high lift for us rather than building a new tower. Buildings and grounds were so tickled to death that they would store the high lift for us in the off-season as long as we would allow them to use it to go through all and change all of their lights that were so high up they couldn't get to him with the ladder. It was a really win-win situation once we got the new field. I do remember practicing once at the football practice field astroturf for a bowl game because it was snowing so hard that they couldn't get our field cleared [both laugh], and we had the practice. But that was very rare.

[00:16:47]

**JC:** Do you recall any specific shows throughout the years that maybe were unique or special, or were really memorable for you?

**MP:** The one that we did my second year, which was a *West Side Story* show. The music is so good, first of all, that I was really tickled with that. We also did it quite a few times because we traveled more that year. We played the University of Minnesota. That was so close, so we went up there. I forgot--seems like maybe we went to Kansas State or Kansas [University of Kansas] that year. We took the show down there on the road. It almost got to be a joke. We did it twice at home. So, we did that show probably four times, and then went out to do exhibitions. That's the one we always took to exhibitions. So, the last show of the season, we came off the line starting with the same music, and you could actually hear the crowd groan because they had seen it so many times, but the point was, we had an announcement, “We interrupt this halftime show for a special bulletin.” It was a student-written show that day, and we were playing University of Iowa, so we had a whole script written about how we were going to hunt down the Hawkeye. But we came on and we played the fanfare from the NBC news theme, and said, “We interrupt this halftime show,” and then we went on from there. That show was very special. Again, the students help plan all the shows. We always try to come up with a theme, and I'll never forget Chip Andringa, one of our drum majors who was a trumpet player, loved loud, so he came up with the idea, “Let's do a, quote, Loud Show.” [laughs] So, we had some of the biggest and loudest arrangements that we'd done in four years, and it was a huge success. I remember taking that one down to Ankeny for a high school band day and the crowd--at that point, the band could paste your ears back. When they opened it up, the crowd just went crazy that day. That was also a really fun show.

[00:18:52]

**JC:** What other performances did you have outside the football realm? You talk a little bit about going down to Ankeny and doing something. What other sorts of non-traditional things, like parades, etcetera, did you do?

**MP:** Well, one of them was--I think it was our very first years when they started the indoor show over in the eastern part of the state. We went right into the University of Iowa's backyard and did a recruiting show with several high school bands in a basketball arena. Those were always fun because the crowd was always so receptive. It was high school band students, and like I said, the band could really produce some volume outdoors, and when you put that indoors, it was almost painful it was so loud. That was fun. Our trip to London was a huge, huge trip. It was fun for me. I had been once before with another university and the organizers came and said, Wouldn't you like to bring the Iowa State Band?

I said, “I sure would.” So, we put together the ‘Varsity’ Band and the Alumni Band. I think we had about two hundred total, and about fifty of those were alums. It was such a great trip because we did a half-day New Year's Day Parade and spent seven days in London. So, the other six and a half days were all sightseeing. We were there for the turn of the millennium, so the fireworks display--I remember we were on the river Thames, and there's seven bridges that all cross the Thames. From each of those bridges you could see fireworks displayed that were all exactly timed the same. Some of the students and I were on one of the middle bridges and it didn't matter whether we looked right or left, we were seeing the exact same show--and spectacular show. That was just a great trip. There was no pressure from a football game. Nothing except a parade, which as you know are really easy. Once you learn the music, a parade’s about the easiest thing you can do. I remember we were alternating “Stars and Stripes Forever,” which we'd done in a halftime show with the school fight songs. We played the fight song and then the next time we would play, we would play “Stars and Stripes.” As soon as we hit that opening introduction of “Stars and Stripes,” I heard an audible gasp from the crowd in a London audience. I went back to the band, and no offense to Iowa State, said, “We're not doing the fight song ever again today. We're only going to do ‘Stars and Stripes’” because you could hear the crowd go [gasps], and that was really exciting.

