

P: We are in West Palm Beach, Florida, in the offices of Marshall Edison Rinker, Sr. I am doing an oral history interview with him for the University of Florida Oral History Archives. Today is March 9, 1990, and I am Sam Proctor doing the interviewing. I am going to start off, Mr. Rinker, by asking you something about you, your family, and your background. I am curious as to where that Edison in your name came from.

R: My mother thought that the name Edison would be a good name for me to have as a child, because he was coming out with electric lights and all of that around the same time I was born in 1904.

P: Other than that, were you named for anybody? I see you are a senior.

R: I was named after an old-time doctor who had a long beard. His name was Dr. Marshall, and he was well known in the area. I was going to be a doctor at one time, too.

P: Is that where the "Doc" comes from?

R: That is where the "Doc" came from originally. I was known as the "Doc from Cowan," a town of 200.

P: Where were you born?

R: Near Cowan, Indiana.

P: On a farm?

R: On a farm.

P: When were you born?

R: December 8, 1904.

P: Locate Cowan for me.

R: It is near Muncie, and Muncie is sixty miles from Indianapolis. Indianapolis would be sixty miles southwest of Cowan.

P: What was your father's name?

R: Jacob E. *E* stood for Elva.

P: And how about your mother?

R: Alberta Mae.

P: What was her maiden name?

R: Her maiden name was Neff.

P: How did your family get to Indiana? Where were they from?

R: The original family--not my father and mother--moved west from Pennsylvania.

P: Where in Europe did they originally come from?

R: They came from what was once Germany--today it is Switzerland. It is a town near Zurich named Holder. There are Rinkers there today in the building material business, and they have come to see me twice.

P: They are your cousins, or something along that line. What drew the family to Indiana? Land? Farming?

R: Farming, I suppose. They came west because it was level land, with no mountains like in Pennsylvania. Indiana, of course, was named after Indians. We used to go hunting and find Indian clubs, flints, and that sort of things in the forest or along the streams. So they came there to be farmers, and the land had to be cleared. It was solid timber--hardwood. They cleared it and built there. Their original houses were built out of logs.

P: What did your father grow on his farm?

R: It was what you would call general farming. He had corn, wheat, rye, and hay. Of course, that went with the cattle. We raised cattle; we had maybe five to seven cattle all the time. We had some sheep. We raised about forty hogs at a time, and every four months we got another sow to turn on. That is the way you run your business. So it was a balanced farm.

P: You ate off the farm, of course.

R: We lived off the farm. We had meat, meat, meat: we had chicken, chicken, chicken; we had beef, beef, beef; and we had pork, pork, pork. But we were always short on green vegetables.

P: How far were you from town?

R: We were five miles from Muncie.

P: Is that where you went to school?

R: I went to Ball State [University in Muncie, Indiana].

P: I am talking about elementary school and high school.

R: I went to Cowan through eighth grade.

P: How did you get into town?

R: An urban line went by our farm and took us to town. It cost a dime to get to town.

P: And you went in every morning?

R: Well, I went to school five days a week, and I later worked five days a week at General Motors.
That was sixty hours a week.

P: How about your brothers and sisters?

R: I had a brother who was three years older than I was. [His name was Lossie.]

P: Is that Joseph?

R: No, he is my younger brother. Joe is eleven years younger. I had four sisters, and one sister is still living. [Syble--Deceased 1/22/91] She is ninety-four, and her husband is ninety-four. I went out there and spent almost a year with them when they lived in Brewster, Washington.

P: What kind of a childhood did you have, Mr. Rinker?

R: I would say it was a happy childhood. Everybody came to our house, and we rode horseback, we played croquet, we played baseball, we went fishing together. Anyplace the family went, the children went. We all played cards together, we played dominos together--old and young. That is the way all the farmers get together once in awhile.

P: Was it a religious family?

R: Yes, we had to go to church.

P: What church?

R: Christian Church, we called it.

P: Was your mother the kind of person who could persuade you to do that?

R: She made persuasion, and Dad used a razor strap. [laughter]

P: What kind of work did you do on the farm?

R: Anything and everything that had to be done. See, I was a little runt, and both of my brothers were big. I, being small, always liked to get an easy job, so I milked the cows. The reason I milked the cows is I could sit down, and in the winter I was out of the snow and ice. I forgot about the manure I had to throw out.

P: What kinds of things did you do for fun growing up?

R: Well, like I told you: fishing and hunting.

P: You liked to do those things?

R: Oh, yes. All kids like to do that.

P: What about ice skating in the winter?

R: I skated all over the place. Ice would get on the highway, and we would skate right down the highway until the ice melted.

P: So you went to school every day, five days a week, but you also had a lot of farm chores.

R: Lots of farm chores.

P: And a close-knit family, obviously.

R: Yes. We always played and sang. The girls played the piano, and everybody sang.

P: You never went hungry? It was a family that could sustain itself?

R: We were never hungry. We did not have a balanced diet like we have today, but we always had plenty to eat.

P: But there were some hard times for farmers in the Midwest, certainly before the First World War.

R: Oh, some were very poor.

P: You went through that terrible recession in 1907 and 1908.

R: The farm was in trouble one time, and the best we could get for the farm was \$4,000. Of course, later I bought it for much more than that.

P: How large was the farm?

R: Very large. It was eighty acres that were cleared, and then we bought forty acres more. We never cleared all of that, and we finally sold it. So we ended up with an eighty-acre farm.

P: Was that about the normal size?

R: That was the normal size. There were no tractors in those days. Tractors came much later.

P: But you said that you had transportation for the commodities your father was shipping to market or sending into Cowan or Muncie.

R: The produce went to the little town of Cowan. Every town had an elevator, and they could buy anything. Farmers shipped their hogs there, their wheat, or whatever they had to sell; it was all sold through the elevator--hogs, sheep, cows, etc. We sold milk for eight cents per quart to the grocery.

P: Obviously, your father made a living from it. He did not have any other work to do outside the farm, did he?

R: No, everything was farming. Well, we paid our taxes by hauling gravel on the road, and he did drive the school bus. He took the kids to school, so he made a little bit on the side in the winter. See, there is not much you can do on a farm in the winter.

P: So he was, obviously, a hard-working man, too.

R: Right. He got up at 4:00 in the morning, every morning.

P: Is that where you get all your good habits from?

R: Well, it gets me up in the morning. I get up at 5:30 in the morning now.

P: Did I hear you say you worked for General Motors up there?

