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Interviews for WESN 35th Anniversary Celebration 2007

Rick Lindquist: I've got this wonderful little device that's a little—we'll call it a telephone handset audio tap.

Stew Salowitz: Huh.

Lindquist: And actually it's owned by our department and if you yourself found it necessary someday to conduct an interview with someone on the air you could record it.

Salowitz: That would be good.

Lindquist: It's at your disposal as well as mine I suspect.

Salowitz: That would be good.

Lindquist: Well Stew, you're class of '76, right?

Salowitz: Correct.

Lindquist: And you sent me some photos and I appreciate that and I'm going to use those in as many ways as possible.

Salowtiz: Blackmail.

Lindquist: Well if they're given to me—

Salowitz: Right.

Lindquist: At your free will, then I know you're not embarrassed.

Salowitz: Okay.

Lindquist: Although a couple people have said that the sideburns were impressive—

Salowitz: Very much so, yeah.

Lindquist: For any decade.

Salowitz: Yes, well it was all the rule back then.

Lindquist: One thing I couldn't really tell from those photographs is where that room was. That was clearly in Kemp basement.

Salowitz: Kemp basement and you walked in the side door and took a right when you got to the basement and then walked through a—one room and then another larger room and then further to the west was the control room at the time anyway.

Lindquist: Is it all the way in the very back of the basement?

Salowitz: Yeah. There was a long corridor as I remember that was—that adjoined that, kind of a long hallway that led to a, I don't know, a danker part of the basement, but it was a—yeah, there was a big room where the records were kept and then a closet that—I can't remember if it had a key or not and if the key ever worked—where I think some of the better records were at least locked up, and at the time we had an associated press machine that just made such a great clacking noise, spitting out paper right and left. It was really something.

Lindquist: So is that your first experience working in a news office then? You were doing news?

Salowitz: I think we did a little of everything. I can't remember if they ever read news, news casts, or not, but it seems to me that they did read some news. You know, it was pretty much just rip and read at the time and keeping the paper in there it was always helpful for weather forecasts or any kind of emergency broadcast that might be coming over the wire machine, but I wonder where that machine is now too. It was a great old thing.

Lindquist: I don't know. I mean it sounds cool. Is it like a teletype type of thing?

Salowitz: Yep.

Lindquist: Yeah?

Salowitz: Yep, yep, very much the standard in news rooms and radio stations for years and years and they had one at WESN right there, pretty close to the front entryway.

Lindquist: So did you do—did you do a music show then and—?

Salowitz: Did a music show for a couple hours. Eh, you know, maybe a couple hours almost in the summer time, two or three—maybe something like that—nights a week and then when school got started I think a music show maybe once a week, and eventually an internship that I did at another station here in town kinda got me away from doing anything at WESN because it was just conflicting with my work at the other place, so that was—I was probably there for six to eight months or something like that.

Lindquist: And then you went on to spend some time professionally—

Salowitz: Yeah.

Lindquist: In broadcasting.

Salowitz: Yeah, yeah, I worked at—I was lucky enough to work at a couple of pretty good places along the way and worked at a place even while I was in college that was a pretty good training ground for what I did eventually and—but WESN was just so much fun. I mean, you know, you had Bob Bray doing a show and guys like **John Pitt** were working there and **Tom Kittler**, **Dave Cannon**, and people like that, Scott McDaniel, you know. It was a really good group of people that were manning the radio station and making sure that it was firing on all pistons.

Lindquist: One thing that's come through in my discussions with a lot of people from the seventies, eighties, nineties, even the current decade, is that the radio station here, WESN, was really, really doing things that other radio station weren't, that music was getting played that wasn't getting spun at other stations. Do you—

Salowitz: Oh yeah.

Lindquist: Find that was the case?

Salowitz: I'm sure that's the case. You give people a chance to—first of all, the record company delivers albums down there and I don't know who was in charge of the—as the music director but they would get these albums down there and they'd be the really cutting edge of different kinds of music, rock or jazz, and, you know, nobody was playing jazz at the time and you'd get a Herbie Mann LP and you'd just toss on, I don't know, a seven or eight minute song that was just great to listen to and sounded good on the air. And nobody's doing Herbie, nobody's doing seven minute songs back then on the radio anyway, and then to make—to have it be jazz or to have it be some other Mott the Hoople or any other kind of rock artist, it was just unheard of. And they're playing songs that weren't the ones that were heard on the radio all the time anyway. It goes against the grain, so it was a good training ground and a good chance to hear all kinds of different things. People could play some of the songs that they enjoyed from albums that weren't necessarily the ones that were being played on every other radio station in the world that time. It was really the epitome of campus radio.

Lindquist: Now were you around—when the radio station initially began, I understand that the programming was heavily focused on, you know, educational, a lot of issues programming and then it was a couple years in that the really switching to a rock format happened? Is that right?

Salowitz: Yeah, well, you know, you—if it was educational in any way, shape, or form, it would've been lost on most of us that were down there probably—

[Lindquist laughs]

Salowitz: But I don't remember that. I mean, my experience with 88.1 was the—when they were playing music and plenty of it. You know, I don't—I'm not even sure that they would be on all hours of the day and night. They had kind of limited hours and even during the school year, as I remember, it was—it'd be pretty unusual to hear it much certainly before noon, and then, yeah, the educational part of it I sure don't remember.

Lindquist: I think that this sparse broadcasting hours have come and gone. I know that in a couple points in the history of WESN, they've been 24/7 with live DJs all night. I suspect that's a little hard to sustain with a small student body.

