

FHS Oral History Project – Matthew Peddie

Description:

Matthew Peddie was born in Saskatoon, Canada, in 1976. At around a year old, Matthew and his family moved to Christchurch, New Zealand, after a brief stint in England from Canada. Matthew recollected memories of his upbringing in New Zealand, particularly enjoying the various outdoor activities offered by Christchurch's diverse landscape. Matthew attended the University of Canterbury, majoring in English and French. After his undergraduate studies, Matthew worked at a rural and local high school teaching English and French. He realized through this experience that he did not want to pursue a teaching career further. This experience, however, also connected him with a colleague from Japan, which sparked Matthew's interest in the possibility of teaching language abroad in Japan. As a result, from 2001 to 2003, Matthew worked in Niigata, Japan, teaching English to schoolchildren and recounting his personal and professional experiences living in a country and culture completely foreign to him. In 2004, Matthew pursued a master's degree in journalism from the University of Western Ontario in London, finishing a year later. Matthew explained how his joy with writing and curiosity about the world drew him to study journalism. In 2005, he married his wife, who was from Orlando, and they spent five years in New Zealand before permanently settling in Central Florida. Matthew worked as a journalist at a radio station in New Zealand and continued in that occupation once he arrived in Orlando in 2010. He explained his appeal with radio journalism compared to print and television. Matthew produced several programs for public radio station 90.7 WMFE (now known as Central Florida Public Media) from 2012 to 2022. Since 2022, Matthew has worked for WUSF in Tampa, Florida, although he still lives in Orlando. Matthew detailed his time at WMFE and WUSF, emphasizing his takeaways about Florida, radio's continued utility, and the current state (c. 2025) of public media. He shared the general reactions he received from his programming. Lastly, Matthew discussed his broader observations about the Central Florida and Tampa Bay regions, their changes, differences, and challenges since 2010.

Transcription:

00;00;05 - 00;00;20

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Mathew Peddie on May 23rd, 2025, in Orlando, Florida for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

00;00;20 - 00;00;27

MATTHEW PEDDIE: My name is Matthew Peddie. I was born on March 10th, 1976, in Canada.

00;00;27 - 00;00;29

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Where in Canada?

00;00;29 - 00;00;31

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Saskatoon.

00;00;31 - 00;00;42

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how long? Because, as you mentioned to me before we started recording you, you were born in Canada, but you grew up in New Zealand. So how long were you in Canada?

00;00;42 - 00;01;05

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Well, I was only in Canada for about six months, so my parents were working there. My dad was working there for a couple of years. So they were there for another six months, and then they moved to England, I want to say for maybe another six months or so and then back to New Zealand. So I spent the bulk of my childhood in New Zealand with a little side trip to England for a couple of years.

00;01;05 - 00;01;07

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did your parents do for a living?

00;01;08 - 00;01;15

MATTHEW PEDDIE: They were both doctors. So my father was a ObGyn, and my mother was an emergency physician. They are both retired now.

00;01;15 - 00;01;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And were you an only child?

00;01;18 - 00;01;21

MATTHEW PEDDIE: No. I have a relatively large family. I am one of five siblings.

00;01;21 - 00;01;24

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Oh, wow. Where are you in the mix? Are you the eldest?

00;01;24 - 00;01;25

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I am the second oldest.

00;01;25 - 00;01;3

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: The second oldest. And so, both your parents were born in New Zealand as well?

00;01;32 - 00;01;38

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Actually, no. My mother is Australian. My father is from New Zealand. So from the Antipodes, though.

00;01;38 - 00;01;39

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And—

00;01;39 - 00;01;41

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Australasian, I guess you could say.

00;01;41 - 00;01;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. And they were in Canada for work?

00;01;45 - 00;01;55

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. My father was doing a locum in northern Saskatchewan. So pretty remote little community was working as a doctor up there.

00;01;55 - 00;02;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Just talk to me about your childhood growing up in New Zealand in the mid to late 80s.

00;02;02 - 00;03;1

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Sure. Well, like I said, we had a pretty big family. So four other siblings, we kind of made our own fun a lot, like a lot of outdoor activities. My family is very interested in getting into the outdoors. So I grew up skiing, hiking, camping. Where I am from in New Zealand, Christchurch, is in the South Island. I am not sure if you are familiar with the geography of New Zealand. It is basically two main islands. The South Island is very mountainous. It was kind of like a long, skinny island with a range of mountains up the middle of it the Southern Alps. So you can be on the coast and then fairly close to the mountains. So if you wanted to, you could go for a swim or surf in the morning and then go skiing in the afternoon. Not that I am a surfer, but we like to get out to the beach as well. So we spend a lot of time in the outdoors kind of doing that as a recreation, as a kid. Music was also a big part of our lives. Fairly musical family. So we would play in youth orchestras, and we all learned instruments of various sorts. Played music at school, sang in choirs. So a lot of that kind of activity as a kid.

00;03;16 - 00;03;22

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Were there any particular challenges that your family faced during this time in New Zealand?