Second, the end of the year performance that we did in the auditorium, we started with the theme from *2001 Space Odyssey*, “Also Sprach Zarathustra,” with the tubas on stage, the entire horn line in the top balcony, and the drum line in the pit. We would have the tubas start, and then the horn line in the balcony. The tubas play the timpani part. The horn line came in with the big *bom, bom, bom, ba-dom*. Then at about a third of the way through, the pit started to rise with the percussion on it, and once again, if you ever see the video of that, you can hear an audible gasp from the audience. At that point, I knew we had him in the palm of our hands [both laugh]. There were just so many. The drum line wrote a version of “Devil Went Down to Georgia.” It’s called “Devil Came out to Iowa,” and let me do the Charlie Daniels [American country, blues, and rock musician known for his hit “Devil Went Down to Georgia”]. I got to do the narration for that, and we took that out on the road, and we did that in the indoor concert. That was a hoot. I remember Rob Kibbe [Robert Kibbe, Mechanical Engineering (1993-1999)] saying, “We're going to make a star out of you.” I think that was probably the second year I was there, ninety-seven. That was a lot of fun. It was such a special band, as you know. I have mentioned a few performances, but I don't know that there was ever any that were not in some way special from everything else.

[00:22:57]

**JC:** Sure, sure. What about traveling? You mentioned going to some away games, etcetera. What was it like trying to take a marching band to an away Big Twelve game?

**MP:** It was terrible. [laughs] We were too big! [Chapman laughs] It was a lot of fun once all of the details were settled out, but we always tried to do a high school show on Friday night, and finding a high school that could accommodate two hundred and fifty, three hundred people on the road. That was sometimes a challenge. Then getting hotel rooms for that large of a group. So, when I said it was terrible, it was a pain to set up. There's no doubt. But once we got on the road and going, the band was quite well-behaved. That was something I didn't have to worry about, and they always performed well. One year, we could not get a high school stay, so we drove like--probably left at two in the morning going to Missouri. That was the year we were doing the *West Side Story* Show. We got off the bus, had McDonald's for breakfast, had not gotten hardly any sleep at all, and came out. I remember our announcer who was in the press box said that the first big fanfare that we hit--he said that everybody in the press box was talking until that moment, and they immediately shut up and looked at the field. We were the visiting band and we were leading at halftime. Which is usually dreadful for the visiting band. They turned that on so well that day, and I know they had to be exhausted because I was, and I wasn’t doing anything. [Chapman laughs].

[00:24:42]

**JC:** Well, you talk about trying the logistics of a two hundred fifty, three-hundred-piece band. What was your instrumentation like, that sort of thing? What was the breakdown of the size of the band?

**MP:** We had three blocks of sixty-four, and each of those blocks were divided into eight by eight. But it was really eight by nine because we had an alternate in each of those ranks. It was sixty-four trumpets, one full block of eight by eight trumpets, thirty-two trombones, twelve baritones, twelve french horns, as many tubas as we could put on the field, and always between twenty-seven and thirty sousaphones. Guard, usually about the same number, about twenty-five to thirty guard. Then percussion, I think we usually had eight snares, as many as seven base drums, five tenors, and seven, eight symbols. So, however many that is. Oh, and sixty-four woodwinds--two ranks of piccs [piccolos], two or four ranks of clarinets, a couple ranks of saxes. I think the band's a bit bigger now. But, at the time, we were still cutting a few people out of the band even with those numbers. I remember one year--I think it was my third year--we had won three or four games in the first two years I was there, and we still had a hundred forty freshmen that showed up that we had no place for in the band. So, during band camp we created another whole block and said, “Look, we always lost people during band camp. We always will. As long as you're here and keep coming every day and doing our drills with us, when spots come open, you'll get them.” We had zero attrition that year during band camp. Finally, I said, “Everybody who's here, give your name and contact information to the student director. Go home. If we have an opening, we'll call you, and I don't think we ended up calling anyone.” I think that's when the band started even growing from where we were. It's because they just started getting too many people that they were turning away. To turn away one hundred forty people--when I was at another school, we didn't have one hundred forty people in the band, and I was turning away one hundred forty. That just didn't sit well with me because I tried every person I could get into the band, at other schools, that's what I tried to do.

