

**INTERVIEW WITH DONALD BYBEE
FORMER QUADRANGLE DIRECTOR
ASSISTANT DEAN, STUDENT AFFAIRS**

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Donald Bybee: Would you like me to begin, Karl, with

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, why don't you start down with, this is an interview with Don Bybee. What was your initial position, and you can go ahead with question 1, 2, 3.

Donald Bybee: Sure, I was hired to come to Stony Brook as a Quadrangle Director in the then Dean of Students office. I was a Quadrangle Director and an Assistant Dean, I think, for budgeting purposes. I came in 1965

Dr. Hartzell: This is student personnel.

Donald Bybee: Uh, huh, yup.

Dr. Hartzell: You came in 1965.

Donald Bybee: I came in 1965, I was 24, I came from Michigan State University where I had worked in residence halls as an emissary of the Dean of Students office there. Michigan State had just made a major commitment to marrying the living and learning activities by bringing them together in the same facilities, and I think I was thought to be interesting for Stony Brook as a participant in that process, although certainly a very lowly participant. My decision to come here was made after attending the NASPA convention in Washington that spring.

Dr. Hartzell: NAS?

Donald Bybee: NASPA, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. At that time it was a major distribution center, every brand new M. A. or Ph. D. who wanted to work in an institution other than the one where he or she was, went to the NASPA conference, and it was very good for that purpose. As it turned out, even before I registered for the conference I ran into an old friend from Michigan State in the lobby by the name of John Herr, John who has an ambiguous reputation at Stony Brook presently. John at that time was the Associate Dean of Students reporting to Dave Tilley.

We had worked at Michigan State together on a couple of projects, one of which was the university theater, the other of which was one of the living learning centers, where I was most recently from. We patted each other on the back and brought each other up to date on what was happening. He was there recruiting people, I was there to be recruited. Within a half an hour I was sitting down with Dave Tilley, and lo and behold before the conference had begun, I'd had a pretty strong feeling that I would be offered a position at Stony Brook. And additionally, I thought I would probably take it. David was quite impressive, looking so much like a Kennedy, and his quiet soft-spoken way. Why did I come? The major factors were that I'd grown tired of graduate study at Michigan State, and it was a pretty sure bet that a position here or a similar position elsewhere would be draft deferrable, and indeed it was. Looking for draft deferred work that seemed interesting were the major factors in my decision to come here, knowing nothing about the institution. In my midwestern naiveté assuming it was quite urban, and to my surprise when I exited Exit 56 and disappeared into the boondocks. I think I was given a pretty good understanding in response to question number 7 here about the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook and something of the vision that was being transformed into reality. Just before I had signed on at Stony Brook, you, Karl, and others had the good fortune to recruit Johnny Toll, who was also looking for work at the time, and we arrived at roughly the same time on campus. I think the institution's goals as they fit in with the larger institution goals were quite clear at that point and expressed I think quite articulately by Johnny, you and others who were in charge of articulating goals at that point. Becoming the Berkeley of the East seemed like a crass way to put it, but it did indeed capture some of the flavor of Berkeley or a Cal Tech. Stony Brook when I first came lived up to its billing of being a showplace for neo-penal architecture. It was small and undistinguished in appearance, still exhibiting a lot of the pioneer spirit. The dormitory where my apartment was located, I think I was the first human being to occupy the place. Much was brand new.

Dr. Hartzell: What was that, H Quad?

Donald Bybee: H Quad in what is now called Langmuir College, which was then called JN. Let me see, question 8. Not too pretty and a little primitive for the initial impressions of it in an aesthetic sense. In terms of the people here, a major factor among staff and students at that time was Oyster Bay nostalgia. People still weren't over the shock of moving operations all the way out here.

Dr. Hartzell: Now this is faculty and students both?

Donald Bybee: Yes, faculty and students both. It wasn't an unpleasant phenomenon to be around, but it was certainly very much in the air, Stony Brook was so new that there was very little history to talk about here on the grounds.

Dr. Hartzell: A golden age in a sense.

