

AL 164

Interviewee: Jonathan Resh

Interviewer: Ivan Osorio

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O: Today is Tuesday, April 13, 1993. I am interviewing Jonathan Resh. First of all, the main point of the interview is the two benefit concerts you organized for St. Francis House.

R: Right.

O: How did the whole thing get started?

R: The whole thing got started because I am in a band called Spoke, in which I play guitar and sing. We play a lot of benefit concerts for a lot of other people – everything from literary magazines to the North Florida AIDS Network to political parties on campus – all sorts of people. I realized after having promoted shows myself and just basically for the interests of Spoke, I realized how easy how it is to put on a benefit, basically having a show with a lot of bands. In our benefit the first time, we had, I think, seven bands and the second time we had five. All of the money that was made by the admission price went to a single organization or association of some sort. Then what wound up happening was, I realized that sometimes benefits did not make that much money, simply because with so many benefits going on in a week, the market for concert-going gets rather saturated. So I thought of what my main interests were in helping people – what I would want to put a benefit on for. I did not want to make it something too political, because political causes often end up in stratifying a lot of people, and there is a lot of questionability as to how far you will go. [The question is,] where [will] the money go if you are fully behind a political cause, so much so that you will represent that cause by putting on a concert for it. So even some things, some basic human rights causes, I would have done a benefit for had I not found the St. Francis House and decided to go with it.

My basic rationale was that everybody has been hungry once in their lives and that being the richest country in the world, it is a travesty that there is still malnourishment existing within our country. Nobody should be without food in this country. That is all there is to it. That sounds simplistic, but is something that I am very adamant about. There are still people, especially in rural areas, who are not getting the sort of food that they need, as well as people living in urban cities who will not get the food they need, because they go into shelters that are basically hostile to them as human beings and to their lifestyles. The St. Francis House is a community-based soup kitchen and counseling center and shelter. I really did not know much about it until I had done a reporting story on them for a class. I realized that if we did a benefit in which people did not actually pay money but brought food – an admission price being two cans of

food – that would generate a lot of food. Of course, a lot of the bands that are playing in these benefits are underground rock and roll bands, and money is not the main objective to them. Some nights they will play for fifteen dollars and not really blink an eye. So if they are guaranteed a good crowd, a good cause, and playing with other bands that were their friends, many of them would do it. The first time we got seven bands. The line-up was I think was Postage Paid, Words Worth, Spoke, Bomb Shell, Radon, Grinch, [and] I think that is it. Maybe it was six bands. I think there was one more; I just cannot remember.

It was a place called Club Velvet, and Club Velvet said that they would not take any admission price at the door unless people did not have cans. So it was either two cans of food or two dollars, and it could be any canned goods. What wound up happening was people were bringing whole bags of food rather than two cans, because it was really easy just to take two cans of green beans or creamed corn or something off the shelf and walk in with it. Those who did not have the food we charged two dollars, and that went to the St. Francis House. About 600 people showed up and absolutely packed this little Club Velvet, which held about 200 people safely.

O: Club Velvet is on Main Street about half a block north of University [Avenue].

R: Yes. We got all sorts of food. We got a lot of food that would not go bad, like dry goods, pasta, and things like this. But overall, by the end of the night, we accumulated about 1,500 canned goods and \$150 all for the St. Francis House. There was one other really beneficial thing about it, and this is more on the sentimental side, not the pragmatic side.

O: Just one thing, do you remember the date?

R: March 25, I think. It was on a Saturday, I believe.

O: Was it 1992?

R: It was 1992; it was this last year. It was that spring, which meant a big deal because it was at a really good time. It was about a month and a half before final exams. It was that time a lot of people want to go out. It was just wonderful, because people were also there, like local magazine publishers, and local record distributors. Everybody was sort of selling their wares and being very politically aware and conscious of the problem of hunger in Gainesville. It is a bigger problem than I think people realize.