R: Yes, at a General Motors plant--Muncie Products.

P: What did you do?

R: Well, I was an inspector--my number was four; I can remember that to this day--and I inspected steering gear assemblies. My job was to turn it to see if it was loose so it would run--not too loose or not too tight. If it was okay, I put a number four on it and hit it with a hammer.

P: How much did they pay you?

- R: I think we got about thirty cents an hour, and we worked twelve hours a night.
- P: Thirty cents an hour was good pay for those days, right?
- R: Yes, it was very good. That was night work, too.
- P: That may have been because of the upgrading of wages that Henry Ford was responsible for.
- R: Well, see, in the early days, this was before they had all the fights and strikes. Henry Ford became famous as the promoter of the five-dollar day. Then everybody went to Detroit.
- P: Was the plant in Muncie large?
- R: It had about 2,000 employees.
- P: That is a big plant. How old were you when you went to work there?
- R: I was out of high school, and I was going to college part-time. When I first went there I worked in the shop. That is when I was pretty young.
- P: Well, you had to be, because you were born in 1904, and you came to Florida in 1925, so it is during that interval. You could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen years old.
- R: I was pretty young. When I was about thirteen years of age I went to Washington state after the First World War to live with my sister and brother-in-law. My [future] brother-in-law was [stationed] at Fort [Benjamin] Harrison [near Indianapolis]; he was a captain in the artillery. He became acquainted with my sister, and they got married and moved to Washington state.
- P: And you went out to live with them for a year.
- R: I have a picture of when my family and I drove out there in a Dodge. That thing would go fifty miles an hour, and that was quite fast. We camped out every night. See, there were no signs on the highway or anything like that in those days. We followed the Yellowstone Trail, but the Yellowstone Trail would be just a mark on a tree maybe every ten miles or so, so if you did not see the tree, you did not know where you were. We would drive early and late, and we averaged about 200 miles a day. We cooked out at night; we would shoot jackrabbits or cottontails or birds and cook our own meals. Sometimes we slept in a barn. Once in a while we found a motel that had a place where you could go in and cook and take a bath.
- P: But they were few and far between.

R: There were no paved roads.

P: You just followed what really amounted to a country road.

R: Well, they were traveled. Some of them were mud, but most of it was gravel. They were one-way roads in the mountains, always one-way roads.

P: You went to Ball State Teachers College?

R: Yes.

P: What year was that?

R: Oh, that had to be when I came back from Washington.

P: About 1920?

R: You have me there. It was before I came to Florida.

P: You came to Florida in 1923?

R: I came in 1925, so it was along between 1923 and 1924 when I went to Ball State.

P: Why did you not stay and finish your work there?

R: I was a dreamer, see. I wanted to see the world. I loved geography, I loved history, and I loved anything that was different from what we had in Indiana. That is why I went to Washington state, to see those mountains and the Columbia River. We did not have any rivers in Indiana. The biggest thing there was Buck Creek, and that was about as wide as this room. That went into the White River, and that was a little bigger. The White River runs through Indianapolis, then into the Wabash, then into the Ohio, and then into the Mississippi.

P: But you had to go a long way before you got to the Mississippi!

R: I read a lot about Tom Sawyer and what he and Huck Finn did on the river, and how he got other people to paint the fence. I must have read that ten times.

P: I did, too.

R: How he got people to work for him is something I have never forgotten.

P: Do you remember the wonderful trip that Huckleberry Finn took down the river on the raft?

R: I sure do.

P: Was your mother very pleased about your leaving Ball State without finishing?

R: No, that did not bother her much. She encouraged me to go to school, but she also knew I had wanderlust in my veins. We went to Washington state again when I got out of high school. We saved our money and bought a Model T Ford. There were three of us who paid for that car. That thing would go about thirty miles an hour wide open. If you went any faster than that, it would boil over. So we went out and worked in the apple harvest, and we went up to Seattle. Then we went down to Oregon and worked some more. We went to California and worked in the orange groves packing fruit. We went to Tijuana, Mexico. We thought there would be a road from Tijuana to El Paso; we did not know there was not road down there. We went about thirty miles, and that was the end of the road.

P: Who is this we? You and friends, or you and your brothers?

R: This was me, a fellow by the name of "Westy," and a fellow (who's father owned the drug store where I worked), Bob Whinry. He got cold feet and homesick, and he came back from Washington. So "Westy" and I and one other fellow by the name of McDonald [finished out the trip]. He did not have any money, and I did not know that. But he was not worth a cuss anyway.

P: Well, none of you had very much.

R: No, we did not. But I used to wear two pairs of socks and carry my money between them.
[laughter]

P: Particularly when you went to Tijuana.

R: Oh, yes. You bet.

P: Tijuana could not have been any more than just a little village at that time.

R: That was in the days of the famous bandit, [Francisco] "Pancho" Villa. He was around there with all of his guys.

P: His widow died just three years ago, and someone was able to get her on a videotape interview. She was visiting a daughter in El Paso in the early 1980s. She was a woman in her early nineties, but she still had clear memories of her husband and of some of those activities on the border in 1917. [General John] Pershing sent those American forces down there to get things settled down.

R: I will tell you one thing about him. We had a fraternity brother who was a newspaper man, and he

went down to cover that story. They kidnapped him and kept him. When I went down there--this fellow's name was John McFee and we tried to find him. They turned him loose, and when I came back, of course, I was a hero down there looking after John. I had no idea whether I might get my head cut off or what.

P: Were you in a fraternity in college?

R: Well, it was Kappa Alpha Phi. It was kind of a combination college/high school thing.

P: What attracted you to Florida?

R: Reading all about the wonders of Florida in the *Saturday [Evening] Post*, and [seeing] the pictures of the boom. Muncie was a place where everybody worked every day and did not do anything very exciting. So, again, we got into the Model T Ford with a fellow who later turned out to be my father-in-law. He had a Ford agency that went bankrupt.

P: In Muncie?

R: Oakville. See, there is a town every two miles in Indiana. So he picked up a Model T Ford, put a canvas top on it, a tool box on the back of it--he was a mechanic--and we took off for Florida by way of Washington [DC] because we were afraid to go through the mud in the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky. It took us eight days, driving early and late, to get to Florida.

P: It took you eight days from Washington, or eight days from Indiana?

R: It was eight days from Indiana to Washington down to Florida. Even then, we got stuck in the mud in Georgia. We were on the bottom of a hill and could not get up the hill. There was a man with a team of horses, and he pulled us up the hill for one dollar. That was a lot of money just to pull us up the hill, but was a matter of, Do you want to get up the hill or not?