00;03;22 - 00;03;50

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I would not say any particular challenges. I mean, we were fairly well off. The quality of life in New Zealand is quite good, good standard of living. There is a good social safety net. We lived in a city, but it was a sort of a small city so you could get around pretty easily. Did not have a lot of issues in terms of, kind of transportation or anything like that, and a very supportive family. So I would not say there were any big challenges at all.

00;03;50 - 00;03;56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Walk me through the demographic landscape where you grew up.

00;03;56 - 00;04;48

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Sure. So it was predominantly white, I would say. I am not sure how familiar you are with the demographic makeup of New Zealand, but a lot of the folks who make up the population of New Zealand have ancestry from England and Ireland and Scotland, that part of the world. There is also a very large, Pacific Island population, but there is more of that in the North Island, Auckland in particular, the biggest city in New Zealand has a large Pacific Island population. The Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, also a part of the

population mix. But by and large, the population of Christchurch where I grew up was fairly kind of Anglo.

00;04;48 - 00;04;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Walk me through your education and schooling experience in New Zealand.

00;04;55 - 00;05;40

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Sure. I attended a public elementary school. I went to a high school that my father attended, so that was kind of the rationale for that. Christchurch Boys High School. It was not a private school, but it was not a coed school. Very strong rugby tradition. Rugby is the national sport of New Zealand, you could say, is the national obsession of New Zealand. I did not play rugby but watched a lot of rugby as a kid. And then after that, I went on to get a bachelor's degree at the University of Canterbury, which is also located in Christchurch, got an arts degree there. And then completed further studies overseas.

00;05;40 - 00;05;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was your favorite subject in sort of high school or even before?

00;05;45 - 00;06;23

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I like art. Yeah. My older brother and I used to draw a lot as kids. Actually, the entire family is fairly artistic, so I think I probably had dreams of doing something art related when I was a kid. Something like architecture. My older brother is actually an architect. And my other siblings all have some kind of hand in the arts field. But, yeah, my favorite subject at school, in high school, anyway, I would say would have been art, like painting, same with elementary school. I like writing as well.

00;06;23 - 00;06;30

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And when you went to college, what was your major?

00;06;30 - 00;07;14

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Well, I majored in English and French. I thought I might want to go live in France at some point. I am not quite sure where that idea came from but did enjoy taking French in high school, and I kind of wanted to keep that going. That was not really something that I pursued further, but I have always been interested in languages. So yeah, I did enjoy studying French, especially the kind of French philosophy and some of those great thinkers from France, like [Albert] Camu and others. So, yeah, I enjoyed those subjects and English. I mean, a lot of theater and kind of novelists and that kind of thing.

00;07;14 - 00;07;28

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, and correct me if I am wrong, but I am assuming the college you attended reflected sort of the demographic makeup of the town that you lived or was it more different people?

00;07;28 - 00;08;00

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, I mean, it probably depended on what you study there. Like they had a good law program, a very good engineering college. So I am sure they probably would have attracted a lot of students from other parts of the country or other parts of the world. And that is definitely the case now. Yeah, maybe, I am not entirely sure, but I would say that the university was maybe a little more diverse than at least the schools that I went to.

00;08;00 - 00;08;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, growing up in New Zealand during this time, can you share if any larger political, social, cultural developments whether directly or indirectly impacted you or your family?

00;08;17 - 00;09;26

MATTHEW PEDDIE: No, I would not say so. New Zealand has parliamentary democracy. It is similar to the system they have in the United Kingdom and Australia and Canada. So what that means is that—I do not have far into the kind of politics of it you want to go—but smaller parties have more of a say. So you can have a like a coalition government, for example. I know there is some similarities in some ways, I guess, with the United States politics, where if you want to get a bill pass, you have to kind of make a deal with somebody from another party, but you can actually form a government with different parties in New Zealand. So in some ways it was a political set up where smaller parties and a more pluralistic, kind of spread of political groups can have an influence on government. Yeah. I cannot really think of anything kind of majorly disruptive anyway, in terms of the politics of the time that I grew up in, that had a big influence on me personally.

00;09;26 - 00;09;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am stretching it back. It was your father that was born in New Zealand, correct?

00;09;34 - 00;09;34

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yes. Correct.

00;09;34 - 00;09;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So, again, assuming if his father and know those previous generations had deep roots in New Zealand, I am curious if they experienced the transition from still being a part of the British Empire formally and then independence by mid-century?