[00:27:14]

**JC:** What was the selection process like? How did you decide who got to stay and who didn't?

**MP:** At that point--and this was something that Mr. C had been doing, so we continued--at that point it was all based on an application date and instrumentation. So, when students send in, sometime during, even their junior year of high school, but definitely senior year, we would date the application as we got it and then keep them in a file separated by instrument, and when it finally came time, everybody was invited to camp, as I said. Then, when people showed up, and we realized who we had and who we needed, then we would just go based on that date. In the trumpet and trombone sections, we would audition, but that was not to get into the band, it was just to decide whether you're going to play first, second, third trumpet or first or second trombone. We had to make those distinctions. At that point it was all [based on] date. I understand that there's a much more involved audition process now. Probably, I would have done the same thing had I stayed longer because we were just getting to the point where it made sense to keep, not just based on a date, but based on some talent. If we were going to have to limit the size of the band, then why not limit it based on talent?

[00:28:36]

**JC:** Sure. How did you go about deciding who your drum majors were?

**MP:** That was all an audition. They would self-select who wanted to audition, come to me, fill out an application, and just mainly, Why you want to be drum major? Then, we would do an audition process in front of the band, where they would conduct the band. Then I would send them away and I would ask the band three questions. "Who in the band feels like this person conducts well enough to be drum major?” I didn't count but they would raise their hand and I would just sort of take a survey, you know—almost everybody, almost nobody, about half, only the people in their section. Whatever seemed to be appropriate. Then the same process through another question is, “Who thinks this person has the leadership skills necessary to be drum major?” That was almost impossible for a freshman to do well in that category, but I still always encouraged freshmen and sophomores to audition because that put them in front of the band and said to the band, Hey, I'm somebody I want you to watch next year. But I never chose a rising sophomore to be drum major. Only because of the base of that second question. People didn't know them well enough to know if they were going to be a leader. Then I would actually ask, “Who knows something about this person that would influence my decision?” and I would let them talk, and I would take notes. I was very careful about what the student said to me. At that point, it became my decision. I did not vote, and I thought, “I've done this long enough that I know what we're looking for.” I have to say I was pretty successful in the choice, but I mean, we always had good students from whom to choose, but it seemed like the right ones always came forward. Then I would bring them in and talk to them very briefly and say, “Thank you all for auditioning. Here's who I would like to be drum major next year,” and then I would leave. Because at that point, somebody's incredibly disappointed, and that's not the moment that I want to talk to them. Let them have a chance to process it, and then they can come talk to me the next day and I can explain to them the basis of the decision. But right when somebody's in that emotional state of really having invested so much into the audition process not to be selected—and I understand what that's like because I've been in that position--I want them to have a chance for them to process it before I talk to them about it.

[00:31:11]

**JC:** So, what would you say would be the culture of the band while you were there? How was it molded by you as a director, or maybe your drum majors that you selected, or maybe just the band itself, what kind of culture did it have?

**MP:** Well, it was a band that liked to have a good time. Actually, early on, I felt like I didn't understand the band. Probably, it took me about two-thirds of my first year to figure out what the culture or what the personality of this band was. I don't think they accepted me very quickly, and honestly, I was not ready because it was very different from bands I'd worked with in the past. Once we got to know each other, I thought it was a marriage made in heaven. I enjoyed them. I think they enjoyed me. But when I said that the band liked to have a good time, they also knew that it was a whole lot more fun to be in a group that was good. To do that, you can't go out and just have a good time all the time. It takes a lot of hard work. You know that.

