DON & TISH DAVIS

LIFE STORIES – Taped in WOSU Radio Studios, June 26, 2013
Interviewed by Thomas Rieland, General Manager, WOSU Public Media

Don Davis started a long career at WOSU after graduating from Ohio State University. He started in radio as a staff announcer in 1956 and moved up the ranks to News Director and Radio Station Manager. His wife Tish assisted the stations in other roles and graduated from the OSU Law School. Don retired from WOSU at age 55 in 1990 after over 30 years of service.

TRANSCRIBED 12/19/13 by Paula May, WOSU

TR: Welcome to the Life Stories recording with Don and Tish Davis. My name is Tom Rieland at WOSU. Today’s date is Wednesday, June 26, 2013. Thanks so much to both of you for coming in today for the WOSU Life Stories. I’m going to start with very simple stuff. First of all, for the recording, give me your full name and when and where you were born.

TD: My full name is Leticia Rose Kincaid Davis, and I was born in Greenville Oh, on December 1, 1933.

DD: I’m Don G. Davis, and I was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1933, and have been trying to live it down ever since.

TR: So did you grow up in Detroit?

DD: No, I lived in the Detroit area until the second WW broke out, as far as the US involvement, December 7, 1941. My dad was in the Army reserves. He enlisted in the Army in the first world war, and in the period between wars, he became an officer. And my brother and I woke him up, because it was a Sunday, and the mayor of Detroit wasn’t reading the comics on the radio. There were people talking about Japanese, and Pearl Harbor, and we didn’t understand. We jumped on the bed and woke him up and we told him what they were saying. And he didn’t say anything; he just put on his uniform and went to war. And we followed him from army camp to army camp, to the point that he said that when the war is over, we’re moving back to Ohio. His home was Milford Center. He said, “I’m never moving again.” And that’s what he did. He came to Columbus and lived out his life.

TR: And how old were you when you moved to Columbus then?

DD: Oh, gosh. I must have been 12 or 13, something like that. It was around 1945, so I would have been 12.

(2:17)

TR: And what part of the community did your family settle in, in Columbus?
DD: Well, houses were very hard to find, and we found one eventually way out on West Fifth Avenue, in a little strip of Columbus that’s between Grandview and Arlington, and bought a house there. That’s been a long time ago.

TR: Is it still there?

DD: No, it was torn down to be a parking lot for a bar that was built after we bought the house. Amicon’s Bar & Grill, or something.

TR: So what high school did you go to?

DD: Columbus Central.

LD: Which is interesting, because he lived practically a stone’s throw from Grandview High School, but he was technically a resident of Columbus, and his parents would have had to pay tuition for him to go to Grandview. Whereas he was entitled to go to a Columbus public school, so he did.

TR: And did you come here to go to Ohio State?

LD: Yes.

TR: When you were 17 or 18, you came here from Greenville?

LD: let’s see, how old was I… I think I was 19, or going on 19. I had been out of high school, working for one year. I graduated at 17, I worked for a year, so I guess I was 18 going on 19.

TR: Since you were in Columbus for many years, since you were 12, tell me a little bit about that neighborhood you grew up in, the Grandview area, Upper Arlington area. What did you guys do for fun as teenagers then?

DD: Well, we played sports mainly, just continuously. All the boys in the neighborhoods had bikes and they had a ball glove on the handlebars. We’d meet at a ball field, or any open field, and play soft ball or baseball, you know, whatever was in vogue at that time.

TR: Are there any other memories you remember of just the community or the people in the community during that time, or some of the stores, things like that?

DD: Well, there was a heavy population of Italian Americans in that strip of land. Later, a friend of mine, with whom I went to grade school at Our Lady of Victory in Marble Cliff, told me that that little strip of Columbus stuck into the area between Arlington and Grandview so that Italians couldn’t live in those two affluent suburbs. Now, whether that’s true or not, I don’t know, but it looks that way on a map.

TR: So you hung around with a lot of other Italian families, Italian kids?