Donald Bybee: If you couldn't be the University of Chicago, Oyster Bay was next best, I guess. Events and persons standing out in my mind

Dr. Hartzell: Let me ask you one more question about that; as an ideal for the campus to realize in terms of faculty-student relations and faculty relationships, how long did it persist and did it have any effect in influencing people's behavior here on the campus?

Donald Bybee: Well, I think from the beginning of my experience here, there was a divided opinion on the priorities that were appropriate. There were the official ones articulated by Johnny and people at his level, and indeed by Albany; and there were on the ground versions of that. The institution from the beginning was clearly committed to a shining future, and it seemed to many that the day-to-day life on the campus was always available to be compromised or sacrificed for the future. And so it seemed, especially as time went on, the construction began happening at such a great rate, and so much was disrupted, just the prevalence of dirt and mud and bad tempers as people tried to accommodate to all that. But I think there was at the beginning and persisted a division of opinion on what ought to be going on.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you be more specific about that.

Donald Bybee: Students and some faculty were under the impression that insufficient attention was being paid to the day-to-day quality of life on campus in the interests of keeping the formal eye on the future. And there was a great deal daily to reinforce that view. The Residential College Plan was thought to be a means of addressing the day-to-day quality of life issues as well as augmenting the intellectual stimulation and merit of the institution, and it just never flew, as far as I could tell.

Dr. Hartzell: Why?

Donald Bybee: I don't know, Karl. I was from a system where we had successfully arranged for faculty to be in residence at a very great rate, and they would climb over one another to get there. We had arranged for auditoria, libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and very commodious faculty offices to be built in the residence halls; and faculty members were more than happy to trade in their 100 year old office for something that was bright and shiny and new. And you know it was routine to have Edward Teller or Margaret Mead or Paul Goodman to go marching through the dorms to do this or that colloquium or whatever; and learning and living were truly paired there. We never experienced anything like that here.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember Margaret Mead coming here one time.

Donald Bybee: I do too. But in terms of the so-called Residential College Plan, it just never seemed to work. Not only did it not start auspiciously, soon thereafter came the student movement of the high '60's, student movement so-called, and it seemed to me that within three or four years much of the academic credibility and leadership had eroded at Stony Brook. I remember Homer Goldberg mentioning once, I hope Homer has a chance to hear this or hear of it and correct it if I'm citing him wrong, but Homer defined academic integrity among his peers and colleagues as anyone who had given a C in the last three years, even though it isn't and wasn't true, it certainly captured the flavor of the times. How shall we go, Karl?

Dr. Hartzell: Well, what about the difference in student body between Stony Brook and let's say Michigan State.

Donald Bybee: Let me see, the differences, in hindsight now it's easy for me to say the differences were not very pronounced, although at the time it seemed to me there were significant differences. Stony Brook students oddly enough seemed a little more worldly, a little more world weary maybe, a little smoother than the average Michigan State student, but with just the merest bit of hindsight one can see the Michigan State students were really very cosmopolitan compared to the average Stony Brook student who was really pretty parochially Long Island.

Dr. Hartzell: Manhattan and Long Island.

Donald Bybee: Yeah, not comfortable in the same room with an international student wearing garb from home, whereas Michigan State students had always been accustomed to that. It was just standard that they wore native costume on campus, and the availability of people from other countries was thought to be a boon, an opportunity to learn and broaden one's horizons. We never go that cosmopolitan here. There were efforts at several points, student advisors notwithstanding.

Dr. Hartzell: Was there any change while you were involved in the Residential College Program in the point of view of students, was there any evolution in attitude, quality? You were here during the bust, too.

Donald Bybee: Indeed I was.

Dr. Hartzell: What were the effects of that?

Donald Bybee: That's a difficult question. The evolution of the students, it's hard to say what happened by attrition and new students coming in with different ideas and what happened while they were here. Part of what was happening at that time, if memory serves, is we were able to be more and more selective each year in our admissions, and we were attracting more and more of the better students graduating in Long Island and in New York, maybe they were brighter students coming in, I don't know. The bust is certainly a major event in Stony Brook's history. I don't know whether it did anything other than consolidate kind of an anti-establishment mentality among students and

younger faculty and staff, one that seemed to be well on its way before the bust happened.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you see the TV brochure that was gotten out by the Suffolk Police Department, about half an inch thick and given to the media beforehand?