But as I was saying, more on the sentimental side, it was good to see that people were bringing these cans, and they knew that unlike money, these cans were going to be eaten by people who needed them. There was more of that bond of

giving and charity, rather than just cold hard cash that could go into a million places; it could go into the promoter's pocket. They were literally feeding people who needed this food. So that was really good. The club helped out a lot. They just gave us leeway to do basically whatever we wanted, and there were no problems with security or anything like that.

The St. Francis House was very grateful. They were so grateful that the second time we had a benefit, they asked that we not [ask for] food again, because they had all of the canned goods that they needed; they did not have room for any more. We said, "OK. If we don't do food again, what are we going to do?" We wanted to stick with the idea of bringing something rather than cash – although cash was good, too – but bringing something that we give straight to the people who needed it.

So we talked to the St. Francis House [staff] about other things to do – this was in the fall; I believe it was in October – and about other things that people could bring and what they needed. They said, "Well, you know, a lot of people come in here, and they are in kind of bad hygienic shape. They need to shave, they need to shower, they just need to look better to get a job. We could use hygienic stuff." So I was thinking hygienic products.

Well, what wound up happening is, in October, we held the second benefit at the Covered Dish on Second Avenue, where people brought two hygienic products. This ranged from anything – toothpaste, toothbrushes, razors, deodorant, shampoo, soap, brushes, toilet paper, tampons, [or] anything that they wanted to bring. It had to be brand new [and] unopened. Either they could bring that or three dollars. We had five bands play, and it was just as successful. It is hard to determine exactly how many products we got, because they were in these huge boxes and it is tough to say, because I am not going to go through each one of them the next day and actually look. I think there were five big boxes, like dishwasher-size boxes, of hygienic products – which is rather an odd sight – actually, full of deodorant and all of this other stuff, but it went straight to the St. Francis House and they were very happy about it. Some people still brought cans, some people brought other things like towels and stuff, which, of course, they really needed too. They also made some more money – I think it was \$300 – from people who did not bring anything and just paid to get in. It was something like that. I am not really sure how much that was or how many people came exactly. It was around the same number, maybe 500.

Basically that worked out really well. I am not sure how we are going to do it in the future. It does take a toll on you somewhat, because getting all of the bands together, scheduling them, persuading the clubs to do it without any money ([by telling them] they would make enough money at the bar). [Also] organizing things with the St. Francis House or whoever the people are in which they have

to pick up the surplus profit, in this case, food and hygienic products. It takes a toll on you, putting up fliers, designing fliers, all sorts of things. We have public service announcements in the radio and newspaper and these sorts of things. It wound up working out very well. It was among the most gratifying and satisfying things I have ever done.

O: Tell me something about the actual logistics of organizing this thing. What was the first step?

R: It is not as difficult as it may seem. The first step was just coming up with the idea and talking to other bands about it. That was a first step, thinking we want to do it not using cash as much as the raw product of food or hygienic products, and here is who we want to do it with. After calling the St. Francis House and making sure it was okay with them (they were very enthusiastic about it), or whoever you are doing it for, if you are doing it for cash, I would recommend calling the organization immediately and getting a good rapport with them. When you are dealing with cash, things are different. People want to be much more efficient, tight, and organized with their cash, because they do not want to lose anything. You have to be very straightforward as to where the money is going, because sometimes the clubs will take some money at the door because they need to, in order to stay open. [They have] to pay the rent. Luckily these two clubs that we did it at did not have to take money at the door; they were willing to just leave the doors open and collect the food.

The second step was finding the clubs to do this. The two clubs that we used were very into it, mainly because it made good publicity for them. People would be out on these nights. In the case of the first club, they did not have an alcohol license, and they got an alcohol license just for that night because they knew they would make a killing. And they did. They made a killing at the bar.

The next step was just organizing the bands. No band wants to play first and no band wants to play last. Then just make sure that each band plays a half hour; [you have to] enforce that. The next step is finding people to collect the food and drive the food around, making sure that it is in a proper place or that it did not get in the way and things like that.

O: Who did that?

