

JOHN BROSEAMLE SUDDENLY A GIANT: A HISTORY OF CSUN COLLECTION

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH BEN RUDE

March 13th, 1991

Unspecified interview location

Interviewer

John Broseamle

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Edited by: Philip Walsh

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PROVENANCE

This oral history of Ben Rude was conducted by John Broesamle on March 13th, 1991 in and unspecified location. This interview was conducted by Broesamle as source material for his book *Suddenly a Giant: A History of California State University, Northridge* (Northridge: Santa Susana Press, 1993). The first transcription of this interview was completed by Cameron Takahashi.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ben Rude was a student of CSUN during its early years. After serving in the Air Force during the Korean War, he attended Los Angeles State College (later California State University Los Angeles) until 1956, when he took classes at what was then a satellite campus of L.A. State in the San Fernando Valley, also serving as the first president of the Associated Students there. He earned his BA in 1957, subsequently becoming first president of the Alumni Association. He went on to earn an MA in June of 1961 from San Fernando Valley College, which had become independent of L.A. State in 1958, and started teaching there in September of 1961. He taught English as a Second Language (ESL), and served as foreign student advisor and coordinator of the ESL program.

BEN RUDE'S ORAL HISTORY

SUMMARY INDEX

TRACK #1a

0:00-5:00 Rude describes his upbringing and background, then begins to talk about the age demographics of the campus at the time.

5:01-10:00 Rude further describes his background in the university, including his time in teaching ESL classes and being in charge of foreign student advisor.

10:01-15:00 Rude describes what Associated Students is, and what they do.

15:01-20:00 Rude describes the general atmosphere of the students, faculty, and demographics of those who were on the campus.

20:01-25:00 Rude further describes how tight-knit the community was at the time of the campus's conception.

25:01-30:05 Broesamle and Rude look through past photographs and add detail about past events and how it demonstrates the closeness of students and faculty.

TRACK #1b

0:00-5:00 Rude adds detail about the family feeling nature of the early campus with illustrations.

5:01-10:00 Rude begins to describe how CSUN originally was attached to another campus and the consequences of that.

10:01-15:00 Rude further describes tensions that arose because of this connection between the campuses and further behaviors that stemmed from that situation.

15:01-20:00 Rude describes how the inevitability of the separation of the San Fernando State College would further change the educational system in that time.

20:01-25:00 Broesamle and Rude share vignettes about past times.

25:01-28:57 Conclusion, and wrap-up.

INTERVIEW NOTE

Interviewer: John Broseamle, noted as JB

Interviewee: Ben Rude, noted as BR

Date: March 13th, 1991

Time: 58:11

Subject: CSUN History

Tape 1a begins.

00:00 JB: You—you arrived in 1956.

BR: Yeah.

JB: San Fernando Valley State, what became San Fernando Valley State.

BR: It was the San Fernando Valley Campus of Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences.

JB: You graduated in 1957.

BR: Right.

JB: Before that, you had been in the air force.

BR: Uh, yes. From '51 to '53.

JB: I see. What was your rank when you finished?

BR: Let's see. I was—I went in with the Van Nuys International Guard during the Korean thing, and got out of the Air Force as a sergeant but I had to stay in the National Guard for another 8 months of—I was staff sergeant by the time I finished my military commitment. I think they call it something else now.

JB: And then you found your way to Los Angeles State, from '55 to '56 you were Junior Class President.

BR: Right.

JB: Who were you when you were elected president of Associated Students of Valley student—

BR: Let's see, that was in—well actually, what—the way that developed, I was at, what we called then, the Ramona campus, L.A. State, and I had gotten to know Bob Lawrence, and I decided that I preferred living in the valley to living in Los Angeles, and I wanted the opportunity to open a new—a new campus. And I became acquainted with Bob Lawrence, he was going to be activities

advisor, so he asked me if I'd be interested in assisting to set up student government. So, I was happy to. So, we formed sort of an interim, I can't even recall what it's called, interim student board or something of the sort, the official name is probably in one of the early copies of *The Sundial* here, of students who were interested. And I believe that we operated that way for just about a semester, then we had—then we had an election, and the board was elected. So an answer to the question, I was served as chairman of the interim student board for some months and then was elected probably around January of '57 for the remainder of the school year.