00;09;57 - 00;11;33

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I am sure they did. It is not something I have really discussed in great detail. But yeah, I mean, there has always been that awareness that this is where the kind of history of New Zealand in terms of we were part of the British Empire at one point than it was a Dominion, so it kind of gradually split away. It still has pretty strong ties to England. Here is an example of that. When people graduate from college in New Zealand, they often do what is called an OE, overseas experience, so they will take a couple of years off before settling down in their career and go live in England or Europe. And New Zealanders can do that because they are still ahead of the Commonwealth. So there are still some kind of economic and political ties there that are beneficial if you want to go live and work in another country. I think you can get

like a two year work visa. You can go work in England or Canada for a couple of years. I mean, you would have to do something else if you wanted to live there indefinitely. So a lot of New Zealanders do kind of take that overseas experience and go live in England and work there for a couple of years and see that part of the world as well. So yeah, there are still definitely some pretty deep ties with the United Kingdom, I would say in New Zealand and Australia too. A lot of New Zealanders actually moved to Australia after they graduate or when they become adults because there are sometimes better economic opportunities in Australia than you would find in New Zealand.

00;11;33 - 00;11;42

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. But these stories were never explicit passed down.

00;11;42 - 00;11;48

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Can you be a little more specific.

00;11;48 - 00;12;0

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am not sure how old your father is, but if your father or his father lived during that time of the transition between British Empire to independence—

00;12;02 - 00;12;03

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah—

00;12;03 - 00;12;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: —if they ever told you any stories about, that is where I am getting at. But it is fine if it did not, that is what I am asking.

00;12;09 - 00;12;34

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. I mean, I would have to go back and check with my father, actually. I mean, he probably has told me some stuff like that in the past, but I am trying to think now. Now I am kind of scraping through my knowledge of history of New Zealand now. I should actually have some better answers to that. But I cannot remember exactly when the kind of switchover from being a Dominion to a country on its own—

00;12;34 - 00;12;36

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I think it was 1947.

00;12;36 - 00;12;46

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, yeah. So I mean, let see, my father is thirty years older than me. So he is seventy-nine. So he would have been—

00;12;46 - 00;12;47

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Born around that time.

00;12;47 - 00;13;06

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. So I guess he would have kind of experienced some of the vestiges of that. I remember, for example, there were still kind of like coins from the old

denomination, like shillings or whatever laying around before New Zealand started using dollars. So maybe that was a physical remnant of the past.

00;13;06 - 00;13;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. So you mentioned how once you finished your bachelor's, you went overseas. So talk to me about.

00;13;16 - 00;14;32

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. Not immediately. After I had gotten an undergraduate degree, I took a little bit of time to figure out what to do next. I went to teachers college and taught in a high school in fairly rural part of New Zealand for about a year and a half. I was teaching English and French. And then while I was there, one of my colleagues, a teacher from Japan, became friends with him. And he kind of got me interested in Japan. So I applied for a program to go teach English in Japan. And so I did that for a couple of years. So that was in my mid-twenties. And that was where I met the person who [became] my wife. And she was from Florida. So yeah, spent a couple of years teaching English in Japan. Moved back to New Zealand for a little bit, not too long, and then went to college for a graduate degree in journalism in Canada. So I spent a year and a half in Canada after my stint in Japan and then moved back to New Zealand for a bit and then back here.

00;14;32 - 00;14;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: All right. So several questions. Now that you have given me a map, which I appreciate.

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MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, it was a bit complicated, zigzagging around the globe.

00;14;40 - 00;14;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But this is good. How was it like teaching in that rural area in New Zealand? Where you were from was not that rural?

00;14;55 - 00;15;10

MATTHEW PEDDIE: No. I grew up in a city. I mean, it was not too far. It was about maybe an hour twenty minutes south of Christchurch, a town called Ashburton, but a fairly rural sort of community, a lot of dairy farming around that area—

00;15;10 - 00;15;13

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So did you experience that rural-urban difference?

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MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, a little bit. It was an interesting experience. I realized while I was there that I did not want to make a career out of teaching. So, I think I really started to get an idea of figuring out a different line of work while I was working as a high school teacher. I think teaching in general you have to be very committed to it to really get something out of it and be a good teacher. And I did not have that level of commitment at that stage.

00;15;46 - 00;15;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What else did you learn from that experience teaching in that high school?

00;15;52 - 00;16;33

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I mean, I had some great colleagues. It was interesting teaching alongside folks who had been teaching for a while and were really committed to it and passionate about it. So I could sort of see like what it takes to be a good teacher. Like I said, I became friends with a teacher who was from Japan, so that kind of got me interested in maybe going and visiting Japan and learning about that culture as well. I think it was kind of like a springboard in some ways to do something different, which was leave New Zealand, live in a different country, where I was totally immersed in a completely foreign language and culture for a couple of years and get out of my comfort zone.

00;16;33 - 00;16;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To that point, did you ever envision leaving New Zealand?

00;16;38 - 00;17;12

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I always wanted to travel. I do not know that I thought about living permanently overseas. I always had it in my mind that I wanted to go back and live in Canada for a little bit, at least, just to see what it was like, because I was always conscious of, okay, I was not born in New Zealand, I have some kind of connection to Canada, even if it was fairly tenuous. I just want to go and see what that was like. So I always had that idea in the back of my head, and I ended up doing that. I went and got a graduate degree at the University of Western Ontario in London. So, yeah, I am glad I was able to pursue that.

