

## Ralph Prator, Track 4

Tape 2, Side B

JB: Okay we are back on tape.

RP: Alright we'll to continue. That also, we probably didn't maximize the effort of some of our citizens to develop financial resources for the kind of icing as it were on the cake of excellence by raising funds for special purposes. Like faculty research, for example, which is now pretty much underway as you know, we have some 80 million dollars now in that fund from the people in the foundation. We had people who were willing to help. It could have been very helpful to us if we had the time to use that resource in developing these extra funds as it were for these extra purposes that would have been very helpful to us, now this is one thing that I think Jim Cary has done very well. So he has been able to muster this kind of response and I think that as an aside that we partially, because we're just didn't have the time, but also because we were unable to pinpoint the kind of people who could help us in this category. You see now so far, right off the top of my head, think of things that are disappointments or achievements either pretty much belongs there.

JB: Were you administratively shorthanded, or were things just so frenzied that it was difficult to maintain all the balls in the air?

RP: They were both related, we were very shorthanded, administratively speaking. To develop a kind of community resources that we test upon takes a lot of time and a lot of planning. We didn't have that kind of time planning. We didn't have the kind of people who could help us with press in terms of numbers, and so on, who could write stories and influence the people who were going to let's say, respond. We didn't have the kind of money that would be required to develop a strong athletic programs or bands and the other things that tend to show. In that conjunction, we realized immediately that take, the field of athletics that I'm pretty familiar with. The chances of our having any particular place in the sun were very remote, still are very remote, and I think it's too many strong contenders, this area in the Los Angeles complex for San Fernando Valley, or Cal State Northridge, any particular role to play because of the excellence of the teams at UCLA and USC and the professional teams. But you've wasted a lot of time trying to compete in this area, and I think a lot of money trying to compete in these areas to. So my thought initially was, we ought to have a league within ourselves. We've got enough state college, and we could just play nobody except each other. And I worked hard at this, trying to get them to concede, two things. One, we couldn't afford to compete to get the kind of athletes that are going to be required for nationals significance, just can't afford it. I know this because I was a coach at one time. I know what it takes to sell in

this area. Secondly, there tremendous obstacles to doing well here for instance, there's an insatiable appetite on part of these facilities and teams it's like feeding a tapeworm, the more you feed it the bigger it gets and the more you got to feed it, pretty soon it will eat you out of house and home. That's the way I'm judging this business. So I thought if we could get all the state college organized just kind of a league we could have a northern section and a southern section and have a playoff between champion down here and the champion up there. I couldn't get to first base with this, with the college presidents. They were not going to listen to this for one minute, I had a few people who came to all the meeting but they were not sympathetic with this idea. Some of them envisioned being national powers for example, and others of them felt that I had an ax to grind here I was more knowledgeable in a certain sense and some of the others and I must have some ulterior motive to try to push this off on them. There is suspicion involved, and I had a few supporters like Lang Store at Cal State Fullerton, but it was an impossible thing. But you see, the possibility was there and we could have had something, we could have played the bona fide athletes. We wouldn't really need to recruit we just use the kids that come and wanted to play. And we wouldn't have to do all this recruiting and all this fundraising abilities and stadia and all this sort of thing. Couldn't do it.

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JB: I had a chat with the head of state academic senate at Cal State Fullerton not too long ago, he said they're playing body bag games with their football team to generate revenue. Several are half a million, a million in the red with division 1.

RP: Yeah, well as I say, it reflects what I said about going like this, it's like a tapeworm. I don't care how big you get you never get quite big enough you see, Michigan with, I don't know, twelve or fifteen coaches for the varsity team, and you got one hundred and some odd thousand people in the stadium. They still don't have enough money. Why? Because Ohio State will add something, then they have to have it in Michigan.

JB: It's an arms race.

RP: Yea, let's decide.

JB: It's Germany, it's very Germany. I was talking to Paul about the sports programs, he and I chatted, you know, because he was dean of favs.