JB: Who was the electorate of the total student body?

BR: Right, so four hundred and some-odd students as I recall.

JB: And you would've been what age? Of—

BR: At that time, it was '57, I would have been twenty-six years of age.

JB: The reason I'm asking is because it's rather typical of the student body that the student body was older than it became later.

BR: Yes, as a matter of fact, I was one of the younger ones in the graduating class. If you look at the—the pictures of the graduates, there were others my age, but very few that were much younger. Of course, it was only Junior, Senior, and Graduate classes. There was no Freshman or Sophomore class. And it was the post Korean war era. So many of the fellows were Korean war vets. A lot of the women were women whose children were either grown or they were now in junior high school or late elementary school so Mom was able to go back to school and finish her education or get a credential or something of the sort. In fact, one of our first social clubs was called *Los Maduros*, which means "The Mature Ones", which was a sorority, largely of women, in—oh, very early middle-age, mid-thirties and up.

JB: This is something that's an object of wonder to the faculty looking back, the students—so many of the students was their age, everyone's seems to be age-peers to one another.

5:00 BR: Very close to it. Yes. The faculty, I would say, by and large, tended to be in the thirties and forties and maybe the students tended on average to be a decade younger but certainly the same generation.

JB: You did your graduate work at Valley State to the tune of your MA.

BR: Right. At that time, the secondary credential was a year of graduate work, and the MA was a year of graduate work, and there was a lot of overlap, of course, but the whole thing took—took me—I'm trying to think now—full-time and part-time, mostly part-time as a matter of fact, took four years, I got the MA from Valley State then, in '61.

JB: And then another MA at USC.

BR: Yes, later, that was—I've even forgotten—I think maybe 1970 in Linguistics.

JB: And then at—at an early point you came to Pasadena City College, what year would that have been?

BR: Came to Pasadena—Pasadena High School in '59, while I was—while I was working on my MA, and then I came to PCC in '61, I finished my MA in June, came here in September.

JB: And you've been on the faculty ever since?

BR: Ever since.

JB: Your specialty now—can you describe just a bit in terms of what you focus on and what you teach?

BR: Yes, my—I came here, interestingly, the department chairman said the only thing we have available is a job teaching ESL [English as a Second Language], if you do that for a year, then maybe the next year I can get you halfway out of it and the following year maybe all the way out of it. And so, I taught ESL for a year and I said to him, well, you know, I rather enjoy this, it's really

a challenge, and I enjoy the students, I'd like to do it for another year. And that was thirty years ago, and I'm still doing it. But in the meantime, I became foreign student advisor and coordinator of the ESL program which was—both of which were release time jobs, one time I was teaching one-third, being foreign student advisor for about one-third and coordinating the ESL program for about one-third. And then my teaching consisted, at that time, occasionally ESL class, but also Introduction to Linguistics and the History of the English Language. So actually I consider myself more of a linguist than anything else. Then, about ten years ago, I went on a Fulbright to Denmark, and I was replaced, of course, in my position. When I came back, I decided that I liked the flex time of the classroom and I no longer wanted to continue being foreign student advisor. So the person who had replaced me for a year was asked to continue it, the job was cut in half, I took the ESL coordination, he took foreign student advisor, so since then I've been one-third ESL coordinator, two-thirds teacher. And now my last full-time year here, I'm on a three-day week, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, teaching five hours a week and the other one-third time of coordination.

JB: Were you involved in establishing the Associated Students itself?

BR: At Valley State? Oh yes. The first constitution and bylaws and really all of it.

JB: Could you describe the process by which AS [Associated Students] emerged, in outline form? How did it all happen? How did it emerge?

BR: I would say it evolved more than anything else. Now the—by the AS—do you mean the total activities program, the clubs and the rest of it?