00;17;12 - 00;17;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So, talking about your experience in Japan. Where in Japan, number one? But number two, what was what was that experience like, as someone—Japan and New Zealand, they are both islands, right, and islands have generally this characteristic of being insular. So from someone that grew up on an island to go to another island, what was that like?

00;17;48 - 00;20;32

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I think the biggest difference, the biggest culture shock for me was the language. So I studied a little bit of Japanese before I got there, just to kind of have some basic ability to communicate. The program that I went on is called the Jet Program. It was run by the Japanese government. So it was a teaching program where they basically put native English speakers or native speakers of other languages into Japanese classrooms, and you are there to help the English teacher kind of teach the language. So, I had done some research on Japan. I was interested in the kind of mountainous parts of it. So, the place that I really wanted to go to was Hokkaido, which is an island at the very tippy top of Japan. It is a little more remote than some of the other parts of Japan. Great skiing there. So that was part of the motivation. I was not sent there though, I was sent to this place called Niigata, which is also a very snowy part of Japan. In fact, I think it may be one of the snowiest places in the world in winter time. So they get a lot of snow in winter time. It was very hot and humid in summer. I was in a small town, maybe about 5000-5500 people, at the confluence of two rivers in the middle of these

mountains. So going from New Zealand, being transplanted into this kind of rural mountainous Japan, where I was like maybe one of three people who spoke English in the town, it was great, people were very friendly and welcoming and open to talk, great way to learn the language. Like if you want to learn another language, the best way to do it is just to throw yourself into a place where you have to speak it. So I got quite good at conversational Japanese in those two years. Japan is a fascinating place because it does have these little pockets which are pretty rural and remote, but it is also fairly well populated. Like if you go to Tokyo, that is a very busy, cosmopolitan, advanced city, fantastic transportation system, very high tech. And so I was able to visit some of those places in Japan as well. And that is also its own sort of culture shock, because the lifestyle I was used to in New Zealand is pretty laid back, not too crowded. It can be quite frenetic in places in Japan. The place where I was living, though, was another variety of laid back, like people took their work very seriously, so they worked hard, but they also played hard. There was a ski field about twenty minutes away from me. I would go skiing on the weekend. And I joined a tennis club. Just kind of threw myself into everyday life in Japan and enjoyed it tremendously.

00;20;32 - 00;20;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What years was this?

00;20;34 - 00;20;43;1

MATTHEW PEDDIE: So I moved there in 2001, and I was there for two years. I left in the middle of 2003.

00;20;43 - 00;20;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You were there teaching English to, students?

00;20;52 - 00;21;02

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yes. It was middle school students, predominantly. But I also helped teach some classes to elementary school kids.

00;21;02 - 00;21;10

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was that like teaching to a younger age group?

00;21;10 - 00;21;32

MATTHEW PEDDIE: They were very high energy. I am not sure how much of the English I was trying to teach them stuck, but they definitely enjoyed having a foreigner in the class and something a little bit different from their routine. I mean, it was fun. But like I said, I am not sure how much of the English that I was trying to teach them really stayed with them.

00;21;32 - 00;21;38;

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did you learn about Japan living in Japan in those two years?

00;21;38 - 00;23;01

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I did not really have too many preconceptions of the place before I left. I found that they were, like I said, the town I lived in, the folks were very friendly, they would say hello to you on the street. I mean, I think that was the kind of experience you might have in

a small town anywhere in the world. So, I am not sure if that was unique to Japan per se, but yeah, they were definitely interested in kind of learning about New Zealand and different cultures. Like, they knew a little bit about New Zealand because some of the things that New Zealand is famous for obviously kind of [resonated] with the Japanese, like for example, rugby, they were fascinated by rugby as well. The rugby team, the Haka, which is a kind of a dance or a sort of a challenge that happens at the start of every rugby game. They all knew that. So they would ask me about that. A lot of Japanese folks like to visit New Zealand as tourists. Some of them may have even kind of been there and sort of seen it and were familiar with the at least images of the kind of natural landscape of New Zealand. I mean, Japan is a fascinating place, very kind of diverse geographically. Like I said, great outdoor activities if you are into that skiing and hiking and fishing and that kind of thing.

00;23;01 - 00;23;39

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You went back to New Zealand and then you went to Canada to pursue a graduate degree in journalism. So talk to me about that experience going back to the nation you were born. Did you fulfill that sort of gap—maybe not gap—but what you were telling me earlier, how you were always conscious about you were born in Canada, but you grew up in New Zealand and you felt some sort of connection. Did you fulfill that connection by going back?