Donald Bybee: Yes, I think I did see that.

Dr. Hartzell: That was quite a production.

Donald Bybee: Well, they were certainly very committed to see what they needed to see here on the campus, the police were, under their leadership at the time, I don't know how the DA figured into that, although we had a liaison with the DA all along, but they certainly

Dr. Hartzell: Now, let's see, which DA was this?

Donald Bybee: The one before O'Brien, Harry was his aide. I can't remember his name at the moment. I don't think he was much of a lawyer, I think he was more of a politician. But the University and the police were operating in separate worlds, absolutely, despite the fact that I personally was led to believe that we were on the same team. I was the in-house narc at that time and taking a lot of heat here on campus.

Dr. Hartzell: In-house what?

Donald Bybee: Narc, narcotics officer.

Dr. Hartzell: Oh, I see.

Donald Bybee: Yeah, and we were dealing with what we now know was the tip of the iceberg, but at the time it seemed to us that we were dealing with monumental issues and numbers of students and had really no idea how extensive and pervasive the use of illegal drugs was. The police did in fact have an idea, but they never shared that with us. They let us go on thinking that we were doing something they wanted done, and lo and behold it was a long exercise in bad faith.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, in 1963 or 1964, when we had the burning of a small wooden house out here by one of the maintenance people, a young chap and who was taken into custody, I remember being over there at the time that he was arraigned, and one of the

members of the Suffolk Narcotics Squad told me that it was coming out the Long Island, that drugs were coming out the Island, and that if they hadn't hit us yet, they would. They had a picture of it that I don't think we had at the time.

Donald Bybee: Well, I guess if they had any picture at all they did, they had one that we didn't have. It was, well, it was inconceivable to them that we didn't know what they thought they knew, and, well; Mike McGrady, who's reviewing movies, I think, for *Newsday* now, at the time I think, if you don't have in our archives a copy of the article that he wrote just post-bust, I think it was probably the sanest piece of prose to come out of that era. I don't even remember the details now, I just remember that was the first time that I had read something under his byline, but he wrote a very nice sociological, historical description of the time, it seemed to me.

Dr. Hartzell: Was there a title of it?

Donald Bybee: No, but I bet you that somewhere in somebody's file, there will be copies of it. I'm not sure that the University didn't reprint copies of it. I'll look in what files I retain, and see if it's there. Mike McGrady, he's currently still with *Newsday*, so

Dr. Hartzell: I see, okay. All right, any particular members of the faculty stand out in your mind as being particularly interested in students, close to students, guide, philosopher and friend so to speak.

Donald Bybee: The one who stands head and shoulders above all others in recollection at this point is Norman Goodman. Norman was from the very beginning, and every week since then, has been an advocate of students on this campus, has been a contributor to the quality of student life on this campus, has been a tireless partisan of Stony Brook students and Stony Brook as far as I can tell.

Dr. Hartzell: By partisan what do you mean?

Donald Bybee: Advocate, representative, defender.

Dr. Hartzell: Why did the students need to be defended?

Donald Bybee: Oh, I don't think they did, but Norman was there before they got interested in it, and he's still there long after they stopped being interested in it; he's

someone who really dedicated himself to the institution through thick and thin. Jim Fowler is another one who comes to mind right now. Jim could and would do anything for the institution, including serve *ad hoc* in various administrative capacities, but he would go down to the wire for the institution at any point.

Dr. Hartzell: What about Max Dresden?

Donald Bybee: I never had much to do with Max. He certainly spoke a great deal at faculty meetings and other kinds of meetings, and he clearly had a following of people who admired his approach to things, but I never had that much to do with Max.

Dr. Hartzell: What about Stan Ross?

Donald Bybee: Nor him, the most, I had a friend who was a graduate student studying with him, we came to Stony Brook at the same time, but I didn't have a clear sense

Dr. Hartzell: He had his own job to do, which was with faculty and curriculum. When did Larry DeBoer come?

Donald Bybee: Larry came probably in '67 would be my guess, hired to head up the Residential College Plan.

Dr. Hartzell: How did he work out?