DD: Right. And had pizza for the first time. Mrs. DeVictor – Mama DeVictor – offered me pizza. And she sort of adopted me. And I really enjoyed that culture, and still do to this day.
TR: So you had to make a decision. Did your parents go to college?

DD: My dad did. He went to Ohio State.

TR: Oh, really? So there wasn’t much of a decision about where you would go…

DD: No.

TR: And did you know what you wanted to do at Ohio State when you got here?

DD: No, I really didn’t. I was thinking about coming here today to talk with you and looking over my memories of my life at that time, and I’ve decided that my whole life was guided by an unusual event. I was tripped by going around end playing football, touch football, late one night, in the Big Bear parking lot at Fifth and Grandview, and broke my left wrist. I was manager of a Dairy Queen on West Fifth Avenue, and I had to quit, I couldn’t work anymore because I couldn’t use my left wrist. And turned out I couldn’t play sports, I wasn’t supposed to play sports at all. I had it in a cast and I was supposed to be very careful. Well, boys will be boys, and I ended up having a very nice vacation. This was right after graduation from Central, early summer, and I went down to the Grandview swimming pool during the day. And I’d jump in and swim and the cast would get soft, and about a half hour before I had to be home, I’d get out of the water and let the cast dry in the sun and reform. So I think my mom never found out that I did that. But I got bored after a while, lying in the sun, reading books, swimming, and I decided, well, I’ll become an actor. Cause I’ve got nothing better to do. That’s all I could do. So I went to the Stadium Theatre, which was under Gate 10 in the Ohio State Stadium, a very successful summer theatre put on by the Theatre Department at Ohio State. They were holding auditions for The Admirable Crichton, and Crichton was the lead, so I said, “Well, I’ll condescend to act that role for you.” And the director, Roy Bowen, said, “Well, unfortunately, I’ve already cast that role. But I’ve got something that will for your particular and unusual situation. You can be the stable boy, because you can wear a cloak and nobody will know that your wrist is broken. And another plus is that you won’t have to learn any lines because you don’t say anything.” So I said, OK, great. And I was in the play, and really enjoyed it, and got to meet a lot of the theatre people at Ohio State. And as a result of that, subsequently was hired at WOSU because some of the announcers and officials at WOSU at that time had been acting in OSU Theatre productions. Dave Ayers is one, you may have heard of him. And Gene Gerard is another that comes to mind. So they knew that I…

TR: Even though you didn’t have a voice, didn’t have a line…

DD: No, that’s right…

TD: But obviously he has a beautiful voice!

TR: Obviously.
DD: I got a reputation for being reliable, that was the thing. I showed up on time, I was neat and clean, and did what I was supposed to do, and didn’t make a fuss about everything. So that helped me land the job at WOSU later.

(9:30)

TR: And this was even before you started here at Ohio State, or the first year you were here?

DD: Well, I was acting in the Stadium Theatre before classes started in the fall of ’52, before I was officially a student. And then started school in the fall of ’52.

TR: So what was your first job at WOSU?

DD: Well, later on, I got bigger and better parts, and was able to say lines, and I thought I was pretty good. And I met Tish, and we married, and we decided to become professional actors.

TD: Yes, we met at acting class. And he impressed me immediately because I could tell he had acted before.

TR: Yeah, he was a stable boy!

TD: He starred in productions in high school before I knew him. I met him in an acting class, and I could tell that, unlike most of the others in the class, he had been in plays before.