P: When you got into Florida, did you come by way of Jacksonville and St. Augustine?

R: We came on that narrow brick road.

P: The old Dixie Highway had opened then.

R: It was about eight feet wide.

P: Yes, and it was brick.

R: Yes. That only ran a little ways out.

P: It was mainly graded from there on in. Tell me about the trip from Jacksonville down to Delray

Beach.

R: We started early in the morning because we wanted to get here early. We left at 6:00, and I think we got to Delray about 11:00 that night. I remember the passenger trains were going by, and people were riding on the tops of the cars because they could not get inside. Even as slow as we went in that Model T, we beat the train. The train ran as much as a day late; they were a day behind time because they were loaded so and made slow time.

P: Everybody was trying to come to Florida and become rich.

R: Everybody was coming to Florida. I saw my first \$1,000 bill in Florida.

P: When you got to Delray Beach, you did not have a job, did you?

R: I did not have a job. I borrowed twenty-five dollars from my brother-in-law in the Farmland Bank to get to Florida. Of course, it took us longer than we thought, so I ran out of money, and my father-in-law-to-be had to loan me money to make it down here.

P: Was he about your age?

R: No. He was to be my father-in-law.

P: I understand, but he could not have been much older than you.

R: Well, he was older than I was. He was almost old enough to be have been my father. He died when he was about fifty-two.

P: What brought him to Florida?

R: The same thing. He went broke up there, and there was a boom down here, so he came down to open up a garage.

P: Just the two of you made the trip?

R: That is right. There were two bucket seats in that little Model T Ford.

P: How much was gas in those days?

R: Ten cents a gallon.

P: Where did you buy it?

R: Along the road.

P: There were not many filling stations along the road.

R: No, but there was always one. There was a nine-gallon tank on that Ford, but it did not burn much.

P: Did you have any blowouts?

R: I have forgotten now, but I remember we had a couple of spares. We had to patch them; they had tubes, and you had to rubber patch them.

P: How fast would that car go?

R: Well, wide open it would go maybe thirty-five, but if you went that fast the thing would boil over and spray all over us. We went maybe twenty-five to twenty-eight miles per hour.

P: Did you have a windshield?

R: There was a little one, but it went over the top.

P: So you had no way to protect yourself, then.

R: That is right. There were mosquitoes everywhere! I wondered what those people were building those fires for out there. It was hot, and they had those fires. What they were doing was getting in the smoke to stay away from the mosquitoes. We found that out at Fort Pierce. We stopped and were going into the restaurant, but we could not get in because it was full. Man, we just quit. We got back into our car without anything to eat all the way to my sister's house in Delray.

P: Oh, I did not know you had a sister living in Delray.

R: I had a sister and a brother-in-law who, just like us, came down to Delray to represent a firm from up north. It was a contracting business.

P: So you had relatives here to come to and a place to stay, then?

R: We stayed just two nights with them. They had been here only six months. But half of the state of Indiana was in Florida. In Fort Lauderdale there were as many Indiana tags as there were Florida tags, and Delray was the same way. There were lots of Hoosiers. Carl Fisher, who opened the Indianapolis Speedway [in 1909], had a big development down here.

P: He is the man who developed all of that Miami Beach area.

R: And Coral Gables.

- P: Well, he did not build Coral Gables. George Merrick did that.
- R: But Fisher was one of the early birds.
- P: Oh, he was one of the big promoters at Miami Beach. He built the Roney Plaza [Hotel] and Lincoln Road.
- R: He went broke.
- P: Well, he did go broke, yes. I think his wife, Jane Fisher, just died in the last ten or twelve years. George Merrick, the Coral Gables man, went broke, too.
- R: One of those men who was the president of one of those big developments (I have forgotten his name) came to me five years after that and wanted a job. I said, "You cannot drive a truck," but he said, "I can do anything if I get money to eat on."
- P: George Merrick, who was this multi-millionaire Coral Gables developer, ended up being the postmaster. That was the only job he could get.
- R: They used to run these Coral Gables buses and bring them down free on those buses.
- P: And William Jennings Bryan was one of the land promoters for them.
- R: Right.
- P: What did Delray Beach look like when you arrived in 1925?
- R: First, you have to remember the mosquitoes. They were most impressive. Delray was the size of around 1,500 or 3,000. It was very small.
- P: Had the boom already begun to move up into that area? Was there already some real estate development going on?
- R: Oh, that is why I told you that is the first time I ever saw a \$1,000 bill. One of our friends from Indiana was there. He sold a piece of land, and the man gave him a \$1,000 bill as a deposit. He sold it, and he took that \$1,000 and put it on a Moon sports car, which looked like a Stutz. He bought that car, and he would haul around all the boys from Indiana. Six months later, they repossessed the car. [laughter]
- P: Well, the boom really started in the Miami area, and then it began to move up the east coast and on into the central part of the state. It even got as far north as Jacksonville and over to Pensacola.

- R: And of course St. Petersburg. You see, the FEC--Florida East Coast Railroad--developed this part; that was Mr. [Henry M.] Flagler. On the west coast was Henry Plant.
- P: Henry Plant developed the Plant system, which after his death became the Atlantic Coastline Railroad [later Seaboard Coastline Railroad].
- R: That is right.
- P: Mr. [William D.] Chipley built the area out in the Panhandle--the L & N Railroad. But it was really Plant and Flagler who were the big promoters here. Plant had made his money in the Southern Express Company, and he brought it to Florida. He built the hotels. Flagler did the same thing. What kind of a job did you get when you first arrived at Delray?
- R: I think the first job I got was in a drug store, because I had worked in a drug store and I had to go to work right away. See, I had no money, so I went to work in a drug store.
- P: Were you a soda jerk?
- R: Yes, that is right.
- P: You had worked in a drug store as a kid up in Indiana doing the same thing?
- R: When I was going to school I was working mornings and nights--before and after school. And I thought I would learn a little bit about being a doctor. I had a friend, and he and I were going to be doctors. He got rich, and I got broke. [laughter] He was killed later. He was a trumpet player, and he had a band they called "The Crimson Serenaders" at Indiana University. He went to Europe on a boat. He became famous and did everything you do when you get famous, and you are young and foolish. He bought himself a sports car. The last thing that happened to him happened when he was coming home for a visit: he hit a concrete bridge and broke his neck. That was the end of my doctor's career. Jim Collier was his name, like the Colliers over on the west coast.
- P: Maybe he was related to the Barron [G.] Collier family.
- R: No, there is no relation. His folks were Scotch. His father used to work in a little factory, and he walked three and a half miles to work every day, and he got two dollars a day. His mother wore thick glasses, and he had a sister. They were frugal, honest, and hard-working people. Sometimes I would go over there to spend the night, and we would sleep in a little balcony upstairs. I had to bend over to get into bed! It was a nice little house.
- P: So you go to work as a soda jerk to tide you over until you could get a real job. What was that job?