Donald Bybee: I really don't know, Karl. I think he was invited in to a sinking ship at the very beginning, but I don't know what the verdict is on that.

Dr. Hartzell: Dave Tilley is coming over next week.

Donald Bybee: That's super, I hope I get a chance to talk to him.

Dr. Hartzell: Okay, it will be interesting to see what he has to say.

Donald Bybee: Yeah. David is another one who worked tirelessly on behalf of the institution and the students here. I think that oftentimes it was not apparent how hard and diligently he was working, and David was never one to blow his own horn very much, so he wasn't given to bold public statements and pontificating, but David was a very hard worker.

Dr. Hartzell: My impression was that we got quite a lot of unfinished business from the home in the students that we were recruiting or who came to us, in other words that they weren't housebroken.

Donald Bybee: Oh, well, that's still the case, Karl, I think very much. Stony Brook's location is such that it's always been a wonderful compromise school for the youngster who doesn't want to stay at home but doesn't want to go very far west of the Hudson either. So you come to Stony Brook, and you're an hour from home, and you're away but not away, you're home but you're not really home.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, I also meant by housebroken that they were not accustomed to being very neat about public rooms, not above graffiti and defacing walls and things of that sort.

Donald Bybee: That got to be standard, that got to be a norm. At some point in the '70's maybe, in the beginning it wasn't that way in my perception here just in terms of a fuller view of the history. We were served very well in those early years by members of the housekeeping and maintenance staff, and in the building where I lived initially on campus, there was a great relationship between the people charged with keeping the place clean and the youngsters who lived there to the point where a mess wouldn't be made for fear that they knew the people who had to clean it up, and they didn't want them to do that. Or if they were in error, those people would track them down the next day, and remind them of their obligations. But there did come a point a few years after that where a real indifference to the physical plant got established and is with us yet. I don't think there is as much vandalism as there used to be, but still there is an indifference to the physical plant. It was stunning in those years to go to another campus, and I went back to *alma mater* one time

Dr. Hartzell: Where was your *alma mater*?

Donald Bybee: Michigan State, and I was just so used to the grime and the indifference here, and walked into a building where a friend of mine was working, and it

was just breathtaking. There was just one coke can in a lounge of about an acre and that was quickly spirited away while we stood there.

Dr. Hartzell: What is your particular function now, what are you doing?

Donald Bybee: Presently, I'm senior counselor in the counseling center here, which is a sub-agency of the student affairs office.

Dr. Hartzell: What kind of counseling do you do?

Donald Bybee: Whatever is needed. As someone comes through the door, the bulk of our work is crisis intervention and short-term or time specified psychotherapy. We're all licensed social workers or psychologists and do, if I do say so myself, a good job, a good professional job.

Dr. Hartzell: Are we getting more of that kind or is the incidences declining or is it a pretty steady function of the kind of people we get?

Donald Bybee: Which kind, Karl?

Dr. Hartzell: Students, I mean. I'm talking about the people who come into your office with problems, are they sent to you, do they come of their own accord, which?

Donald Bybee: Both.

Dr. Hartzell: Both.

Donald Bybee: Uh, huh. I would say the bulk of them, maybe 60%, come on their own hook, 40% are probably referred, of that 40% maybe half by faculty members, half by fellow students.

Dr. Hartzell: What kind of problems, family?

Donald Bybee: Family is always an issue, the past is always present in that sense. I think the problems we deal with are probably very much like the problems dealt with by a comparable sized institution serving a comparable clientele. We may have more students who are, a large proportion, who are in the throes of family issues, of independence issues, of separation issues, because of our location. We still have a preponderance of our undergraduates are very local. We see a good many graduate students though and their problems are standard brand, how to do this Ph. D. before the money runs out.

Dr. Hartzell: discrepancy between what the family would like to have the undergraduate do and what the undergraduate wants to do, is there much pressure on our undergraduates to achieve.

Donald Bybee: By and large I would guess the pressure is less these days than it used to be. Less family pressure, less internal pressure, that's judging from the sample I see.

Dr. Hartzell: What about the family home, is father or mother a college graduate?

Donald Bybee: Probably not in most cases, although unlike the situation ten years ago, one or both may have some college experience.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. What about first generation American, second generation American?