I especially remember when we went to Louisiana for the bowl game, we had been probably two or three weeks without a rehearsal. That was 2001. We were required to play a patriotic show following the attacks in New York City that September. We hadn't done a patriotic show that year. We had done one the year before, so I pulled out all the music, all the drill. Anyone who is a returning band member got moved to their old drill position. The new students were worked in, and then some alumni who came in to help us to make up for the students who couldn't attend came if they could. I think we rehearsed maybe a week before we left Iowa or before we went home for the holidays. We came in a week or two later, not having done that show, and we had one three-hour rehearsal. So, I knew that that rehearsal was going to have to be a bit of a grind and I was probably going to have to be the one that was going to apply the pressure. It was twenty-four degrees, and the night before we were at the hotel, and of course these Iowa people were hanging out at the pool. They tried to get me to take a swim, and I said, “I'm not jumping in this pool.” I did go to my room, put on my swimming trunks, came out, jumped the fence, swam one length of the pool and back, jumped a fence and went back into my room. They're all sitting there going, What just happened here? What that all was about was having the band be able to laugh at me, because I knew the next day, there was not going to be much laughter. I did have to put my thumb on them just a little bit, hold them to the nose to the grindstone, but they accepted that challenge really well. We went out and played the University of Alabama. Alabama had not done a patriotic show that year either and did exactly what I had talked about earlier in this interview. They came out and stood for seven and a half minutes. We came out and did a full field show with drills and everything, and pretty much blew away the Alabama band that night. That kind of a work ethic, when we needed to, we could get to it. They didn't necessarily need me to do that either. They knew that. My father-in-law’s a professional photographer and he came to a Saturday morning rehearsal, and when we got home after the rehearsal, I said, “Well, what did you think?”

He looked at me and said, quote, “You don't do very much, do you?” You know, that was maybe the greatest compliment that I ever got as a director because on Saturday morning if I have to do very much, I haven't done my job that week. Drum majors, just get out there and run it. That was the band. When they needed to, they knew what they had to do, and they got it done.

[00:35:12]

**JC:** Are there marching band traditions, maybe on the field, maybe off the field, that you think are really neat or maybe some rituals that are part of what encompasses the band?

**MP:** Well, I love the dismissal. I’d never done, you know, what the Iowa State band–. The drum majors always dismissed the band by asking them a question, you know, “Which band *da, da, da, da, da*,” and I lucked in to, my very first year, Gordon Brock was drum major, Guido. He was a *master* at the dismissal. No matter what had gone on that day. Again, the first couple, two thirds of the season, we were not clicking on all cylinders--and I take credit for that. But no matter what had happened that day, Gordon could get the band back up to a really high point with his dismissals. I loved that.

The passing on of the overlay within ranks. I'd never seen that done before, and that was so meaningful. Students would get their uniform and then their overlay was held back, and before the first game, rank leaders would give the students their overlay. At that point, they were now full members of the Iowa State Marching Band. I really, really love that tradition. I guess those two are the ones that come to mind first. So there again, stuff that the students were—oh! The songs on the way back on the bus, those were hilarious. That was a lot of fun, and they wouldn't ever give me a song sheet. To this day, I don't have a song sheet, and I would love to have had one.

[00:36:56]

**JC:** Definitely. You talk a little bit about the uniforms. Can you talk a little bit more about those uniforms and the uniforms that they used while you were there?

**MP:** Yes, 1996 was the first year that they had the brand-new uniforms that I think the alumni, either affectionately or not, called “bird in a blender.” Not having any background with Iowa State, and not knowing what the old logo was, and the fact that the blue was a new color. I thought those uniforms were as stunning as any band uniforms I had ever seen. I *loved* them. When that uniform was coming down the street, it just screamed Iowa State Cyclones. That was the uniform that we kept the full six years I was there. I know at some point they've gone away from them, but even when I moved to my next job, we were designing a new uniform--no specifics from the Iowa State uniform, but just the idea that all of the identifiable Iowa State trademarks, the cyclone, the words, all the colors. All of that being a part of the uniform really influenced my design of the uniform when I moved to a different school. I've seen so many college bands that use the colors and that's about it. You don't really know what band you're looking at until you get close enough to be able to read the words on their sleeve. I just think a college band is all about the pageantry and representing the school, exciting the fans, and for that reason, that Iowa State uniform just hit the bill in every way. I was so tickled to be able to be a part of that tradition.

[00:38:44]

**JC:** What was the marching style that you chose to use while you were there? Was that different than your predecessor? Or what was that like?