00;23;39 - 00;24;46

MATTHEW PEDDIE: In some ways. I was studying in Ontario, which is very different from Saskatchewan, like Saskatchewan is not as densely populated as Ontario. A lot of agriculture there. And where I was born to was pretty remote as well, like a lot of little lakes. I think where my parents were working, they had to kind of fly on a float plane at certain times of year because it was inaccessible by road. So, sort of a long way from the city. And I studied in a college town, London, Ontario. It was a pretty well regarded school in western Ontario. So, I think I did kind of fulfill part of it, but I am still interested in going back and spending a little more time in Saskatchewan, the province where I was born, having a little bit of a look around. I did one road trip at the end of my college time into my graduate degree from London, Ontario, all the way over to Vancouver, so I got a little bit of a sight of the country, but I mean, it is a huge place and definitely more to see there.

00;24;46 - 00;24;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Why did you pursue journalism?

00;24;51 - 00;25;27

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I got interested in it. I have always been interested in writing and creative aspects of that. So I think it was kind of a natural fit. I enjoyed writing when I was in my undergraduate degree to my bachelor's degree and reading. I have always been a pretty avid reader, and I just thought it would be something that would give me a way to kind of channel my curiosity about places and make a living from it. So, yeah, so far so good.

00;25;27 - 00;25;31

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what years did you attend, or pursue your graduate degree?

00;25;31 - 00;25;46

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Sure. Well, it was kind of a condensed graduate degree, so it was like, I think I want to say three semesters, but it was basically over the course of a year. So from 2004 through 2005, graduated in 2005.

00;25;47 - 00;25;5

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And then you went back to New Zealand, you told me, for a little bit.

00;25;52 - 00;26;25

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. So, one of the things that happened in Japan, which did not really have anything to do with Japan per se, but there were a lot of Americans teaching in Japan. So I had a lot of American friends there, and one of whom became my wife. So we got married here in Orlando in 2005. We moved back to New Zealand and spent five years there, where I was working for a couple of radio stations as a journalist and then moved back here in 2010.

00;26;25 - 00;26;28

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And was she from Orlando?

00;26;28 - 00;26;43

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. I mean, her family. So she spent most of her life in Orlando, I think she was born in Connecticut, but yeah. So she is an Orlandoian, I suppose.

00;26;44 - 00;26;5

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Just briefly, because there is obviously different ways in which journalists could practice, whether it is newspapers, radio, TV, like, why did you decide radio?

00;26;59 - 00;27;42

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Well, when I started my degree, I wanted to be a newspaper journalist because I enjoyed reading. I enjoyed the writing aspect of it, like the journalists that I was reading were kind of writers. So I thought that would be a good thing to pursue. But the school I went to, they had a pretty good broadcast program. So I really enjoyed the television kind of component of the degree I did. And I applied for a bunch of different jobs and newspapers, TV stations and radio stations. I ended up just getting a job at a radio station. And, yeah, it has been fantastic. I mean, that has been where I landed and that is where I have stayed since then.

00;27;42 - 00;27;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did you find out or learned when you finally worked in a radio station that convinced you to stay and not still kind of pursue that newspaper goal?

00;27;51 - 00;29;20

MATTHEW PEDDIE: The thing about radio is it has some elements to it that is a little more nimble in television. You do not have to worry about the pictures. Although these days everybody is kind of a multimedia reporter, so you do have to think about pictures. But you can convey a story pretty evocatively with radio in a way that sometimes you just cannot do with television, because if you are telling a story and you are telling a compelling manner, you can

really put somebody in that story and kind of bring them with you. And there is still an element of creativity in the way you script a story, like you kind of bring somebody along the story. I mean, obviously it is journalism. So we are not talking about creativity with the facts, but creativity in the way you craft a story, put it together, and present it. And I think that is the kind of most compelling thing about radio. To me, if you are listening to a good radio program, and it has got you hooked, there is nothing you want to do other than listen to that story all the way to the end. And I think you can get elements of that in print and television journalism, but it is not quite the same. I think there is something about the imagination of that kind of connection be able to tell a story and have somebody sort of speak that story to you, or listen to that story and, kind of be able to sort of imagine what is going on and sort of picture in your mind that makes radio a pretty powerful medium.

00;29;20 - 00;29;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Well said. So after spending five years in New Zealand working at that radio station, you then finally left and came to the United States in 2010. First question, in what ways did your perceptions about the US or Florida change once you settled here permanently?

00;29;45 - 00;31;20

MATTHEW PEDDIE: That is a good question. The thing about America is it has got a very big footprint everywhere in the world. Like culturally, like American culture is huge. I remember growing up in New Zealand and watching American television shows like Chips or The Dukes of Hazzard or 21 Jump Street, some of those shows which probably before your time, but they were pretty popular in New Zealand in the 80s. So I kind of had that notion of America like, "this is what it was like," when I was a student, like both in high school and in college. Like I had some teachers in high school, particularly who were pretty interested in kind of teaching American literature. So I was familiar with that and American films and culture. So it was kind of like I had this idea of America before I got here. I mean, Florida, though, is kind of its own thing. First of all, coming from a temperate place like New Zealand, where you got four seasons, you can go skiing in winter time, and it was kind of cool and mild, to Florida, which is subtropical, that was a big adjustment. So there is that. Orlando itself has grown a lot in the time that I have been here. But even in 2010 it felt a lot more like a real city like a cosmopolitan place where people sort of come and mingle and you have a lot of different cultures kind of blended together. So that was quite different. Honestly, I am still trying to understand Florida and I am not sure that I ever will, even though I have been here for almost fifteen years now.