Salowitz: Yeah, that would be pretty tough. You know, the other thing that's come and gone over the time—and I know I did a football game on WESN, an Illinois Wesleyan football game I broadcasted—has been the sports broadcasting and it's just so good to have that back as part of the chance that kids have to work at—on the radio and maybe perfect a skill or at least gain a skill and I know that that has ebbed as we've gone along. There have been some highs and lows, but I do remember doing a game on WESN from the—from Illinois Wesleyan, a football game back then. That was a lot of fun, just really enjoyed that.

Lindquist: Cool. Yeah, I know we have some current students who are doing a fine job getting that going and hopefully it'll sustain itself a little—for a little while at least.

Salowitz: It's good to work with them too.

Lindquist: Good, I'm glad to hear that. You mentioned some names and some people, were there any events or weird things or debauchery or anything that's not too illegal that you recall from your days down there or anything—?

Salowitz: Boy I—it just seems that back in 1974, I think the legal drinking age was nineteen in Illinois and it probably wouldn't have been unusual if somebody would've come in there and—to do their show in the evening and maybe had a beer chaser of some sort that they could've had while they were on the air. You know, I don't remember that much and I'm sure that other people can remember tales of craziness, but I remember playing—trying to play PSAs and trying to tape the PSAs and just getting mountains of audio tapes and mountains of records and things like that that nobody was ever going to play and it would be interesting to know what happened to all of those things. [laughs] I doubt that any of them exist now.

Lindquist: You'd be surprised. I bet you we have a lot of those tapes and they've been taped over and taped over and taped over.

Salowitz: Yeah, nobody knows what reel to reel is anymore and that was a perfect example back then—reel to reel and learning how to edit if you ever needed to. That was a bit of a nightmare to take care of some of that and it was really campus radio at its rawest and finest and—

Lindquist: I did get a tape in the mail from Circuit Judge A.J. Weber—

Salowitz: Wow.

Lindquist: From—that was from 1974, '73, or something like that, and I've sent the head off with my engineer to get digitized, so I can have it and listen to it—
Salowitz: Wow.

Lindquist: But I suspect it was a PSA from the seventies and I'm anxiously awaiting that.

Salowitz: Well, more power to you. I'm—I think all the tapes from that era in my collection have been—they've lost in a flood probably along the way, in the basement flood somewhere at home, so…

Lindquist: I think most of the records were probably stolen and sold.

Salowitz: Yeah, it's hard to sell those records though with the holes in the album cover that kind of indicated, you know, when it's stamped and gold promotional copy—

Lindquist: Right.

Salowitz: Not for resale—those are hard to unload at the used record stores like Mother Murphy's or places like that or Apple Tree and—yeah, it was tough to do. I tried.

[Lindquist laughs]

Lindquist: We did have one record that was just recently returned to us, you know?

Salowitz: Oh yeah, sure, Demetria Kalodimos brought one back for—

Lindquist: It was A.G. Weber, Albert G. Weber, Class of '78.

Salowitz: Okay? So he's the one who sent me the tape. Chip! Chip Scholz was another guy that would work—worked there and I remember him and he—Mary Brown was another name, Mary V. Brown. We had a list of really illustrious people that worked there and we can't forget Bob Bray doing a show with maybe Jim McGowan at the time called *Ultramontane*.

Lindquist: I think it was Spencer Sauter.

Salowitz: Was it Spencer? Ah, that was it they—

Lindquist: I think it was Bob and Spencer.

Salowitz: They were wonderful, so—

Lindquist: I have actually a recording of one of their programs.

Salowitz: That doesn't surprise me.

Lindquist: I would like to play some portions of that at homecoming.

Salowitz: Yeah, they'd be good.

Lindquist: I think it would be. What was interesting to me is that what they called alternative music in the seventies and early eighties is not what you expect when you hear the term alternative music now.

Salowitz: Right, right.

Lindquist: They meant literally this is different than what you hear somewhere else.

Salowitz: Yeah, it was like birds screeching and all kinds of bizarre—

[Lindquist laughs]

Salowitz: Theremin music and stuff like that. It was pretty eclectic as I recall.

Lindquist: Oh sure. And a lot of the music was still really strongly rooted in folk music and I think that even if we traced it back, some of the shifts in programming that we heard, you know, to contemporary Christian rock music or to folk rock music or heavy metal and all those things, those were years ahead at WESN—

Salowitz: Yeah.

Lindquist: That you couldn't find anywhere else.

Salowitz: It was quite a place.

Lindquist: Yeah, it still is. It's still going.

Salowitz: Yep, yep, yep

Lindquist: Well, Stew, I appreciate your time.

Salowitz: No problem, no problem. Well thanks to you and—

Lindquist: Some of these folks will probably be back, so if you're around let me know.

Salowitz: Yeah, I'm going to try, yeah, I'm going to try. Absolutely.

Lindquist: I could try to hook you up with them.

Salowitz: Well that'll be fun. I—well, thanks anyway for putting it all together and thanks for the fix on Eudora. It works.

Lindquist: Oh good.

Salowitz: Meant to let you know that last week—

Lindquist: Glad you—

Salowitz: I guess I could've sent you an email and told you that too. Oh well.

Lindquist: Glad to hear that because we didn't want to break it if it wasn't—

Salowitz: Yeah.

Lindquist: No, we didn't want to fix it if it wasn't already broken.

Salowitz: That's right