JB: Whatever you were tied in with, whatever wore on your responsibilities.

BR: Yeah. Because the Associated Students is simply a name for the student government. And our primary function then is, for the extracurricular, we like to call it the co-curricular program at that time, which was largely activities program. So our function primarily was to plan those activities that are appropriate for a co-curricular program. And to do that, of course, you need more than just what we called the student board, you know, president, vice president, and representatives, and class representatives. You needed individuals to be responsible for certain areas, people to plan cultural activities, for example, lectures, during

the first year there we had Margaret Mead come on campus and do a lecture, that was sponsored by the Associated Students. We had famous, at that time, I think still, jazz saxophonist Bud Shanks come in and do a concert, and that was sponsored by the Associated Students, and we had dances of course. But to get a full activities program going, you need more than just this one body. So, we also did what we could to encourage clubs to form. Academically oriented clubs and those were usually strongly supported by the facul—by the faculty, the California Student Teacher's association, for example, by the education faculty. SAM's Society for the Advancement of Management was no doubt the biggest club on campus and that was through the business and economics faculty. There was a geography club that was formed, well, these—these special interest clubs took care of activities for people in those majors. During the first year, there were social clubs formed, I mentioned Los Maduros, there was the first fraternity formed, and the first sorority, and of course these were the—the named sources of later really social activities, dances, and things of that sort. So, the function of the Associated Students was to run the student government, but also to attempt—to attempt to foster other aspects of the total activity program, clubs and things like that.

JB: As an aside, a footnote to the linguist, is Maduros spelled the obvious way in Spanish? M-a-d—

BR: M-a-d-u-r-o-s. It was all women, and it's interesting because it's a masculine term. One would think Las Maduras.

JB: We'll put it in the—*both laugh*—Beyond—beyond what you described, were there additional responsibilities you had as the Associated Students President? How was the scope of your responsibilities? Had we pretty much encompassed it, or did it run—

BR: No, we pretty much encompassed it. There was a lot of, oh, public relations kind of responsibilities to, what one might say, maintain a high profile on and off campus. I was involved in community activities of various types, for example, the Northridge Chamber of Commerce one time decided they wanted to have a Northridge cleanup day, and they got a local trash hauler to donate trucks and drivers and of course they came to the college to get volunteers from the student body to help pick up trash throughout Northridge and obviously I was the one they came to, and so it was my responsibility to try to find enough volunteers to make the day a success, and that—that kind of thing, what, community outreach was another important part of the job.

JB: Did you find the community supportive of the campus?

15:00

BR: Tremendously supportive. Tremendously. Northridge at that time consisted of about two blocks on Reseda Boulevard down by Sherman Way up toward—up toward Nordhoff it was primarily open acreage. But I can remember people commenting that Northridge was destined to become a future Westwood, and we all laughed at it at the time. Looking back, twenty-some odd years later, it is practically a Westwood.

JB: We were talking a bit about the early students in terms of—

BR: The what?

JB: The early students in terms of age range cause that's one of their most striking characteristics. What else stands out in your mind about that student body as you knew it? One of the nice things about talking with you is you now have thirty some-odd years of experience working with students behind you and a lot of perspective on students in general, looking back on it as a colleague in this profession, what strikes you? Does anything else strike you about them?

BR: About the students, outside of the maturity level, no, nothing really. There was, of course, a tremendous closeness at that time, you would walk into—there was one tiny cafeteria that served faculty, staff, and students and it was really one big happy family. It would be unheard of to go in for coffee, for example, and sit down at a table by yourself. If there was someone sitting a table, regardless whether it was a caretaker or the president of the college you simply went over and joined that person at the table, the next person who came in would probably join you also, because just about everybody knew just about everybody. I think there was also a—a real pioneer spirit that caused a kind of cohesiveness that you don't find on larger campuses anymore, of course.

JB: This is important, you're touching on points I want to expand on. Going back to student body, and this is focusing really on them for a moment more, how serious did they strike you academically? That is, how serious were they as students?