Donald Bybee: Most of those whom I've run across recently have been Asian, the most recent immigrants have been Asian.

Dr. Hartzell: We have a sizable number then.

Donald Bybee: We do indeed.

Dr. Hartzell: Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated, you were not here?

Donald Bybee: I was at Michigan State.

Dr. Hartzell: Did that have much of an impact on the students?

Donald Bybee: Absolutely, it stopped everything for days, absolutely. I guess everybody answers that question these days, I remember who I was with and what we were talking about, who brought the news and how we spent the rest of the day and all that business. The other early experience of that kind of encompassing was the night the lights went out here, I guess that was in November of 1965 when the northeast went black.

Dr. Hartzell: Oh, yes, the big blackout. Were you here when one of our students tried to jump across one of these open vents and fell in:

Donald Bybee: Indeed I was, I remember his name.

Dr. Hartzell: You do. Was that a dare or

Donald Bybee: I don't know, Karl, my impression is that the students involved were not behaving nearly as prudently as they might, but I don't, if I ever knew, I don't remember what the exact circumstances were.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, did you have any relations with Albany?

Donald Bybee: None, none that were of any merit or substance.

Dr. Hartzell: Now, go ahead and recollect incidents, anything that you can remember.

Donald Bybee: Oh, let's see. From what, from the very earliest time.

Dr. Hartzell: Earliest time for you, yes. Department chairmen,

Donald Bybee: I remember J. D. Reid and Jim Harrison, two of Herb Weisinger's minions in the English Department. Harrison was Weisinger's administrative assistant and J. D. was a master's candidate, I think, maybe he was a doctoral student. They've both gone on: Harrison is a well published and critically loved novelist; Reid is in the hierarchy of Time magazine now. I remember them putting on the whole institution a two-man Vietnam war protest, they were going to napalm a pig for everyone's edification, and David Tilley and I, neither one of us thought this was going to happen, but we also thought the better part of prudence was to have someone on the scene. I don't know that there ever was a meeting, I went to the Humanities Building where this was supposed to happen, I think, or maybe it was in the Physics or Chemistry Auditorium, I don't know, but I stopped in the john on my way there, and both Reid and Harrison were in there drinking a bottle of Wild Turkey, and I don't think that they ever went to the meeting. It was all a joke, and a good one, it seemed to me at the time. I remember you introducing Johnny at his first, or one of his very first official formal state occasions here on campus.

Dr. Hartzell: Introducing him to the faculty?

Donald Bybee: I don't remember what it was, but whatever it was, he chopped his way out of Sunwood that morning with an ax, trees had fallen down overnight.

Dr. Hartzell: We had chopped also a tree which had fallen over John Gambling's place, I got a call from him, and it was one of our trees that had fallen across his driveway. He was a little bit upset.

Donald Bybee: One of my favorite recollections is the time that Nelson Rockefeller came to do the first spadeful for the Earth and Space Sciences Building, and cleaning people in the dormitory where I had my apartment, the same cleaning people I talked of earlier, were just excited beyond belief at this prospect, they were claiming that Rockefeller had helped them get out of Cuba, and we all said, yes, they're there, but they were very eager to go to this event and make sure that it was okay with everybody that if they went, still technically on company time at the moment, and we were all being superior and indulgent and the event came, and they were at the, up near the event, and called out to the Governor, who called back by name. Yes, and they had a reunion there while the cameras rolled on. It was a delightful event; Rockefeller at his most human.

Dr. Hartzell: We owe a lot to him.

Donald Bybee: Indeed.

Dr. Hartzell: I wish he were still with us.

Donald Bybee: Karl, I'm watching my watch, I do need to run back and do my four o'clock appointment.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, what time is it now?

Donald Bybee: It's about ten of four.

Dr. Hartzell: Ten of, okay. Well, thanks for coming, I've run out of questions to ask you.

Donald Bybee: Well, if others occur to you, I'll be happy to give you my, good luck with the project.

Dr. Hartzell: Thanks. It's interesting, I think people like talking.

Donald Bybee: By and large, I think that's so. Take care.

Dr. Hartzell: Yeah, bye, bye.

[end of interview]