R: Next, I was working for a surveyor. I had a machete, and we had to cut down through the swamp. Oh, it was hot, and the mosquitoes about ate you up! But the pay was good; maybe I got four dollars a day, or forty cents an hour. I went to get lunch one day, and when I came back there was a big old black snake about as long as from here to over there on top of my machete. Heck, I did not know whether he was poisonous or not. I quit! So I had to get a new job. I went around looking for a new job.

On the farm I drove a gravel wagon; I loaded the gravel and put it on the highway so we could pay our taxes. So I learned how to shovel and how to load and unload the truck. I got a job where I loaded a truck and drove the truck. It was a Model T Ford, again, that carried one yard [of sand or fill].

P: Where was that job?

R: Delray.

P: Everything was in Delray so far.

R: Everything.

P: I thought you had a job in Boynton Beach.

R: Yes, but I have forgotten what it was.

P: That was right in that same period when you had first come, before you moved down to West Palm Beach.

R: Well, it could not have been much. It must have been a short job. See, I made a deal with that man for a dollar an hour or something like that. I told him that if he would pay me twenty cents a ton or whatever the load was I would do it for half price. He said: "Okay. Go ahead." Well, it seems to me that we got our pay up to eight dollars a day.

P: That is big money.

R: Gordon West ("Westy") and I were driving that truck so darn fast it was dangerous, really. He called me one day and said, "You are making more money than I am." I said, "I am doing it cheaper than you got it done before." He said, "I cannot help it. I cannot pay you." So I said, "I quit."

Then I went out and got me a second-hand Indiana truck. A fellow by the name of Deboben, who was retired from the railroad up in Pennsylvania or somewhere up there, had money, and he had a lot of land down here that he had bought cheap--for ten dollars an acre. He agreed to finance me, so he put up maybe \$300, and I put up \$200.

P: Are you still in Delray when all of this is going on?

R: I am still in Delray, and I went into the business of loading and hauling. I would say: "Do you want to buy some sand? I will haul it for you." I would haul anything for anybody: cement, brick--anything.

P: But you are working for yourself now.

R: I am working for myself. Then I bought him out. Of course, he was not making much from it.

P: Now, were you fired from a job in Delray before you went into this operation?

R: Yes. Do you remember the man who said I was making more money than he was? Well, he fired me.

P: He did not let you just resign?

R: That is right. Well, he is the one who cut my salary, and then I quit. So I was fired.

P: Well, you were making big money, though. For those times that was a lot of money.

R: That is right. We got up to where we were making twelve dollars a day.

P: Well, nobody else made money like that.

R: No. Anyway, when I make a deal, I make a deal--and you have to pay me!

P: Were you still living with your sister?

R: No. We stayed there a little bit until we got a place of our own. In fact, we slept on the floor of a warehouse for a while until they found us sleeping in there, and then we had to get out.

P: Is this still with your future father-in-law?

R: No, this is the Indiana boys. We split. His wife and my girlfriend came down, and they rented a little house.

P: When did you get married?

R: We got married November 26, 1925, the first year we came down. Her name was Vera Lea Keesling.

P: That was before you moved to West Palm Beach?

R: That is right.

P: And she is from Oakville, Indiana?

R: That is right. That was two miles from Cowan.

P: Did you get married in West Palm Beach?

R: Yes.

P: Okay. Let us get you moved from Delray up to West Palm.

R: That was the spring of 1927. See, all the banks closed in Delray. I put \$1,100 in the bank on a Friday, and the darn thing did not open on Saturday. I went down to get the money for the man to pay him, and I could not pay him. I never heard of a bank closing in all my life. I thought the bank would open Monday.

P: Do you remember the hurricane of September 1926? Not the 1928 hurricane, now, but 1926.

R: That was in Miami.

P: Yes, that hit Miami. Did you feel any fringes of it in Delray?

R: Oh, heck yeah! Yes, sir.

P: Did it bother you or anything that you had?

R: I made money on that thing. See, we hauled ice down to Miami from Delray. I would go down with a load of ice on my truck, and I would bring something back to Delray.

P: Where were you getting the ice?

R: Delray.

P: There was an ice plant in Delray?

R: That is right.

P: And you were hauling it down to Miami.

R: This was a dump truck, now; I put that ice in a dump truck. It was not like a flat truck.

P: How much were you selling it for down there?

R: Whatever I could get. Anyway, I made a little money.

P: They were desperate for anything.

R: They were desperate for anything. That was a bad mess down there.

P: Was there any physical damage to Delray?

R: Not then. In 1928 West Palm Beach and all around there was hit bad. But Miami, Hollywood, and all around there was bad in 1926. Ships were all over the place. You could not even drive down Biscayne Boulevard. In fact, they wanted to know what I was doing there with a truck, and I told them I was hauling ice.

P: The police were patrolling the highways in Miami, of course, after the hurricane, because there were so many people hurt and so much physical destruction, both in the harbor and on land.

R: It was bad.

P: The winds had blown those boats ashore along Biscayne Boulevard and in that area. Now, what motivated the move to West Palm?

R: There was nothing in Delray. There was absolutely nothing to do.

P: Why did the bank close?

R: Just like all banks: they had made loans on this real estate, and the real estate was not any good.

P: Well, the boom bubble really began bursting in the summer of 1926, and I guess the hurricane of 1926 was the death knell of it.

R: Hurricanes, in both cases, brought in insurance, and that helped things pick up a lot. Miami did it, and West Palm did in 1928. In fact, I was flat broke. They repossessed our trucks, but they could not sell them to anybody else. They came back and asked if I wanted them back, and I said sure.

P: The history books always say that Florida went into a depression in 1926, four years before the rest of the country, when the stock market crashed.

R: That is right.

P: Banks began closing all over the state, and there was unemployment. But tourists were still coming down, so I guess south Florida was doing some reconstructing after the two hurricanes.