BR: I think, by and large, they were—they were quite serious as students, but they were not by and large full-time students. The great majority of them were employed, many of them were

married, many of them were family people, the men, veterans with wives and maybe small children held down jobs, also, and had home responsibilities, so they were people that was very, very busy. And by and large, school was an important part of their life, but school was—was only the place where they came to attend class. From that, they went home. With most of the students, it was not a big involvement in the co-curricular program.

JB: So it was, what we call, a commuter campus right from the start.

BR: Very, very definitely. We all were looking forward eagerly to the first freshman class, because we thought, This will bring the youth, and this will bring the vitality, and the interest in activities programs, and so on.

JB: Did you have the impression, because you did continue with the campus, did you have any impression that the arrival of the first freshman class did have that effect?

BR: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely. All of the sudden, there were eighteen-year olds on campus. Where before, the average age was well into the twenties.

JB: So immediately you drove that age average down.

BR: Immediately, yes.

JB: I've heard various accounts for how demanding the academic expectations were. How demanding did you sense the faculty was, in its expectations of the students?

BR: I think, at the risk of falling into the trap we all fall into, you know, students aren't nearly as good as they were when I was a student, and I suspect that our teachers were saying the same things about us, but my impression is that they were more demanding. And that—that we—we were absolutely expected to do the work that was required. I'll never forget the first and last time in my life I ever tried to turn in a term paper late. I brought one up to Charlie Kaplan about a week late, and he said, What's this? And I said, This is my term paper, and he gave it back, he said, I don't accept late term papers. He gave us a final exam that was half-take home, and to

atone for this late-term paper, I sat up literally from 8:00 at night til 6:00am in the morning writing an essay answer to one take-home question. I was able to squeeze a B out of the course, but—now, he was maybe not—not typical, but he was not atypical either. So, I think they were more, they were more demanding of us. We were

more mature and they were expecting more maturity.

20:00 JB: You compared—well, you used an analogy a moment ago, to the family. The campus really had, like one big family, one large family, talking to the faculty, John Stafford, who you might have known, and in many others, that term “family” keeps coming up. The faculty use it, you have used it, and I gathered that it really has meanings from the student’s perspective because it surely has meaning from the faculty’s perspective, that’s how they thought of their relationship with one another. But it sounds as though the students thought of it as a large family, including embracing them too.

BR: I think without question that’s true for those students who were involved at all in the school, those who did anything besides come to class and go. I think what—what tend to create the family feeling was the feeling that—that we were all really building a university. We’re building—at that time, the idea of ever becoming a university, of course, was the furthest thing from our minds, but we were looking forward to then, even, was a change of name, establishment of a totally separate state college. But I think we all felt that we were engaged in the building of a new institution.

JB: You mentioned faculty and students sitting down together in the small cafeteria, was that the Bull Ring, as it was known?

BR: I think—yes it was, that was the very first—the very first one. The cafeteria staff, in fact, consisted for a while of one cook who took the orders, washed the dishes and everything, and then later on, I think in the second semester had a—had a helper, a woman assistant. Ironically, who married the president of the first fraternity that was formed on campus, a Korean vet who had lost a leg in the war.

JB: This family analogy really does parse out, doesn’t it. (laughs)

BR: Yes, absolutely.

JB: I've seen pictures of the Bull Ring, it's kind of a legend, I guess, among people who were there at the time. Could you describe, in just a few words, what its atmosphere was, apart from the cook?

BR: It was a—of course, a temporary building. They were all cold (??), plywood buildings, I think it's probably still there, we say nothing as permanent as a temporary building. Very, very spartan, but it was the one place that was open from about seven in the morning until—we had night classes there, too, of course—until later in the evening, it was the—the only place, really, that one could go that was—that was inside. There was the library of course, but to spend an hour between classes, that was the place where you went. And teachers went there, as well as students. We had the student—the Associated Students decided we were going to have a Christmas party, so we ordered a complete turkey dinner, with all the trimmings and everything, for everyone. (Coughing) Pardon me. So, we served—served turkey dinner for the faculty, staff, and students, and that was typical, I think, of the—of the Bull Ring atmosphere. You know, that term of case—of course, was brought about by the name of Matadors, selected for the teams which we didn't have, then, by the way, but—but still we had the name and if you had the Matadors, then, of course, that gave the rise of the Bull Ring, there was some talk even from the school newspaper to call it the Bull Sheet but that didn't go very far.