00;31;20 - 00;31;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Some people spend their whole lives trying to understand Florida. Yeah, it is a very interesting and complicated place. Despite you living in Orlando, you worked, and still work, I think, in Tampa at the public radio station, WUSF. So talk to me about that, how did you get involved with them with that radio station?

00;31;48 - 00;32;49

MATTHEW PEDDIE: So, that was really a connection I had with the news director there and some of the other folks who work there. So the world of public media is I think the world of the

media in general is fairly small and insular. Like if you are a reporter in Orlando, you will bump into people from different radio and TV stations and newspapers all the time. So kind of developing some of those professional relationships with some of the other journalists in the public media sphere in Florida. We worked fairly closely with my old station, used to be WMFE, now it is Central Florida Public Media, with the folks at WUSF and Tampa and an opportunity came up. It is a bigger station. They just had a little more resources. And it was a group of colleagues that I was interested in and working with and just sort of seeing a different part of the station, just kind of pursuing that angle, really.

00;32;49 - 00;32;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you initially started with WMFE here in Orlando?

00;32;52 - 00;33;04

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yes. I started working for WMFE back in 2012. So from 2012 through 2022 I worked at WMFE.

00;33;04;20 - 00;33;08;07

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Oh, okay. So it has been a recent change to go to WUSF.

00;33;08;07 - 00;33;11;20

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, I have been at WUSF for three years now.

00;33;11 - 00;33;22

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Okay. Interesting. I am curious well, first of all, what type of stories were you reporting on?

00;33;23 - 00;35;12

MATTHEW PEDDIE: A lot of variety. We covered a lot of politics, a lot of kind of arts and culture. A little bit of history from time to time. Some business stories, music. When I was at WMC, I hosted a show called "Intersection," which started out as a half hour once a week show, expanded into a twice a week show, an hour long, had like live call-in elements. We would get bands into the station to perform. I always enjoyed that kind of hearing from musicians and hearing the music, and Florida has always been a fairly important state politically, so any time it came to it like a gubernatorial election or president election, like a lot of eyes across the country were on Florida and of course, the world. So, yeah, you cannot really escape politics. It was pretty consequential either way. And really kind of continue those themes in my job WUSF, although one of the things we have really been focused on in the last couple of years is growth, because, as you know, living in Orlando, like the growth here is pretty phenomenal. It really accelerated since 2020, at the start of the pandemic, a lot of folks started to move to Florida, and it just has not really stopped. Like if you look at Orlando, for example there is a lot of places around the city where you may have had like a tract of like farmland or orange groves, and now it is just wall to wall houses, and you just see that across the state. So that is kind of a story that continues to unfold. Like how do you manage that? How do you kind of make sure that folks can get a good standard of living the more and more people that move here?

00;35;12 - 00;35;21

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What were some of your more memorable programs that you have produced?

00;35;21 - 00;37;28

MATTHEW PEDDIE: That is a good question. I have produced so many, it is kind of hard for me to keep them all straight, but, yeah, we have produced some pretty good kind of political coverage, I think. Like I said, I have always enjoyed highlighting some of the cultural aspects musicians, who make their home in Orlando and Florida. I just like hearing people's stories. It is hard to pinpoint one, really. I mean, there was a lot of a lot of stuff happening in Central Florida and the Tampa Bay region and a lot of stories to tell and enjoy.

I mean, just as a random kind of example of a story. I remember one time, this is back at WMFE probably about ten years ago now, I went out to do a story about gopher tortoises. So it was kind of like a development story, almost kind of a combo of development and environmental. And I went out with a biologist who was trying to figure out where the gopher tortoises were, so they could sort of figure out a way to make sure they were not harmed in the development. And they had a backhoe because these gopher tortoises, they are pretty incredible animals, they are what they call a keystone species, so other animals can make use of their habitat. So they dig these incredible burrow systems. And so this biologist was like, "Okay, we are going to dig down here and see if we can find this gopher tortoise and relocate it." So he started digging and he dug and dug and dug, and I think he was probably about sort of five or six feet down this massive crater. He was like, "No, we are still going to keep going." So they just gave up at a certain point, like we cannot find the tortoise, this burrow system was too extensive. So that was just kind of an interesting insight into the ecology of Florida and how that is changing. And that is kind of a growth story as well, because I think they were looking at developing a road through there or something or might have been a subdivision, but either way, you have these stories that kind of revolve around the intersection of developments and the natural world.

00;37;28 - 00;37;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. That is interesting. What was something about Florida or Orlando or even Tampa now that you are at WUSF, that you did not know prior to working as a radio producer, covering all these stories?