R: We just basically recruited people. People volunteered. They said, "We'll do this." At the first place, Club Velvet, it was less of a club and more of a hole in the wall. People stood at the door and took the food from each person. They were also checking I.D.s. It was such a loose club that the management was all behind the bar, and nobody was up front. So, people under twenty-one were checking I.D.s for people over twenty-one. It was just one of those situations

where we found a space that let us do this, and we took over from there. It was a very do-it-yourself sort of ethic, which I prefer. Had it been at a very big professional rock and roll entertainment center, a night club, or theater that has a lot of business ethics and transactions, it probably would not have worked so well because they want to see some money out of it. We were not interested so much in making the club money as we were in getting food for St. Francis and into people's mouths.

Then [the next step includes] designing a flier, putting up the fliers and getting people to put up the fliers, [and] writing public service announcements. These are for both the print and broadcast media.

O: What were these?

R: I think it was just a radio station. I gave it to somebody at the public service TV station. Supposedly they got it on there.

O: At WUFT?

R: Yes. Supposedly they got it on there. I never saw it. I do not think I even heard any of them, but other people did and they told me it was on there. So that was fine by me. [The last step is] just working with the St. Francis House and getting all of the cans and hygienic products over there. If you are doing cash, like I said earlier, you want to make sure from the start that you know where the cash was going at the end of the benefit: how much they were getting in terms of whether it was a percentage of the door or if they were getting all of it. You also have to let people know if you are doing it for another organization, that if nobody comes out for the benefit, which is a real possibility, especially if you are doing it on a weeknight, that it is not the band's fault, the promoter's fault, or the organization's fault. It is just that crowds can be very fickle. They can be very picky. The fact that ours is basically free, that you just have to take a couple of cans off your shelf and come and see a lot of music, I think helped out with the crowd situation. A lot of people were enthusiastic about a free show and helping others out in Gainesville.

The other thing was that, as opposed to making money for an organization like Care or something where all of the money is going to Somalia – not that I am against worldwide relief, quite the opposite; I think it is a very necessary thing for our nation to do – but if there are hunger and problems in our own backyard, I want to take care of that first. That is just how I feel about it. I do not want some sort of corruption from within our own society to be causing more problems for us than the problems with population outside of ours. Obviously we have to come first in order to ensure our survival, if nothing else than to be sure that we can continue worldwide relief to other countries. This is my opinion. Anyway, that

was my rationale for doing it.

O: OK. Now, let me ask a little bit about yourself. When were you born?

R: September 15, 1970.

O: You are in what year at UF?

R: I am a senior at UF and graduating in two weeks – in May. So I will be a graduate of UF in 1993. I am going to be working at the University writing press material for a little while, probably for a year, before I venture out and pursue my career in the real world which will revolve mainly around print journalism, writing and copy editing and all of these things I have studied for four years in the College of Journalism and Communications.

I am originally from New York, Kentucky, and Orlando, Florida. I have moved around a little bit in my life. I have been in this band for two years. We have a couple of records out, and it has been an enormous catalyst for all sorts of creative projects and constructive things. I have worked on the *Independent Florida Alligator* newspaper, on *Orange and Blue* magazine, [and on] various underground rock and roll magazines. Outside of that, that is a basic description of my life that one needs.

O: So you are going to hang around Gainesville for a year then?

R: Yes, it is not so much hang around.

O: I mean you are going to work here.

R: Yes, I am going to be probably working two or three communication jobs. This is what I am really trying to get, I am working on it right now. In order to put my diploma to work – this is a very big thing with me – it is sort of a transitional period for me to work and to look nationally at what else is out there while I am still here. I love this town, I absolutely do; it is my favorite town in Florida by far, and I am not in a real big hurry to leave it, if I can help it. If there is a better job opportunity in Atlanta or Chicago or some place, I would definitely go. Gainesville does not have enough power over me to keep me here, but I like this town enough that with these jobs that are in my field that I have been schooled in, they can keep me here basically.

O: As long as you are here, you are going to try and have another benefit or anything like that?