RP: Yes.

JB: Let me ask you this and that the question is linked in such a way that I'm going to ask it fully. And I don't think it will be an odd residence when I do. You decided to retire from the presidency after ten years, at the same time student of peoples were in the offering. And I'm told you were very far sided in seeing what was coming.

RP: Yes.

JB: Was there a connection there?

RP: No I don't think so. I anticipated, of course, it is going to get worse before it gets better. But my goal in retiring when I did was, I thought we had reached the end of the first phase for California State University Northridge. We had the land base that I've talked about, maybe too much. We had the organizational structure that I thought would fit the bill, and it was functioning. We had gained a kind of status among the people of the San Fernando Valley and among our sister institutions that I felt was promising. And as I saw it, at that particular time we were ready to start the second phase and the second phase I felt was going to be a pretty long one. This was too implement all these possibilities that were germinating and to settle down and let the institution grow in its normal course, with particular emphasis on the quality concept that needed to come. And I felt this was next phase and I thought this would be a very long one, and somebody ought to come in who was relatively fresh and able to cope with this concept. Now there's probably a little personal feeling about this, I felt as an administrator, I was best able to start and push something to its maximum possibilities but to settle down and run it was not my cup of tea. I've just not especially interested in that kind of challenge. I had left Bakersfield after we had already developed the campus and was now ready to run itself as it were. And the exciting thing to me, an administration, is too be at the ground floor and push these things to see what the outcome is going to be, then when we get to the outcome and let somebody else run it. With respect to the trouble, a thing happened to me that I don't know that anybody has ever talked about, particular. But you see the sixties, as you reflect on it, were troubling times, not only to the San Fernando Valley State College, we probably had as little as most institutions had. But the last, my last year, I hadn't necessary planed on this. We've had the spring before, an episode that was distressing, the students had invaded the corridors of large instructional structure, and the police were called and we had a confrontation. And I came on to the campus; this was on a Friday afternoon about four o'clock, I think. And they were everywhere, to the administration building. This president of student body, William Snyder, met me at the door and said, Dr. Prator, there waiting on you up in your office. They completely crowded the facilities, and I said, I forget what this kids first name was, I said you go back and tell him that I'm not going to go up to my office. If they're going to see me,

there going to see me out on the campus. So go up there and tell them I'm waiting out here for them, because I wanted them to clear the building, it dangerous to have them in their by the numbers, since there was several thousand of them. Well, at this particular time, we were trying about four or five kids who are guilty of infraction. So this thing that I spoke about crowding the foyer of the campus and a committee of faculty and students were sitting in judgment on these people as to whether were going to expel them or what we were going to do. So I want to get the building clear, and he went up and addresses the leaders and we had some very forceful ones that kicked in the shin often, some of the others were really tough characters, they were imports and I don't know where they come from out there, they weren't there very long. At any rate they came down onto the campus, and they had three things that they wanted to be sure and get cleared with me. One, they wanted to disarm the Police, for example, carrying a firearms. Secondly, they could meet wherever they chose to meet. It had to be in the outdoors that would be required, and then they wanted the exoneration of these people who were on charges. So I said to the first one, that disarming the police is entirely up to you. Soon as you get quiet and we don't have any of these kinds of problems and this kind of advantage that you have in numbers over our people who are few in number that be a positive factor in terms of what kind armament that police had to have. With respect to the facilities there here for educational purposes, not for rebel causing and so on, we can't afford to have you fill the buildings, their fire restrictions and a lot of other things. So the answer to that is no. And then we haven't got the end for this trial is underway here at the present time. Well, a lot of her reign went on here. One kid got up and raised hell and that the kids were raising hell. So a big flack starts with this particular student, and was a very good meeting in terms of airing the difficulties and one of the novelties at the time, because there hadn't been many of these kind of experiences on other campuses. What I'm coming to the next year, we anticipated that they're going to be pretty troublesome times. We had a youngster by the name of, what was his name; he was vice president of the student body. His name just escapes me at the present time. But he came to see me. Towards the end of the summer, and he said would you like some help, in respect to this next year, among the students. And I said, I really can use all the help we can get. And he said, leave it to me. I'll get them organized. Well, the first thing that was to happen, two things that were to happen, one of the kids by the name of Freed, who was a very active activist, a member the Democratic society student.