DD: So it was in the summer, I think it was ’54, we decided to get jobs as actors at a stock company on Lake Erie, near Geneva on the Lake, North Madison. There was a theatre called Rabbit Run, in a barn. And it was a stock company. You had to be a professional actor to work there, and we knew the director, and he got us on to be part of the company. And that worked out, and we were having a wonderful time, until the weather turned really bad. You had to wear a winter coat in June and July because it got so cold up there. And they were losing their shirt, so they started cutting the company, and we were the last hired, so first fired. We came back to Columbus, and I’m looking for a job, and I went down in the basement of Derby Hall where there used to be a theatre, and on the bulletin board, Gene Gerard had posted a card: “Announcer Wanted.” The thing that caught my eye was that it paid $300 a month. Well, this was the mid-50’s, and to me, that was a fortune. So I went over and read the audition, and messed it all up, but they hired me anyway because I could be recommended by a couple of people who were already working there. And that’s I got started as a staff announcer. That was my first job at WOSU.

TR: So what did a staff announcer do?

DD: Well, I discovered that they paid you to listen to classical music. It was really a rough job, but somebody had to do it. You would sit in the studio and have a symphony on, or a concerto. And once every 45 minutes or so, you’d make an announcement. The controls were run by an engineer, so all you did was talk. And that was really a lot of fun for me, to get paid to babysit a radio station.
TR: How long were your shifts?

DD: Oh, I think eight hours or so. It depended on whether the next guy showed up on time or not. But I was so enthusiastic, I would just stay there and work and work and work, cause I listened to classical music.

TR: Well, as Tish said, you weren’t a natural in understanding classical music, were you? Maybe Tish can tell this story.

TD: But you learned a lot about it, because his job involved listening to it. And people who did know how to pronounce all the words were handy. Say, for example, Fred Calland.

DD: He was the music director, and he saved my life. He was a very good friend, and he was a self-taught musicologist. He could learn a language in about two months, he had that gift. So I would get the list of pieces that were going to be played on my shift, and he would tell me how to say the composer’s name and the conductor’s name, and so on. And I’d rehearse, and he’d say, “No, no, you have to say it this way.” I was his dummy, he became a ventriloquist. And I was his willing subject. And it worked out. Most of the time. Most of the time.

TR: So you were on the classical side, which was 89.7 at that time, all classical, and then the news…

(14:30)

DD: Well, it was 820, was the AM...

TR: 820 was the AM, but that was still news… it was simulcast, that’s right.

DD: We didn’t know if FM was here to stay or not. It was relatively new, and it was sort of a secondary throw-away service. Since we were producing the programming anyway for broadcast on the AM station, why not put it on the FM for free, you know. And we simulcast from 1956, when I started there, and we did that until about 1980. The FCC was demanding that we separate. And CPB, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, wanted separate programming, so we were working at doing that, fulfilling the obligation to provide two services because we had two stations.

TR: Now I skipped over this, but you said you met Tish, or Tish said you met in an acting class.

TD: At Ohio State.

TR: So what attracted you to this guy, other than you thought he was a pretty good actor?

TD: Well, that was the main thing, and then I got to know him a lot better when he was in the cast of A Comedy of Errors. I was one of the costume assistants on that show, so we spent a lot of time together. And we’ve been spending a lot of time together ever since.

TR: What about you, Don? What attracted you to Tish?
DD: Well, she thought I was funny. I wanted to kiss her the first time, and she said, “Well, what do you want to do that for?” (laughter)

TR: So, as you progressed at Ohio State, what did you major in?

DD: Let’s see. I don’t remember. I guess it was speech. I actually was a theatre major, but I took courses in broadcasting and public speaking and so on. And Roy Bowen, who may have been mentioned before, became chairman of the Theatre Department. He was my advisor, and he made sure I got a degree.

TR: So you were here starting in ’56, and well into the 60’s, and I take it you moved up from a staff announcer. How did that work? What other jobs did you serve?

DD: Well, I found that just by being here, through longevity, you could get most of the jobs in the station. And I was like the assistant program director at one time. Then I became news director, and I really liked that, and that shifted my focus to journalism. And I started courses in the School of Journalism at Ohio State, and ended up being part-time professor of Journalism at Ohio State.

TR: And what drew you to Journalism? Why was that something you were interested in?