JB: No masthead would say "Bull Sheet."

BR: No masthead.

JB: Too bad. There are pictures of the Christmas party, and I was very moved by this.

BR: Oh yes, yes.

JB: It's not something that could happen today with three thousand some-odd students or something like that.

BR: It couldn't, it couldn't. But, of course, it could happen then with, I think, a total faculty numbering in the sixties, probably including administration, and not all that many students, something that could be done.

JB: And there you are together, students, faculty, just as you described. There wasn't a sense of distance between students and faculty that one might expect, was there? In a more established campus, I think—

BR: No, there was no dist—there was no sense of distance at all, and yet, of course, this was during the 50's, it would never have occurred to me to call Dr. Marcus, "Mitch", or Dr. Kaplan, "Charlie". You referred to them by name. And they referred to us, for the most part, by Mr. and Mrs. and Miss. But that was a more formal atmosphere that characterized the '50s I think that went out the door during the—during the '60s. That was the time, I think that professor would not think of coming to school without a coat and tie. He might take the coat off, but he would not take the tie off.

JB: It's fascinating, going through the annual, you're reminded of that and you have to be reminded of that because things have changed so much.

BR: Yes.

JB: What other things did students and faculty do together? For example, I've heard stories, at least, of later softball games between students and faculty, picnics among—

BR: Oh, yes.

JB: —students and faculty, did these things happen when you were there?

BR: Yes, I—and, of course, either that—that involved the—what we would call the active students and the active faculty. There were the faculty who were—who were no doubt deeply involved in the university, but, you know, in other aspects of the university and were not as involved in—in student life. And yet, there was always that group that could be counted on, Del

Stelk and his beautiful wife were always at all kinds of activities. I remember one, I—you mentioned a picnic, we had square dancing. And that, of course, was students and faculty alike and we had a professional caller, and everybody learned to square dance, and we just had a—had a wonderful time, and that was just another of the kind of activities that we had at the time.

JB: Once again, so like—it is another agent, it sounds like another agent. On page twenty-six, we have the sock-hop described.

BR: Oh yes. (laughs) A typical 1950's activity.

JB: (Laughs) I recall some of those myself. But of course, I wasn't at Valley State yet. There's a brief description of the sock-hop and the box-social. Does your memory allow you to add any details to these little descriptive paragraphs?

BR: No, and I wish I could recognize some of the names in the picture. But, as you can tell, in at least one of the pictures, they're not all—they're not all students going through that silly chain, whatever you call it, I can't remember, had a special name at that time—oh that was a bunny hop. That was a bunny hop.

JB: Either these are faculty or older students, they look like faculty, don't they.

BR: Yeah. Actually both. Both faculty and—a couple of them I recognize as students—they're mostly students of course, and I would be very—I know that Del and his wife were there.

JB: Is this—Is this Bob Lawrence?

BR: That's Bob Lawrence, yes. And Diane Murray was—at that time, remember, we were a branch campus of Cal State L.A., so we got to choose a princess for the Cal State L.A. homecoming, and Diane Murray was the princess on the Cal State L.A. homecoming court. We did have some activities that were in common between what we called at that time the Ramona campus and the—and the Valley campus. Homecoming was one of them.

JB: You know what's become of her? I mean—

BR: No, I have no idea. She was a younger student, as you can tell. Transfer student from, I believe, from Valley College. Elementary education major.

JB: Odds are, teaching in the Valley today, who knows.

BR: Probably so.

JB: Let's change sides on our tape. This is a suitable moment to do that.

[END OF TRACK 1]