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JB: That free.

RP: He came to the registration and to interrupt the process, we had set parameters where they could have meetings and he meet deliberately outside the parameters, and I had said to our campus police, if any of this happens don't spend any time, book him right now and take him down and put him in the jail, just like this. So they did, and took him down and found a number of things that were interesting when they kept through this process. So they're going to have a mass meeting, protest meeting, and they're going to come by bus from UCLA and from all the other campuses and really have a showdown. This kid that I'm talking about and they're going to meet me up in the outdoor area. He arranged to have all the members of the athletic team and the supporters that he could gather to come. And they got out of their classes early, and they took all the front seats, all the front places to sit. So that when the meeting started and they had a person I think from Valley Junior College who was a noted rabble rouser, who was going to be the speaker. And when he got up to say this is an institution and as the first president to allow you to do this and so on. The kids down front, say ya we're number one then he gets somebody else to say something that gets him started, ya were number, well the meaning just broke up in to a tremendous turmoil and the, now to show you how alarming this was. Apparently, a number of these people have come with sawed off cue sticks, you see. There was going to be a real bloody battle.

JB: That is imperative. They were prepared to fight.

RP: They were prepared to fight. Well, what happened when this became evident, and I think this probably developed kind of spontaneously. Remember the athletic team walked right inside, one of these people who had this weapon, you see, to be sure he wasn't going to use it on anybody. And meeting broke up and we had no problem at all that year, just like that, you see. So I didn't anticipate in a sense, it was going to be such a thing has happened. And it wasn't the kind of context it was in the context that I just described. That happened the next year. You see, it came over the segment of the students, the black students, who incarcerated members of the administrative staff in the building itself. We really hadn't anticipated anything like this, and I don't know that anybody had, way knew that we're going to have more of this rabble rousing thing. And I won't say what I would have done had I been there because I don't know what I would have done. But to say that I was clairvoyant in knowing something was going to happen, I think so.

JB: How imprisoned, I think that Paul used.

RP: Yea, well they tried to get me stay on, you see, the next year because they hadn't selected my successor. I had announced the summer before this last year that I served, that I was retiring at the end of that year and they had a whole year to find somebody to take my

place, you see, and then they haven't done this. They came to see whether I would be willing to serve the next year. And I said, no, this is the end of it from me for two reasons. One is I would be a lame duck for one thing. Secondly, whatever control I had with you, had been moderated considerably by virtue of my lame duck status, and that I was gonna hang it up. You could get somebody else to do this job. And I wasn't on campus when this thing broke out, I was doing one of the administrative responsibilities that I had my class, they bring school.

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JB: One of them risk in doing oral history, is a risk of failing to ask the question you should of asked. And I wonder if there's some question you've been anticipating some serious questions that I would have asked, that I have not asked.

RP: Well, let me see here John. And you might wanna turn that off while I review these.

JB: Sure, Sure.

RP: I was going to talk, rather speak specifically about what role that I felt our advisory board played in the early years of the campus. But to back up just a bit we talked, or I talked recently about this student activist. I forgot to mention one little episode that I remember vividly, the most aggressive and popular activists on the campus during the year prior to my resignation, was a student by the name of Shinoff. And he was a remarkable person, as a matter of fact, he unsolicited, came to talk with me and the opening conversation went something like this. He says, I suppose you're pretty curious about me, and I thought that's very curious about it. And he said, well let me give you a little background. Now I don't know how much of this is fact, and how much is fiction, but he said, I've been an activist all my life, and I assume he probably was in his early twenties and maybe middle twenties. He said, I rode a motorcycle from Singapore to someplace important in the European situation I forgot which city it was. Which is just a very remarkable thing to have done you know, and then he recited a number of other experiences he had have absolutely fascinating, this guy had a really of a most unique background of experience. He was I understood a member of the central committee for students with democratic society which was the motivating agency on most of the campus you see, for a lot of the friction of the sixties and were there any of the other students that we have were on this council or not, I don't know they probably were because they were able, they were extremely able students these activists. As I say they were not regular students of ours they just come for, well I suppose a purpose. And this looked like a pretty interesting place because it was new and there was growing rapidly