00;37;52 - 00;39;15

MATTHEW PEDDIE: That is a great question. Every day I learn something new. I think one thing is I did not realize how intense of hurricane season would be and how important that coverage can be. I mean, last year, for example, 2024 was a pretty terrible hurricane season for the Tampa Bay region specifically. I know Orlando got quite a bit of flooding as well. So there were some neighborhoods in Orlando that got hit hard, but going through that and seeing some of the devastation to these communities and realizing that in some cases their radio, whether it was public radio or other radio stations that were on, it was the only way that people in the storm had of connecting with things and figuring out what was going on. So that has been an eye opener, just sort of realizing that there is this utility to radio, specifically public radio, that other media does not really have because when the internet goes down, you cannot connect to

your favorite news website or whatever it is. If you have got a radio, though, you can keep listening. And if your radio station still has power, like we have backup generators and whatnot, it is a pretty important way to get information out there. And it can be really vital for folks in the storm and then in the aftermath too when they are trying to contemplate clean up and figure out what is safe to do, what is not safe to do. So that was been an education.

00;39;15 - 00;39;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. You know, in what ways has—now that you have spent three years working in the Tampa Bay region but living in Orlando for ten plus—in what ways are the two areas different and similar?

00;39;34 - 00;40;51

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Each area I think has its own culture. There are some similarities. You can drive through some neighborhoods, and you are like, “this could be a neighborhood on the outskirts of Orlando, could be a neighborhood on the outskirts of Tampa,” and you would not really know. But, I mean, Tampa being a kind of a seaside location having the bay there is pretty important part of the heritage and the culture and people's identity, like the beaches are very important to folks, economically and as a source of pride. Tampa Bay is just very big, and it is hard to wrap your arms around it, both in terms of trying to drive from one end to the other and just sort of trying to get a handle on all the different cultures that make up the place. I mean, you look at the city of Tampa itself, like Ybor City, for example, got a very specific kind of identity to it that is really unique and quite different from anywhere in Orlando. And I am still learning a lot of stuff about Tampa Bay. I mean, there are parts of Tampa Bay that I have not visited yet would like to get to, and it is going to take me a long time to get around all of it.

00;40;51 - 00;41;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your experience and perspective being in Florida for fifteen years, how has Florida changed since 2010?

00;41;00 - 00;41;41

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, I think just the population growth has been the biggest change and the physical changes to the landscape. If you drive around Orlando, out towards the airport, you will see these neighborhoods getting built where before there was farmland. So, I mean, the way it looks is different. The traffic on the road is different. I-4 which I spent quite a lot of time driving on, is always interesting. You see a lot of things on the road that probably should not be there. Yeah. So the traffic. The folks moving in here, the busyness of the place, I think is probably the biggest change.

00;41;41 - 00;41;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What challenges does Orlando or Florida face today?

00;41;45 - 00;43;19

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I think those challenges are just related to growth. Like what kind of jobs are people going to be able to get? Because there is a pretty big component of the economy which revolves around tourism and hospitality. And there are some really good jobs to be had there. But there are also some jobs that do not pay a lot. And sustaining the quality of life for

people on low incomes is challenging. There is not a massive safety net in terms of if you are struggling, like how do you get by?

I think transportation is another huge challenge. If you are fortunate to live on a bus line, that is great. You know, for example, if you live on one of the bus routes that goes to the airport, for a couple of bucks, you can get to the airport, and that is fantastic. You do not have to pay for parking. So that is wonderful. But if you do not, you could spend half a day just getting from A to B and that is tough, especially in this climate. Like waiting at a bus stop with no shade in the rain, in the heat, that is very challenging. So I think that is a problem that Orlando and a lot of places in Florida have to solve. Like if you look at the sprawl of the place, I am just looking at a map over here on the wall. I mean there is a lot of growth in Orlando. There sometimes neighborhoods going up where it is going to be hard for you if you do not have a car to get around. So it is not a new problem. But it is definitely not an issue that that has been solved. I am not sure what is going to happen there. It is going to be interesting to see.

00:43:19 - 00:43:31

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. And speaking of the present day and as someone that has extensive experience in public media, what is the state of public media?

00:43:31 - 00:45:34

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I mean, I think the state of media in general is a little challenging. It is quite fragmented. There is a level of trust that has been lost for one reason and another. And public media is no different from any other media in trying to build back that trust. I think the choices that people have now, in terms of where they get their information from is pretty diverse. But not all those choices are good. Like, you can consume a lot of information from a certain bubble, and that may not be good information you are getting. So in public media and any reputable source of media, the goal is always to make sure that you are putting out information that is going to be useful, and you can verify it, and it is factual, and it is something that somebody can use to make good choices and can kind of help them influence their life in a positive way. And like if you just look at the media ecosystem, how to sustain it is a challenge that has not been solved. How do you pay for the journalism that you produce, and I think newspapers have sort of been wrestling with that problem for a lot of years now, and they have not quite figured that out. Public media still has that kind of funding model where we go on the air every so often and I ask people to support us, and that seems to be still working, and it is fairly durable. And it is interesting because you see newspapers adopting that too, like the Orlando Sentinel and others will say, look, this is a vital thing. They are not relying on subscriptions alone anymore because that those have dwindled. So they are saying, okay, there are other ways you can support this journalism. And I think it is important to have a thriving system of news where there is more than one outlet because there are a lot of stories to be told and a lot of officials to be held to account. And if there are not people paying attention to it, then some things are going to slip through the cracks.