R: That is a good question. It partly depends on how long the band continues. The

band may not continue for a while, because there are three of us in this band and we are all very good friends. But we all have other lives to lead beside it, and we have gone much farther with this band than we ever hoped or dreamed that we would. Now we have other things to move on to, and we sort of want to end it on a high note. [We want to] end it with a bang rather than a fizzle; [we want to quit] while we are still ahead. We realize that we do not play the music that is going to make us hundreds of thousands of dollars, that is going to be played and is extremely popular all over the nation or all over the world. We realize our limits, but we have also surpassed those limits. We seem to draw enough people to buy our records to leave us surprised to say the least, so we really want to end it on a good note. If I am still in the band, I doubt I will put on another benefit, because being in a band and being in the benefit and playing in that benefit is really taxing. If I am not in a band, I would be happy to put on another benefit, because then all my energy could go towards promoting it, making sure that the bands have a good time, that the club is happy with it, and most of all, that the organization gets as much as they can out of the benefit. So, "possibly" is my answer.

O: [Do you have] any final comments or anything you would like to say to anybody?

R: As far as closing comments?

O: Yes, and what would you say to anybody who is thinking of doing this sort of thing if you do not continue.

R: OK, as far as doing this sort of thing, I think it is great, I think you should absolutely do it if you are considering it. It is not that difficult, it just takes a little bit of commitment – meaning three weeks of commitment – and it does not take up all of your time, and it is not that much of headache. If you are interested in doing it, give me a call at 338-1489. I will tell you the absolute exact logistics, of who to call and how to get it together.

As far as just final comments, one thing that we all feel – and I think this is just a result of the very technocratic age that we live in – is that we have no control over the society in which we live in, and that we are unable to change it for the better at all. To some degree I still believe it, but my main point is that you can find alternatives and options and new ideas in how to change things. This benefit concert in which we ask for food in order to admit people so that they can rock out and then have that food go to people who need it, is not something that I would have thought of very long ago. But over the while, when I realized that there was a need for it, you become aware that you want to do something that will fill that need that is innovative, creative, and original. I would say do not look for the same avenues of change that we have been relying upon, especially in the past ten years. The 1990s is a very interesting decade, and now is the time

that people can really experiment with changing things and new ways, and using new ideas to try to help people and lessen the pain, harm, suffering, and basically the inefficiency of our government and our society that still lingers on when it should not and when it can be altered.

O: With whom did you talk when you called the St. Francis House? What was their initial reaction?

R: The guy you want to talk to is Bob Tancig. He is a great guy. When we first called, a darling old woman answered the phone – I forget her name – but she answered the phone and we told her the plan, and at first . .

O: She was a volunteer.

R: Yes. At first she really did not get it, and she was asking, "What kind of concert is this? What sort of bands are you?" We said, "Well, basically ma'am, we are punk rock bands." She said, "Punk rock bands want to do a concert for us? Punk rockers are going to donate cans to us?" She was totally perplexed, and it was just really funny. I really grooved on the whole kind of dichotomy of the thing, because there is one image that is very set in people's minds of what a punk rock concert is and what punk rock people are like. Not to get too heavy into this, but basically the reality of it is that most of these people who were involved in this, whether punk rock or not, are just very caring, very concerned, and very cool people with a great sense of humor and a great sense of generosity, as well.

The St. Francis House was kind of taken by this, but they loved it. They thought it was a great idea, and they said they all would have come, except that it was too late because they close their doors at 10:00 and they have to go to bed and the concert does not start until midnight – well, that is not true – but both of them went on until 4:00 in the morning.

O: They have to open really early in the morning.

R: Yes. They have to open really early. They do a hell of a job. Just as far as centers go, in small towns or large towns, if you compare the St. Francis House to centers in large towns, they do a much better job, they are much more caring and much more hospitable. In large towns, in New York City or in Washington, D.C. or Detroit – not that there are not caring people there – they just have so many problems with stealing and violence and drugs.

O: It is more difficult.

R: It is more difficult when it is on a larger level. Of course, there are even better

shelters in these larger cities, too, that are just amazing. Some of them get an enormous amount done, and they do incredibly good things. I am not a person who is a zealot about social work. I am not a sociology major. I do not lobby for these things. It is just I feel there is a very pressing need in the interest of the most basic human rights to get people fed who are hungry, to get people who need help to get up on their feet. That is basically it.

[End of the interview]