DD: Well, it was something new every day. It was really telling stories. It was the same as being in plays. It was another form of communications, and it delved in every aspect of human endeavor. And I’m still fascinated by it, and fortunately, Tish is, too. We are both retired, and we can both listen to WOSU, mainly to the news, and we can watch CNN and anybody else who’s doing news on television.

TR: Tish, you went to Ohio State. What was your major?

TD: Well, I started out as a theatre major, but then there was a long period when I dropped out. We simply couldn’t afford for me to go to school, especially since along the way, we had three children. And so I didn’t go back to school to finish my degree until much later. By the time I went back, I had decided to get a degree in political science and try to get into law school. I had been working as a copy editor for Professor John Kessel, who was then the editor of the American Journal of Political Science, and I figured that was a good thing to do. So I went to law school, one of the oldest people in my class, and graduated from law school when I was 49. A whole different thing. He retired when we were 55, but I was still working as an attorney.

TR: That worked out well for him, didn’t it?

TD: It worked out well for both of us, actually.

TR: That’s great.

(20:08)

DD: She was actively involved in the station’s activities. The one that comes to mind right now is a proposal that was written to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for a production unit grant in 1970.
We were doing a lot of news by that time at WOSU Radio News, and classes from Journalism were coming over to the station and participating in preparing and presenting news. And we developed almost a continuous news program on the AM station. There were two hours in the morning, two hours at noon, and two hours in the evening. I think there were two or three paid people, and the rest were students. But it worked out well enough that we applied for this grant, and Tish got in the assembly line for the grant application on our dining room table. The program director then was Tom Warnock, and he was the “Big Thinker.” But he wasn’t all that good at finding the details. And I was the detail man, and then she was the interpreter, putting it into correct English, making sure the spelling and punctuation were correct. So he’d start here, and then I’d be here, and she’d be over there.

TD: Bear in mind, I had been a copy editor on a professional journal, so I was used to closely editing what was put in front of me.

DD: So these were fairly new grants from CPB, and we won one of them, much to our surprise, several hundred thousand dollars for a five year grant. And with that, we were able to replace many of the students with full time professionals.

TR: So that changed the organization, really.

DD: Oh, it certainly did. We became probably the largest, and I think the best, news operation in the state of Ohio, with that grant.

TR: Was Don Quayle here during that time?

DD: He had come in the late 50’s/early 60’s, so he had long since gone before… but we maintained contact over time. He went off to the east, and worked at WGBH-Boston. Then he was hired by CPB, and somewhere in between there, he became the first president of National Public Radio, around 1970, when we were trying to get a local news operation started.

TR: It’s a little bit inside baseball, but here you were, developing these multi-hour morning and afternoon drives, and here we have Morning Edition and we have All Things Considered, nationally.

DD: And Don was very much involved in developing that service at NPR. His idea was that it should be National Public Radio, and that there should be reports from people all over the United States and around the world. So by turning our operation into a professional news operation, that fit his plan because we could produce professional quality work to feed to National Public Radio for distribution across the United States.

(23:37)

TR: When you think of your career, you were news director, you became station manager. During those times, and we’re talking three decades, what were some of the biggest challenges you had? Was it technology? Was it personnel? Was it funding? What were the things that were the most challenging?
DD: Well, it was different every day. That’s one thing I liked about the job. It was never boring. It was, if not fun, really challenging. I think fundraising was a constant challenge, and problem. When the grant money ran out, we couldn’t raise enough money to keep the full staff, so we had to cut about half the staff when the grant ran out around 1975. So that was really a heart-wrenching time for me, because I let people go who had done very good work. I got no satisfaction out of firing anybody because they were not performing. They all performed. In fact, a few of them went on to work for National Public Radio, were hired away by the network over time.

TR: Talk about some of that. Talk about some of the personalities you worked with here, maybe some of the “strange” personalities, or some of the people you really enjoyed working with.