R: Oh, yes. Rebuilding always brings a boom if you have any kind of a business. I hauled cement back up from Miami; it was brought in by ship, and I hauled that back. I would haul ice down and bring cement back.

P: You hauled ice down to Miami and brought cement back up from Miami?

R: From Fort Lauderdale. It came through there.

P: The harbor at Miami, as you remember, was blocked.

R: Yes, but Fort Lauderdale was not, so it could get into Fort Lauderdale.

P: Do you remember that ship, the *Prince Weldheim*, that sank at the mouth [of the harbor]?

R: It was a big sailing boat, and it blocked the harbor. Of course, all the boats waiting out in the ocean to come in could not. The Florida East Coast Railroad was also blocked because there was only the single line in at that time.

See, I did not spend all that much time in Miami. My base was Delray. I just went down, got my load, and came back.

P: But you loaded up at Fort Lauderdale because the harbor was clear there.

R: That is right.

P: Okay. Things are doing nothing at Delray, so you moved to West Palm.

R: There was absolutely nothing at Delray. Nobody had any money. The banks were closed and could not collect any money, so I came to West Palm Beach.

P: The situation was not much better there, was it?

R: No, but it was a bigger town than Delray. The story is that we leased a piece of land on Roseland Drive, north of Southern Boulevard, for ten dollars, and we bought a tourist cabin made out of homosote for fifteen dollars. You have seen the picture maybe where my sisters helped me unload the thing. It fell off the truck and got bent all to thunder, so we put it on the ground and took a wire and lashed it to an Australian pine tree at the side, which killed the Australian pine. We have the pictures of that tree. Then we built a bin, our first bin. I built that bin out of Australian pine. I did not know anything about an Australian pine; I thought a pine tree was a pine tree. But it collapsed and fell into a hole, breaking into a

thousand pieces, which we shoveled into the bin. See, we dug a hole at the side of the railroad tracks up here, and that bin collapsed. I wondered what was going on. I went down there, and there was my bin with all the rock in the bottom of the hole.

Right after that, the 1928 hurricane came and blew that office and the little old shop we had to kingdom come. We could not even find the pieces. We could not find the furniture of that homosote office. So I was out of business.

Then we went to work and built a new office. We borrowed on credit from Butler Brothers Lumber Company across the street. They gave me lumber, and we built a new bin. On this one I got a chain and bucket conveyor that would take the rock up to the top and dump it onto a chute which dropped it into a bin. Now came the boom from the 1928 storm. I was the only man in the town in the building material business. I hired a man to work for me for ten dollars a week, and I was supposed to get twenty-five. I did not always get it, but, being the only one in town when there was any business, I was doing okay.

The total [value of the building] permits in 1933 for Palm Beach County was \$375,000. That is Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, and Lake Worth. I could not pay a nine-dollar oil bill for Sinclair, and they cut my credit off. That is how bad it was.

P: Describe from your memory, Mr. Rinker, Palm Beach when you first got here. What did it look like?

R: It was very small. The population of Florida in 1925 was 1,400,000.

P: That is right. We reached a million in the 1920 census.

R: Right. So it was a small town.

P: All in the downtown area, around Olive Street?

R: At that place, on Roseland Drive, I was out in the country. Three brothers owned Butler Brothers Lumber Company. They came from St. Louis, and they were rich.

P: Of course, there were some rich people living over in Palm Beach.

R: Oh, yes. In fact, they are the ones who saved us. Joe [Joseph E.] Widener [founder of Hialeah Park Race Track] owned Hialeah. It [the depression] did not affect him. There were three big estates: Harold Vanderbilt's [American yachtsman and card enthusiast] house, Widener's, and one other one.

P: Mrs. Balsan [Harold Vanderbilt's sister]?

R: No, this was later. Anyway, that made 1928 a boom for us. Then, of course, when Roosevelt came in, he came in with his CPA and all those other [alphabet federal programs].

P: Of course, Mrs. [Marjorie Merriweather] Post had already built Mar-a-Lago. She built that in 1925 or 1926.

R: Right.

P: So there were the big estates over in Palm Beach, but that did not do much for the economy of West Palm Beach.

R: Well, it helped. It turned money loose. If you take a little bit of money when there is none, it helps. See, we sat there for two or three weeks without a single order. When we got an order, my wife would come down to answer the phone, and we would drive the truck, deliver the stuff, and come back. Then she would go back to look after the baby.

P: You were lucky you could pay the phone bill.

R: That is right. Of course, the phone bill was not much in those days.

P: Where did you live? Where was your house?

R: It was on the same street, about a block down the street on Roseland Drive. We lived in an apartment over there, too, which they moved from here to there.

P: Now, you already had your first child?

R: Yes. Marshall, that boy you met a while ago, [was our first].

P: When was he born? In the 1920s, obviously.

R: August 7, 1926.

P: So your office is there, and there was a lot of destruction in the September 1928 hurricane. Do you recall when the hurricane came, the warnings and all of that?

R: Oh, yes. My golly, everybody was scared.

P: Where were you?

R: I was at home, or wherever you go. In fact, we spent one night in a mortuary because it was a well-built building.

P: You left your house and took your wife and child there for safety.

R: Yes.

P: Did it destroy your house or the apartment building you were living in?

R: No.

P: But you say it generated some money in this area because of the insurance money coming in for reconstruction.

R: That is right, and I was the only guy in business. I got a big break.

P: How many trucks did you have? One?

R: Well, when we came to West Palm Beach we had maybe three, and that is what they repossessed. I had to get them back. We finally got up to five trucks or something like that. But, see, we would haul sand for forty cents a yard.

P: What was the name of the company in the 1920s?

R: It used to be Rinker Rock and Sand, but then we changed it to Rinker Materials.

P: And that is the name it kept for a long time after that?

R: It still goes by that name.

P: I see. So you started out with one truck, borrowed money in partnership with the man, you bought him out, and you were in business for yourself.

R: Yes. I paid him \$1,000 for his \$300.

P: So he made money on the deal.

R: Oh, yes. Of course, he did not have anything in common with me. He ended up broke, too. He took his real estate money and invested it somewhere else, and he does not have any money.

P: Everybody thought they were going to get rich in Florida, and they all ended up broke.

R: Yes. He had forty acres of land down there, and he bought himself a piece of twenty to make more money, and he went broke.

P: Everybody thought they were going to get rich.

R: I knew people where every child had a Cadillac. The Barwicks and the Sundays were the richest people in Delray. They owned lots of land. I think the Sundays had Cadillacs and the Barwicks had Lincolns. In that day, the Lincoln was a better car than the Cadillac. I think that may be true today.