**MP:** Is this a loaded question? [laughs]

**JC:** It’s not a loaded question. [laughs]

**MP:** Because it was one thing that Mr. C and I talked about. The band had a very proud tradition of doing every step of drill as a high step. High school bands had moved away from that and into much more the corps style. Joe and I talked about it, and he said, “Now is the time that we need to do that.” My predecessor had moved a very small way away from it, and Joe and I decided now is the time. We got a new person coming in. He actually paid me a great compliment. He thought that my personality was going to be such that I would be able to settle that. So, we did change. We still continue to do all the pregame with the Big Ten high-step style, but we moved all of the halftime drill to the more corps style. I don't know if that influenced our recruiting, but I do know that, as I said, that third year when we turned away one hundred forty kids--those two things coincided, whether there was a cause and effect, I don't know. But once I got the alumni to buy in, the students actually bought in pretty quickly. The alumni were dragged along, kicking and screaming. Whenever we had alumni band, we continued to do all the show high step because that was their tradition, and I wanted to respect that. But again, with the counsel of my boss and somebody who had been at Iowa State for more than twenty years, we decided this is [the] time to make this change. Hopefully, I didn't dishonor any traditions when we did that.

[00:40:38]

**JC:** Sure, sure. So, marching in Jack Trice Stadium, how did that compare to maybe some of the other ones that you marched in as you were going away games or whatever--what was that like to march there?

**MP:** Well, it's always fun to be the home band in your home stadium when you come on the field. The first time I ever saw that reversing ISU at pregame that blew me away when I got the videotape. That always seemed to be a high point of the pregame show. But yes, just coming into the stadium as the home band with that specific band--I mean, I'd been at other schools and been the home band, there was something different about the energy marching over from the basketball arena through the parking lot and having the crowd flock to both sides of that parade as the band came in. That was just something really, really special about that. Band in the Midwest is big. Much more than in even in the part of the South where I was, or in Colorado, or in Arizona, so that there was already a built-in tradition of people who loved the band. So, being able just to plug into that was a great experience for me.

[00:41:59]

**JC:** Were there any times that the band experienced difficulties throughout a season, or within a season, or a particular time? Were there any challenges that you encountered at all?

**MP:** Yes, the first challenge was the protectiveness of the Athletic Department of their football field. We had been doing rehearsals, on the field, day of game, and we got moved. That was no longer possible. Okay, so we rehearsed right outside the field. But I remember one game of the season, maybe it’s the last game of my first year, they said, The band can't do pregame, because it was too wet. We’re introducing the seniors that day and it's their last chance to do pregame in the stadium, and I lost it. I went to the Athletic Department and explained to them what was going on and the importance of why we needed to do that, on that day. They never said yes or no, so we came out and marched pregame. I never heard boo about it. But after the game, the students said, “What happened?”

I said to them, “I went to the president of the university and told him that if the band didn't march pregame today, I resign on the spot.” Which was a total lie.

They were looking at me like, What? You're kidding! and I broke down and started laughing.

I said, “No, I didn't do that. I don't know what happened, folks.” But that was a big challenge. Our first bowl game when, I think, it had been twenty-five years since Iowa State had been to a bowl game, and they weren't going to take but two-thirds of the band. I remember calling the band into the band room that afternoon, and I actually brought my boss in, the chair of the department, because I wanted her to hear exactly what I said because I knew what was going to happen. I announced the band, and I said, “We are going to take only two hundred of the band. We will do it on a seniority basis, and who's available for the trip. Show up tomorrow for rehearsal.” And I left. Before I could get to school the next day, the students had contacted every television station and radio station in the state, all the large newspapers. I had about twenty phone messages on my phone, including the vice president of the university who said, “Make it stop.”