DD: Well, let’s see. Larry Carter, I worked with for a long time. He was the morning man, he was very reliable. He could get up on time and get everything going in the morning. I mentioned Don Quayle, who went on to be president of NPR. Oh, gosh, I should have brought in a written list of all the people. Does the name Brian Naylor ring a bell? He’s a reporter now at NPR. Anne Gudenkauf is the chief science editor at NPR. She was here. And there are many, many more, whose names I can’t remember right now.

TD: Another name that pops into my mind is Gene Gerard. He used to do an amazing thing. He took over a radio program in which he simply read books on the air. And he didn’t read little articles. He read, I remember, Doctor Zhivago, from cover to cover, a little segment every day. Gene was a really good actor, and was for a time a drama critic for I think the Citizen-Journal. He’s no longer with us.

TR: Was that called the Book Stall?

TD: It was called In the Book Stall, and it had previously been done by an English professor named Wilson Dumble. But Girard had this wonderful ability – since he was an accomplished actor, he had a different voice for every character in the books. And I learned later that he would go through the books with multiple colored markers, and he would mark each character with a specific color, so that when he came to dialogue, he changed voices. I used to listen to him practically every day. He did it five days a week.

TR: His name still comes up today. People still call and say, “Do you have any of those recordings? I want to hear it again.”

TD: Maybe Don will tell you the story about when he and Gene went to do an interview together.

DD: This was around 1960. Let’s see…who was the humorist from Columbus?

TR: Thurber?

DD: Yeah, that’s right. James Thurber had written a production for Broadway, A Thurber Carnival. And he wanted to try it out in his hometown, Columbus. So Gene interviewed celebrities that came to town from the entertainment world, and he wanted to interview Thurber about his new play. So we arranged
to meet him in his hotel room at the Neil House, which you may have never hear anything, but it was a prominent hotel across High Street from the Capital. We were supposed to be there at 2 in the afternoon, and I would be the engineer and Gene would be the brains, he would do the interview. So we showed up right on time, and Thurber’s wife came to the door, and she was in a robe and pajamas. This is 2 in the afternoon. And welcome us, and introduced us to her husband, James Thurber, and he, like her, was in pajamas and a robe. And he greeted us, and almost ran across the room to the telephone and picked it up. It was a dial phone. I don’t know if you’ve heard of those... And he started calling people all over Columbus, he had these phone numbers in his memory. He was so excited because Gene Gerard was here.

TD: Gene had been reading Thurber’s books on the air.

TR: For a long time, I suppose.

DD: And the thing is, Thurber couldn’t see. By then, he was completely blind. But you’d never know it.

TR: And what year was this?

DD: It was around 1960. They invited us to have breakfast with them. They were eating breakfast when we got there at 2 in the afternoon. We declined, and said we just had lunch. But Gene got a very nice interview.

(30:00)

TR: We talked about challenges. What do you see as the big accomplishments in your career? Other than maybe the grant you mentioned, which is a huge accomplishment. What other things do you take pride in about your career?

DD: Well, just working at WOSU all those years. I’ve found that it’s unusual for one person to be with the same organization for most, if not all, of their career. And to have been associated with WOSU, to have enjoyed the benefits of it now, and not have any of the responsibilities to do anything, but just to enjoy and learn, that was enough. And to be associated with Ohio State, because as I say, my dad attended the University back in the 20’s, so I’ve been a Buckeye all my life. And I think the institutions – both WOSU and certainly Ohio State – want to do good things. They don’t always get it right, but their intentions are noble indeed. And to be associated with them is something to be proud of.

TR: What do you think, Don...and this may not be a fair question, but I’ll ask it anyway...what do you think the role of... We live in a whole different world than the 50’s and 60’s as far as access to media and access to information. What is the role of the public broadcast station today? What kind of impact can it make?

DD: Well, I think one obvious thing is to fill niches that aren’t served by commercial broadcasters. There’s no sense in competing with commercial broadcasters. They compete and provide similar if not the same services across the dial. So there are holes in there for other services. I think providing
information that’s useful to the community is very important. I get most of my information about the Statehouse from listening to the Statehouse News Bureau, which we started here. I can go on and on and cite examples.