P: Did they also go broke?

R: Every one of them lost everything they had.

P: In your construction business, did you ever get to meet any of these so-called "big shots" associated with the boom, like [Addison] Mizner [Palm Beach developer], for instance?

R: I will tell you about them, but let me tell you that when I was down there I worked with blacks. I shoveled, and I had a black working with me. The rich people would not speak to me; I was a common poor folk. Speaking of Mizner, you are talking about much later. I knew Addison Mizner.

P: But you were not working with him or doing any work for any of his construction?

R: Oh, no. I sold rock and sand and that sort of thing. I never met his no-account brother.

P: He was a drunk.

R: And he was a thief, a liar, and every other thing. But Addison always had good-looking women around him, so he was bad to collect from. I went over, and there was always these good-looking women.

P: Well, he also did a lot of that. He built the Everglades Club at Worth Avenue, and he had the fancy apartment upstairs off of Worth Avenue.

R: Mizner was kind of fat, and he always wore white bucks, which were dirty. [laughter]

P: But he was really some promoter.

R: Yes, he was. He sure was.

P: From construction to furniture to whatever it was that those wealthy people wanted, he gave it to them. And they loved it. He came up all the way into our area. He built a church [Riverside Baptist Church] in Jacksonville.

R: He built hotels.

P: He built the hotel at Sea Island.

R: I saw a house out in California that guy had built and lived in for a while. It might have been only one year, but it was a beautiful thing.

P: Have you been to the hotel he built at Sea Island, the Cloisters?

R: I have been to the Cloisters.

P: Well, that was his. He designed that.

R: I did not know that. We used to go there to play golf.

P: He did the initial design of that.

R: Well, that has gone to the devil, now, with all kinds of apartments.

P: That is right. The stock market crashes in 1929. Now, Florida is already down at the bottom of the barrel.

R: The stock market crash did not mean a thing to me other than there was not any money and more banks closed. Go back to those three rich people: Harold Vanderbilt, Joe Widener, and one other man. They went right ahead and built, and that was the thing that carried us through.

P: You provided the building materials?

R: We supplied the aggregates. See, all we had was rock and sand in those days.

P: Where were their estates? Over in Palm Beach?

R: Oh, yes. Well, Harold had a big house on the mainland, and his sister, Consuela Vanderbilt, had the one on the island.

P: She became Madame Balsan. She had been married to the Duke of Marlborough. Her mother married her off very early. Then she divorced him, came back, and married Balsan and lived there.

R: That is right. I met her in Paris one time.

P: She was a very beautiful woman.

R: She was tall and stately. I did not know her from Adam, but she was a good friend of a fellow I did a lot of work for. This contractor, one of our biggest customers, was Dan Wiggs. He knew

her, and we shook hands and talked. We visited in Paris. That is the only time I have ever seen her.

P: I have just seen pictures of her, and I read her book. She was a very handsome woman with a very unhappy life with the Duke of Marlborough.

R: Oh, yes. Terrible. They paid \$20 million for that marriage?

P: And he was a very cruel man.

R: [It is a shame] to sell yourself for \$20 million.

P: So they repossessed your trucks. Business was so bad you could not keep up the payments.

R: I could not pay anything.

P: And the bank came and said, "We want them back."

R: Yes, but then we got them back. We paid them fifty dollars a month--no down payment. They could not sell them to anybody because nobody had any money.

I will tell you a good story. After we got the trucks back and were back in business, we sold [building materials] to a man by the name of Joe somebody who had a hamburger stand. The bill was up to thirty-nine dollars, and he could not pay us. I said: "Okay. We will take it out in hamburgers." He said: "All right. You're on." We ate hamburgers, I tell you, until I just could not eat any more. He went broke, so he never finished paying his thirty-nine dollars. See, the hamburgers were ten cents apiece. It was a big hamburger.

P: So you went on a hamburger diet for a long time.

R: I could not eat a hamburger for five years after that. Now I love them.

P: What is this business of your borrowing \$300 on your good looks? I would like a good explanation of that. That was in 1929, and it had to do with those trucks.

R: I had to have about \$300. Maybe I wanted to get another truck. I remember going to the bank, and they wanted to know what I had for collateral. I said, "I do not have anything for collateral." This man eventually went on to Wall Street, and I saw him up there. I told him then: "You son of a gun! You would not even give me \$300 when I needed it."

P: So it was about 1930 when you started providing the rock, sand, and whatever was needed for those big mansions. Did that bail you out for a little bit?

R: The mansions bailed us out for a short time. The 1928 storm bailed us out; that rehabilitation generated lots of money.

P: I did not even think that the insurance companies paid for that kind of damage.

R: Well, they did not later. They learned better. You could not buy storm insurance.

P: It still is difficult to get storm and flood insurance in Florida today, so I was surprised to learn from you that they did as well as they did by the people in the 1928 hurricane.

R: I will tell you about insurance. I have bought insurance to have this insured and that insured. I went up north and came back home, and I went to collect on my insurance. Well, there was a \$100 deductible; of course, \$100 then was a whole lot. So I said, "I will cancel all of my insurance," and I went up north again. In the meanwhile, I had a little money and bought the Florida Theater in West Palm Beach. I was going to make money and this sort of thing. I owned that theater ten years, and I sold it for exactly the same thing I put into it because TV had come on. The only thing good I got out of it was I got to visit all the studios in California. I got to see stars like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. I could go in on their set because I was a theater operator.

P: I see. You are a big-time operator.

R: I was a wheeler-dealer. [laughter]

P: That was very good. Now, the Rinker Rock and Sand Company began to take off in 1930. Am I right?

R: The first big operation was when we got the trucks back and started to work. The second big thing was when we bought the first ready mix truck. That was a big deal. We had the first ready mix truck. It cost \$2,100.

P: Boy, that was a lot of money.

R: We hocked my wife's diamond ring to get the down payment.

P: And in 1931 I have here that you began a partnership with A. V. Hansen.

R: That is right.

P: I would like for you to tell me a little bit about Mr. Hansen, who he was, and how this partnership came about.