I said, “I can't make a stop. I didn't get it started.” I said, “I will promise you that I have not done anything to do this. I knew it was going to happen, but I didn't instigate it,” and I said, “I promise you, I will not return any phone calls to any news media in the state or outside the state.” Before the end of the day, it had been decided that we would take the entire band to the bowl game, and we would fly. We wouldn't take a bus and spend two nights on a bus coming to, as it turned out, Arizona. That was a real challenge for about two days. I mean, there was at one point there were news cameras on campus that I was trying to avoid, people coming to my office. I wasn't answering the door in my office, or the phone because I didn't want to say anything that was going to get me in deeper trouble. I was already in enough trouble for something I hadn't done. [both laugh] I didn't want to get in trouble for something I was going to do, but that was a real challenge. But we ended up getting to go, and we had a great trip.

[00:45:34]

**JC:** Any other unique experiences that maybe separate out from the everyday marching band experience?

**MP:** You know, I don't know. It was all such a new experience based on my previous college experience that it was--it was just six years that were really, really wonderful. I, in some ways, don't regret, and in other ways do regret leaving Iowa because that was such a special group of students, and a special place. I've enjoyed some of the activities I've been able to be a part of here in Arizona, but I do know at this point in my life and my career, I'll never have that experience again because I won’t be given that opportunity again. It was just a really, really wonderful six years.

[00:46:35]

**JC:** So, when you decided that you wanted to move on, did you pass along any advice to any incoming directors, or how did that go?

**MP:** No, not really, because I wanted that person to be able to come in and do the kind of things that needed to be done in their opinion. In fact, students came to me and some of them were very distraught and, you know, “What kind of changes is this person going to make?” All these people are now freshmen, sophomores.

I said, “Well, let me tell you the kind of changes I made.” We talked about changing from the high step, and I said, “Was that a good change?”

They said, “Oh yeah, yeah.”

I said, “Whatever this new person does is going to be a good change too. But you got to give this person a chance.” I think Matt [Matthew Smith, Marching Band Director (2002-2010)] did a really great job from everything I could tell. But yes, I didn't give him any advice because, first of all, I don't think he needed it. Secondly, it probably wouldn't have been fair. If I had wanted to continue to influence the band, I shouldn't have left.

[00:47:40]

**JC:** You talk about change. How do you think, even since then, the band has changed over time from before you to where it is today?

**MP:** I've only seen them one time when I came up for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Alumni Band, and it's larger. So, the size of the block has expanded. As I recall, they were using the big percussion pit. I think I'm remembering that correctly. That's something, as a percussionist, I always like the idea. I always hated the difficulty of the logistics of making it work. With the Iowa State band, and the sound, and the excitement that we could produce, I decided it wasn't worth that effort, and somebody else decided that it was, and that’s the change that somebody made. And it was. When I saw the band, it was really exciting. They changed the uniform, and as I said, I was so in love with that uniform from 1996 that I guess I became the curmudgeonly alumni and I hated to see the new uniform because I like the old one so well. But there again, all the changes when I saw the band on the field that day and in rehearsal on the day before, I thought, “Yes, this is the Iowa State Band. I don't recognize the uniform. I don't recognize all this percussion, the pit. But I recognize this band.”

[00:49:02]

**JC:** Sure. What do you think sets the ISUCF‘V’MB [Iowa State University College Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band] apart from maybe any other marching band that you find in the in the country?

**MP:** Wow, I mean, every band is different. My first college band at Wake Forest--of course I am an alumnus of that school, so that had a real special place in my heart, and the students there, very different from the Iowa students, but also very special. At Colorado as a graduate student and here at Arizona State, I find the same things, not the same thing, but that there are things about that group that are really special. So, all of the things that we've talked about today is what made Iowa State special, and I wouldn't have traded that for anything.

[00:49:46]

**JC:** Right. Well, is there any other question or anything that I didn't cover that you maybe think we should cover?

**MP:** No, probably not. I really wish that I lived close. I would love to be there a little bit more often. I try to follow the team on television as much as I can, and since they've gotten to be a little bit better than when I was there, they do get on television a little bit more often. I can usually find them at least once every other week or so on YouTube TV. So, I enjoy following the team. Just wish they'd show the band, but that's not going to happen, I know that. [laughs]

**JC:** Great. Well, thank you.

**MP:** Jay, thanks so much, and I look forward to seeing this finished product when it comes out. Good luck at the homecoming on Saturday.