TR: A couple other names we haven’t talked about. I. Keith Tyler and his wife. They had a lot of influence on WOSU’s growth. What were they like?

DD: They were wonderful people. Both had Ph.Ds. There wasn’t one Doctor Tyler, there were two Doctor Tylers. They were wonderful people, and we were privileged to be invited to their home. And then he became a mentor for me. I remember, he was in his 90’s, and one day I walked into the lunchroom here in the Fawcett Center for Tomorrow, the restaurant, we called it the lunchroom. And he was sitting at a table there reading the New York Times. And he said, “Hey, Don, have you read this article?” It was about telecommunications. And I said, “No, sir, I haven’t had time to read it yet.” And he said, “Well, read it today.” And I said, “Yes, sir.” And after I got off work, somewhere around 5, I went to the library and read that article. But they devoted their lives, really, to helping WOSU. She was head of the Ohio School of the Air, which broadcast programming into the public schools around the state about Ohio history and a number of other subjects. They even had a kid’s news shows called “Newspaper of the Air,” which I wrote for a while.

TR: Really? I didn’t know about that one.

DD: Yeah, that was a lot of fun.

TR: And he also was involved in a lot of research, that goes into educational broadcasting, the impact it could have, forming it, in a lot of ways, consulting with other universities that had early radio stations, things like that. I imagine he brought that research back to WOSU.

DD: Sure. He did that not only in the United States, but overseas. He had students coming from Egypt, for example, to Ohio State, to study with him. They were amazing people.

(34:40)

TR: Someone else on the technical side, I think he probably retired in the early 60’s, was Robert Higgy. Did you know Bob Higgy at all?

DD: Yeah, he hired me. The staff at WOSU, after I auditioned and botched the audition, decided to hire me anyway. And Dave Ayers, who was sort of a station manager or program director for radio and television – television had just started – he came to me and said, “Well, Don, we’re gonna hire you, so get a haircut, and put on a white shirt and a tie, and you’ll see Mr. Higgy at 10 o’clock Wednesday morning.” And so I did what Dave said, and Mr. Higgy hired me. I had long hair, and got it cut off, and took a shower...

TR: Where did you meet? Where was his office?
DD: Well, his office was in a building at 215 West 19th Avenue, on the main campus, and it looked like a WWI airplane hangar. Now it has since been torn down and replaced with another building. But I suspect it was an airplane hangar at one time.

TR: Did you ever spend any time – I know it’s the TV side – but over at North Star at the TV studios?

DD: Yeah, from time to time, they’d have me over there to host a news show, an interview program, a panel discussion. Nothing that took a whole lot of time, but they didn’t have anybody else, so they would call me.

TR: What was Higgy like?

DD: Well, I didn’t know him very well. He was a professor in the College of Engineering. I think that’s how he came to WOSU. I think he started as an engineer, running the controls, and then moved on up through the hierarchy to be the director of programming, and all station operations, both radio and television, until he was replaced by Dick Hall, who was brought in to run what became the Telecommunications Center for The Ohio State University. He was a very pleasant man, and he didn’t spend... during the time we worked together at WOSU, I rarely saw him. I think he was being phased out while Dick Hall was being phased in, and I think he wasn’t terribly happy about that. So he concentrated on his responsibilities in the College of Engineering. One unusual thing about him was that he raised hogs. He had a pig farm. The College of Engineering was across the alley from the station, from WOSU, in this airplane hangar that I’m talking about. And he would come out the side door of the Engineering College and walk across the alley and knock on the window to the newsroom. And I’d open it and read him the hog market report. Almost every day. In fact, I’d just give it to him. At one time, we broadcast that. I’d picture farmers all over Ohio just waiting for 10:30 so we could tell them how much they could get for their pigs.

TR: Well, it was a service, a public service to the farmers. What were the facilities like? What were the studios like? The facilities had some things lacking, I take it.