R: Mr. Hansen was a Dane. I think he went through fifth grade in school. He sailed out of

Copenhagen on a sailboat, came over here to Pensacola, and in some way got over here to Palm Beach some way. And he decided he wanted to stay here. He was a concrete finisher, and he was good at it. I could not finish concrete, but I could run a mixer. So we formed a partnership where I ran the mixer and he finished the concrete. One time he owned 11 percent of the company. In time he died. By the way, when I talk about that first truck, that is where it is tied to the tree. See where the top of it is? There is my sister, that is my sister, that is my sister's daughter, and that is my wife. She weighed about 90 pounds.

P: I want to get a copy of that picture if there is an extra one here in the office so I will have those pictures to take back to go along with the interview.

R: That is me at twenty-three on this new location. See, there is the new office. There is the new bin and the new office.

P: Were you in West Palm when those pictures were taken?

R: Roseland Drive.

P: And that was your first location, that ten-dollar-a-month spot that you got when you first came to West Palm.

R: Right. That is what I paid the man. But we took off fast. When we got this thing, we were the only ones in the business, and we could load a truck in three minutes. See, they dumped down at the bottom and picked it up on this thing. The only thing was you had to go on top to crank it. It had a Fairbanks-Morris one cylinder. You could crank it up, and it would go whoo whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo.

P: Life was tough in those days!

R: I would get back down, and that bucket would pick that up and throw it into a bin. We would drive under it and get a load that fast.

P: When you started out, you did not know anything about this business. You really learned by doing, right?

R: That is right. I sure did.

P: You were lucky to get some people, like this Hansen, who knew something about the business and could help you.

R: That is right. Sure. We built a foundation for Hugh Delman, who was president of the Everglades Club. He married a Dodge. He had built a log cabin out here, and, boy, it was all painted up fine. But he did not have enough sense to put a foundation under it, so it all rotted down

underneath. So we jacked that thing up and poured a footing under that. And we built a bridge. Now, what do you think I knew about building a bridge? We built a concrete bridge across the canal about as wide as from here to over there. I put railroad irons in there and poured concrete on it. Well, you could have run a locomotive across it. But that is the kind of thing that gave us money to keep going.

P: In other words, you got some money today that helped you pay the bills tomorrow.

R: That is right.

P: Well, it was the Depression era, too, that we are coming into in the 1930s, and things were tough for everybody.

R: There is that truck again. See me on top?

P: Is that the first truck?

R: I think so. And here is the first mixer. Look. We would throw cement up here, put it in that thing, and then throw the bags in that thing. See these bags? This equipment cost \$2,100: \$1,300 for that and \$700 for that.

P: So you had \$2,100, then; you had in investment in each vehicle.

R: And we were the first guys with ready mix concrete. See, Mr. Hansen and I got rich. We first started out with a half bag at the time you mix it. That is three and one-half cubic feet. Then we got a big one: we got one bag, and it would mix seven cubic feet. Boy, we were big time. Then when we got that thing, we could deliver a yard and a half at one time. Everybody in town that had a big mixer was mad at us. They said, "You will go broke." Well, they were all buying stuff from us. See, with that mixer, we brought it all ready. There was not cement and sand and cement bags all over the ground. So I knew we had it made, and we did. In 1936, I went to Europe.

P: How did you and Hanson meet? He came in to West Palm from Pensacola.

R: I will tell you about that. That is interesting. He had a friend by the name of Jack Stevens, and they were in business together. He was doing the finishing for him. Jack decided he was going to build a boat, so he was building his homemade boat, and he charged everything to Mr. Hanson and his company. Hanson did not like that and said he was going to quit. So he quit Jack and went to work with me.

P: So Stevens was a contractor, too?

R: Stevens was a contractor, but he was an Englishman and Hansen was a Dane. Jack did not treat his

partner right. In other words, he charged everything to that boat. The boat was not worth a cuss. He came over to me and started at a dollar an hour when there was work to be done finishing or pouring.

P: So Hanson left Stevens and came over to you. He came over, introduced himself, and said, "I need a job."

R: Well, I do not know if there was any introducing. I found out through Jack that he was having a little trouble. We hauled rock and sand or cement to Jack's, and I propositioned him for the job. So we started out with each of us getting a dollar an hour for the time we worked. That is where we started.

P: Well, that was big money, too, right?

R: Oh, yes. We could eat; that was the main thing. Anything that paid money was doing good.

P: That is right. You could pay your bills. Now, that relationship began in 1931, and in 1932 you took on another valuable employee, P. C. Smith.

R: That is right. I paid him ten dollars a week. He was a redneck from Waycross, Georgia, and he could fix things. He was an old redneck who could fix things with a screwdriver and a pair of pliers.

P: You heard about him and went after him?

R: I do not know how I got a hold of him. He was also a good checkers player, and we played checkers when there was nothing to do.

P: There were a lot of times when you did not have anything to do.

R: He used to run me crazy. He always wanted us to run the company like General Motors: "We ought to do this," and, "We ought to do that." I said: "This is not General Motors. We have to make a living here." Later in life he got into big money.

P: He got those big ideas from Waycross, Georgia.

R: So he quit.

P: Now, I hear that the company was really thriving when he came aboard. You did total sales of \$9,000. [laughter] It is hard for people today to believe how tough times were in the 1930s.

R: No radios, no airplanes. The static on the radio was so bad you could not hear anything.

- P: The crystal sets started the whole thing off.
- R: See, when we got our first airplanes, you could not hear from here to there. We had an airplane, and you could not call from here to there. We can talk to a guy in California now with one of these walkie-talkies. The man who has bought our company calls his dad in Perth [Australia] on the way to work.
- P: With one of those little car phones, or whatever they are. But the situation was considerably different in those days, when you were much younger than you are today.
- R: We had no radio, and the movies were a nickel or a dime.
- P: But it seems to me that you were a man who was willing to take a chance on things.
- R: Oh, yes. I was a cautious, brave man.
- P: Well, you were. And it seems also that things began to pay off for you during the early Depression years when it was black and dark for everybody else.
- R: Well, I told you I went to Europe in 1936.
- P: I was going to say that nobody but the Harold Vanderbilts did things like that in 1936.
- R: Now, the Vanderbilts are another story. Harold was a very wealthy man, and a big man. Later, as I became a big operator and I owned an airplane, he would loan us his Lockheed to fly to Orlando. I belonged to the Alligator Club and Quiet Birdmen. I do not know if you have ever heard of that. Before Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic, others who wanted to try always had reports of bad weather, so they would come back and wait for the next morning. They would make so damn much noise when they got drunk. Lindbergh finally decided he was going anyway, and he took that *Spirit of St. Louis* and took off. And he made it. Well, when he came back, they formed an association called the Quiet Birdmen, and I became a member of Quiet Birdmen. Also, anybody who made a forced landing at the Everglades Club belonged to the Alligator Club. Of course, we were all folks doing the right thing.