00:45:34 - 00:45:55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Well said. I am curious whether in your time here in WMFE or in the Tampa Bay region, have you received any feedback? You know, listeners calls, listener letters, can you just share some examples if you have received any?

00:45:55 - 00:47:28

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah, I mean, people definitely talk to us about the stories they heard that resonated with them. I have had a few listener emails talking about my accent and saying, “why is somebody from New Zealand telling me the news? I would rather you speak with an American accent,” but that is pretty few and far between. I am trying to think of some specific examples of people reaching out, but yeah, people do. I think people appreciate it when you spend a bit of time on an issue and dig into it and try and explain what is going on. Like, for example, the year before last, we did a series at WUSF, called “Our Changing State,” where we tried to kind of tackle some of those elements of growth and development and transportation and things like that. And we got some good feedback on that from people saying, “glad you dug into the subject because it is important. It is going to help me think about some of the challenges of transportation.” Before that, I mean, one of the other subjects we have tackled both when I was at WMFE, now Central Florida Public Media, and WUSF, was the issue of housing and people who are unhoused. And so we have had some good feedback on that too, from folks saying, “look, I really did not realize necessarily the magnitude of the problem. And that has helped me kind of think about this issue and how we can maybe try and fix it in terms of homelessness.”

00:47:28 - 00:47:39

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Thanks for sharing. Yeah. And that is even striking that you received even though if it was a few, about your accent. That is very strange.

00:47:39 - 00:47:45

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Yeah. I mean, like I was saying, I think I remember that because it was unusual.

00:47:45 - 00:47:56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how do you think Orlando or Central Florida will change in the next fifteen years, let's say, because you have been here for fifteen?

00:47:56 - 00:49:22

MATTHEW PEDDIE: I mean, I would hope that we would see some changes in terms of, like a more robust public transit infrastructure, for example, like some of the things that can really support the population growth. I am not sure that the change is going to be any different from what we have seen in the last three years. I think the growth is going to continue. I do not see anybody saying Florida is no longer a good place to move to. I mean, I know there are some challenges here, like housing and hurricanes to deal with, but it is still a very popular state to move to. The fact that there is no state income tax is a huge driver for folks. The weather when there is not a hurricane happening is a big deal as well. The fact that we have the theme parks here. I mean, Orlando is a pretty big kind of transportation hub. So there are a lot of good things about Florida and about Central Florida that are going to keep attracting people to the state and to this region. And I think it is up to local leaders to figure out the best way to kind of grow sustainably and make sure that folks can achieve the dreams that they want to come here, like the “American Dream” of a good life and be able to raise your family and support them and give back to your community in a way that is sustainable.

00;49;22 - 00;49;3

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your New Zealand heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Central Florida specifically?

00;49;30 - 00;50;42

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Well, I think New Zealanders are fairly adaptable, and like I was saying, my family traveled around a bit and was interested in kind of different cultures and seeing different parts of the world. So I think that has helped me adapt a little bit. I am not sure that I am completely at ease with the climate here. I still struggle with the hot summer going from the blazing heat to the freezing cold air conditioning is something I do not think I am ever going to get used to. But I think that adaptability as help me out. Even if you speak the language of the country you move to, in my case moving here, it was obviously very different from moving to Japan and having to learn the language, you still have to kind of figure out the culture of the place. And there are some things that like, as I was saying earlier, it is a learning process that I think is just continuous, like Florida is changing. Even when you think you have got a handle on it, it is probably going to be different next year anyway. So I think you do have to kind of keep that adaptability and sort of be nimble in your approach and accept that things are not necessarily going to be the way you think they were a couple of years ago.

00;50;42 - 00;50;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording fifty or a hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;50;52 - 00;51;54

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Wow, that is a tough one. My culture, I mean, hopefully they will kind of listen to this and think that somebody from New Zealand is sort of open to the world and open to new ideas and travel and willing to try new things. And as far as Florida itself, I think it just feels like a state that is constantly changing. And I think that is kind of the story of the United States, too. It just has this immense possibility here. Like there are challenges, but there is so much potential in this state. And I think there are a lot of folks who want good things for Florida and hopefully in fifty years Florida will have realized some of that potential and it will still be a good place to move to, and there will still be a good reason for people to want to move here and set down roots here.

00;51;55 - 00;52;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Matthew, thank you for taking some time out of your day to speak with me and share your life story. I really appreciate it.

00;52;01 - 00;52;03

MATTHEW PEDDIE: Thank you. Sebastian. Appreciate it.