DD: That’s right. Heating and cooling was principal among them. So, in the summer, we’d have the windows open out on 19th Avenue. And all the street sounds would come in while we were on the air live. Then the main studio, studio A, was cavernous. It was almost big enough to play a full basketball game in. The walls were beaverboard. It’s not as durable or strong as drywall, and people would get mad and throw things, like throw a mic through the wall. So there were holes around the studio where that, unfortunately, had happened. For a while, I was the morning man in that era, and we signed on really early, 7 o’clock in the morning. And I had a very pleasant piece of music, very soft and gentle, to wake people up. We’d play that for a while before I talked. I was getting ready to talk one morning, and that theme was playing in the background, and the engineer flipped my mic on, and the vacuum cleaner came on. All you could hear was the vacuum cleaner. Someone had snuck in during the night and plugged the vacuum cleaner into the mic socket. So I motioned the engineer to cut the mic, and he did, and I looked all around, I couldn’t figure out what was going on. So we tried it again. I called for the mic, and he turned it on, and the vacuum cleaner came on. After about three times, I got really mad, and I
told him to cut the mic, and I ran over and I grabbed the vacuum cleaner and broke it over the grand piano. Then I figured out it was plugged in to the wall, and I unplugged it, and we went on with our business.

TR: You had a temper! (laughter)

DD: Well, as gentle and calm as you are, you would have been upset by that.

TR: Any other memories that you want to share, as we’re wrapping up? We spent a lot of time together today. Some stories that you wanted to share that we didn’t touch on? One thing I wanted to ask you, I know that one of the things that Mary Alice Akins just told me, because I was just asking her about your retirement party, and she said they were having trouble figuring out what to get you because they knew you were an avid fly fisherman.

DD: Yes, that’s right. Well, they bought a lot of stuff for me, and I’m still using it. A landing net. They were really optimistic.

(41:12)

TR: So how did you get into that?

DD: Well, I started fishing when I was about six years old in Big Darby Creek, near Marysville and Milford Center. And I’ve just been fishing ever since. And one day I took a friend fishing, and he was a fly fisherman. And he just caught like ten fish for every one I did with a spinning rod. So I took up fly fishing right after that. This is something I did after I retired, and it’s been a lot of fun.

TR: So you retired relatively young. You were about 55?

DD: Yes, that’s right.

TR: And what were your goals after that? What kind of things...

DD: Well, to do whatever Tish told me. You know the husband’s magic words? You know what those are? “Yes, Dear.” That’s right, he knows. One thing I ought to mention is that I worked with television to produce a documentary on women’s rights in Israel. This was in the early 70’s. And a group of us took the station’s best camera, movie camera, 35mm, the only one they had, and took that to Israel and interviewed women all across the country, which didn’t take very long because I think you can fit Israel in Ohio. It’s not that big. And when we got back to the United States, we couldn’t land at the airport in New York, there was a problem. We had to circle, fly up to Canada and down to Georgia, and keep circling. And I was pretty groggy when we finally got down. And we were going into Customs, and he said, “What did you do?” And I said, “Well, we made a movie.” “Well, what are the pictures?” I said, “We have a lot of pictures of women.” And they confiscated all of our equipment, because apparently there was a lot of pornography going on and they were cracking down on it. And I gave exactly the wrong answer. And our film and all our equipment was held up for six months by Customs. But we finally got it and put it all together and it won five Emmy’s.
TR: Wow. That’s terrific.

DD: Yeah, that’s something to be proud of.

TR: It sure is.

DD: I’m so glad that that tradition of producing outstanding documentaries for television has continued to this day and probably is at a higher level now with the Columbus Neighborhoods series than anything I can remember.

TR: That’s nice of you to say. Thank you. One of the Neighborhoods we did was about the University District and we talked about the riots on campus in 1970. Do you recall WOSU’s role in covering that, and what kind of environment it was here?