and I was at the center of things, you see, they could draw on their own resources from neighboring institutions.

JB: Were they taking courses at all?

RP: Beg your pardon?

JB: Were they taking courses at all?

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RP: Oh, I think they were, yes they were they were involved they were there one of them was in sociology. I don't know what the others were, there were about five of them who were very able student leaders, set among these activists. And as I say, when the trouble began to wane they were gone and then they're just not around there anymore and to my knowledge, they hadn't been there very long before they, you know, took their active roles. Well, to get back to the advisor's board. We were very fortunate in having some unusually capable people. The records, of course, which show who they were. But let me just recap it. We had Ruskelbery who was the publisher of the Van Nuys, or rather The Valley Times newspaper and Pert Minitel who was the son of the founder of The Van Nuys News and Green sheet, and then Sam Hoffman, who was vice president for Rocket Dyne. And Nate Freedmen, who was one of the most active civic leaders in The Valley, remember they were the board of directors of Water and Power and a number of other agencies in Los Angeles, and a very outstanding attorney. We had from the field of the arts, as I mentioned, Dan Blythe, Steve Allen Francis Letterer. We had a person who was a member of the medical fraternity of considerable influence, Dr. Marshall, a union backer of course who was chairman of the advisory board, and a major factor in early history on campus. Mrs. Owens who was one of the most active leaders among women's groups, parent teacher association and so on. And Robert Fuller, who was president of the Valley Federal Savings and Loans. And these people were means of our getting to a number of agencies we couldn't reach otherwise. You see, the press for example, is obvious what they could do for us. And they were very helpful with all these problems that I've pointed out, the acquisitions to campus and so on. The fair didn't go easily I might say that Devonshire Downs. It was kind of contentious the people who were on the board of directors and who are influential in this, the agricultural circles. They didn't want to see this fair abolished at all. So these people that I've mentioned a number of them were the most influential in pointing out that The Valley was really not suited to this agricultural concept that had been major apart of affairs to that time. And when we entertained people like the board of trustees, which we did several times. They picked up bill, these people did, the members of our

advisory board. They have been very helpful to any venture that we wanted, Steve Allen, for example, helped us with certain of the facilities of the little theater.

JB: And design.

RP: Well, and how to make the most of the facilities that we had, sort of thing. Francis Letterer, very helpful in making us contacts with the Hollywood contingent, who could give us names and places and people who would be willing to serve without faith in some of the capacities that we required. So these people were most helpful in these early years of campus.

JB: There's a remarkable sense of, if you use the word that's in the news these days is neovoluntarism. That is our administrator's are out as corneas and rotarians deeply involved in those organizations and other organizations. Meantime, this body of stars and a prominent civic persona are deeply involved in the campus in a advisor capacity and as a lobbying group as well. A lot of spirit that seems to reflect spring was there then. I sense it among the faculty too, Koji Alan, early on, probably the function of the small size.

RP: Could be. It could be, there were some members of the faculty who were quite resentful of this rapid growth. They felt that we alt to stay small and intimate. One of them felt that we probably should stay over there in the Orange Grove. I remember this staff that comes to us from the University of Denver, I remember, and she felt that this intimacy was something we're losing very rapidly and was highly hopeful, you know, that something could be done to preserve, the kind of thing you say, collegiately that we had in these early years where everybody knew everybody.

JB: Well tape this for a moment

[End of track 4]