DD: Well, we sort of did continuous coverage. That was before we had the grant, I think, so we were still using a lot of students. When we had our windows open, which we had to do because it was warm, it was getting into late spring or early summer, May of 1970, so we had to have the windows open; and the remnants of tear gas from the Oval would waft in. I had one student who was hit in the head by a tear gas canister. He was out on the Oval, the first day of the disturbances. And the Columbus police shot off all of their tear gas during the day and into the evening. A year’s supply in one day. Fumes blew from the south clear up into the north end. We were sitting on our porch on Weber Road, which is a couple of miles north of the campus, and you could smell the tear gas.

TR: That’s amazing.

DD: I thought we were doing an outstanding job, but the administrative said it was being forced to close the campus after a couple weeks of this. And there were students shot at Kent State, four dead at Kent State, and they were really worried that somebody was going to be more than injured. There were a lot of injuries, but nobody had been killed. And so they said we’re shutting down the campus. And they closed Neil Avenue, which was then a main thoroughfare, north and south, for the city of Columbus. They closed that, and it hasn’t opened. So they said, “WOSU can’t broadcast anymore because we’re shutting down.” They wanted to make an example of it. Which I thought was a big mistake, because we were doing almost continuous coverage, and I thought we were among the most reliable of sources of news about what was happening on the campus, because we were right here. But the administration didn’t agree.

TR: So when campus closed, WOSU shut down? There were no broadcasts at that point? I didn’t realize that.

DD: Yeah, for a couple of weeks or so. Dick Hull, who I mentioned earlier, he was Director of the WOSU Stations. He went over – it was toward the end of the month, must have been the end of May – and it was time to pay people, give them their checks. Once a month, you got a check. And they wouldn’t let him in the administration building. They had the doors chained. They opened the chains enough to hand him the checks through the crack in the door. Well, people were really... One of the high members of the
administration started carrying a gun, which was carrying a gun at that time. Yeah, it was very tense times.

TR: What was the relationship between the University and WOSU, not just during that time, but generally speaking. You were here for many years. Was it a good relationship? Was it tense at times? Back and forth, depending on what was going on?

DD: Well, we always contended at WOSU that the University didn’t give us enough money. And the administration contended that they gave us too much. So there was a constant back and forth on the funding. But overall, I think most of the administrators were very supportive of what we were doing. I know there was a time during the riots that some administrator or administrators said we shouldn’t be broadcasting at all. And John Mount, who was the vice president to whom we reported at the time, said, “As long as they follow the rules and standards and good practices of journalism, I think they should broadcast.” And he stood up for us, he was our champion. Otherwise, we would have had to stop doing news if he hadn’t done that.

TR: Yes, and Mr. Mount is still with us, which is wonderful. What a great man. Yeah, I imagine that would have been a tense time, covering the riots on campus and everything that is going on on campus, and administration understanding that they own the license of a journalistic organization that is trying to cover the biggest news story in Columbus.

DD: The thing is, you have to tell the truth. As long as you tell the truth, or do your best to tell the truth, you’re secure, I think.

TR: Anything else?

TD: Not that I can think of, off hand.

TR: How long have you been in Clintonville?

TD: Well, we’ve lived in Clintonville ever since we were able to afford to move out of an apartment in the part of Columbus closer to the University. We’ve lived in Clintonville at least 50 years.

TR: Oh, my. Really.

TD: Well, we’ve lived at the house we’re in, how long now...

DD: Since 1969.

TR: Great, what a great community.

TD: Yes, well, I mentioned to somebody once that I live in a house that is older than I am, and he said, “You mean it’s a cave?” (laughter) But anyhow...

TR: Nice person, real nice.
TD: Oh, no, he was a coworker, a real joker.

TR: Thank you all for your time today. And thank you for your many years of not only work but volunteering at WOSU and making a difference in this community. We appreciate it so much.

TD: You’re welcome.

TR: Thank you, Tish. Thank you, Don.

DD: You’re welcome.

TR: Thank you, that was great.

DD: Lynn Neary is another name.

TR: That’s right.

(51:04)