So we flew in Harold Vanderbilt's Lockheed to Orlando to a meeting, and everybody had a big time. We decided we would get an alligator and bring him home with us, just to show everybody we were real sports. So we got about a five-foot alligator and put him in that airplane. The airplane had seats on the sides and a well down the middle, so you had to walk up and down [the aisle] to the cockpit like this. You have seen airplanes like that. So we put him in there and tied him up.

Well, we had with us a guy by the name of Russ Thaw, who was the son of [Harry K.] Thaw, the guy who

[in 1906] killed [Stanford] White, the architect. He was about thirty. Of course, Russ had to show off all the time. He pulled the thing way up like this and put the nose down like that. So when we were leaving Orlando, he wanted to show the boys we were hot stuff. Well, that darn alligator broke loose. When he broke loose, he slid all the way down the front, with his tail going like this. I was sitting near the front, and I had to hold my feet up. He was mad, and he would bite anything he could get his jaws on. That tail was going like this, and he went clear up into the pilot's compartment. They would pull up the nose, and back he [the alligator] would come the other way. We had the damndest mess in that airplane. There was alligator mess all over the place.

When we got [close to] home we called ahead on the radio--we had radios then--to tell them we had an alligator on board and that we had to come in. They thought we were kidding. They came out there with a rope, and we tied that alligator and got him out of the plane. Then we had to clean that plane. Well, Mr. Vanderbilt came over to see what was going on with his airplane. It was one hell of a mess. That is the last time he ever let us use his airplane!

P: That was the end of the flying relationship with Mr. Vanderbilt.

R: That is right.

P: That is a very good story. That is a great story.

R: Isn't that some story? Nothing but a bunch of crazy kids would ever do a thing like that.

P: I wonder what happened to that poor alligator.

R: I do not know. They took him out and dumped him.

P: They put him back into the wilderness again. Well, it sounds like you had some exciting moments in those early days, even if you were near broke.

R: Well, we were not always broke. See, we would have money, and then we would not have money. I did not keep any books. If I had money to pay the bills, I was rich; and if I did not have money to pay the bills, I was broke.

P: Your wife worked in the office with you? Was she the bookkeeper?

R: She kept books. Of course, we could not run a big business like that, and soon we got somebody who knew something. We got all kinds of training and education.

P: And the business began to take off in the early 1930s, then.

R: Oh, we took off in, I would say, 1933.

P: Well, 1933 was that time when you could not pay the oil bill.

R: Yes, but 1934 was when a man called us and gave us an order for twenty cars of rock.

P: Tell me about that. Was that PWA or CWA?

R: CWA--Civil Works Administration. His name was Crandall; I remember that guy's name. He used to drink all the time. He used to call and give me an order for twenty cars, for instance. I would say: "Okay. I will send it to you." I thought he was just drunk, and he was. About three or four days later he would call and ask, "Where are my rock?" I said, "What rock?" "I gave you an order for twenty cars of rock." I told him: "It is on the way. They must have had trouble getting cars." By golly, they shipped twenty cars a day, and that is more than we sold in a whole year.

He took that rock and dumped it on the highway in Palm Beach, just to get things moving. That is all there was. Then they would take that rock and use it over three or four years. That is the way they started.

P: Now, Roosevelt was elected in November 1932 and was inaugurated in March. The banks all closed.

R: The banks had to have a holiday in February.

P: That is right. As soon as he got into office, he declared the bank holiday, because there had been bank foreclosures all over Florida in January and February.

R: So he just closed them all.

P: That is right. How did you come out after the bank holiday? Did your bank reopen?

R: Well, Farmers Central [Bank] was one that stayed open for a long time, but eventually they went broke.

P: A lot of them did not reopen.

R: There were one or two that stayed open, but not when they all closed, because he closed everything.

P: Did you lose money in the closures because some of them did not reopen?

R: It is a strange thing, or crazy. I was always an imaginative guy. I would go down to a bank that had reopened, and they would give you IOUs: "We will sell you something for (say) \$100." I went to Boca Raton and sold that paper for say \$150. I was in international finance.

- P: It sounds to me like you were in construction, a banker, and obviously you were an alligator hunter and a flyer. It is a good thing that Charles Lindbergh took off before you got the idea.
[laughter]
- R: I had landed in the Everglades on a highway with that dang little airplane out there at Holy Point; I really did.
- P: So it was really the federal money, the CWA, that put you on the map.
- R: Well, that is another good story. When I got the order--and the government had to pay the freight--I went to the bank and told them: "I have this order. It is twenty cars a day, and I have to pay the freight until they can pay it." He said, "How do we know this agency will pay you?" I asked, "You trust the United States government, don't you?" He said, "No. This is an agency." So I had to go get a fellow by the name of Harry Corwin to endorse my note. I paid him so much a car (I forget how much), and eventually he got about \$1,000 a month. I said, "This is not right." Can you imagine that?
- P: How long did it take you to get your money from the feds in those days? They do not do it fast today.
- R: No, but better. They had to pay us because we could not keep it up. We said, "No freight money, no rock." So they would pay in maybe two weeks.
- P: So you would haul the rock from your place and dump it at specified points along the highway?
- R: Over in Palm Beach or any place, I did not care where.
- P: They told you where to dump it, of course--near construction sites.
- R: Later, we decided we could barge it for fifty cents, and the freight was eighty cents a ton. So we decided we would barge it and load them down in that bin right there.
- P: Did you move from this early site over to the river, to the water?
- R: Yes. We filled in that thing. We put a tugboat in there and got all the muck out of the way, and we would load them there. Then our competitors said we could not do that; they said, "F.O.B.," which means "free on board." I said, "That is a term that means free on board when we put it on your truck." So I had to get our senator or congressman, Department of Justice, and everything involved so we could deliver that on their trucks.
- P: And you got the okay to do it.

R: In the long run they made me stop it, but I made a lot of money in the meanwhile.

P: Even the congressman could not help you.

R: Well, there was nobody at that time. We called on him [Dwight L. Rogers, Florida Congressman, 1945-1949] later when they picked on us. This was Paul Roger's father.

P: Paul and I were good friends at the University of Florida. He and I went to school together. [Paul Rogers was graduated with a J.D. in 1948. Ed.]

R: This was Paul's father. In fact, there is a picture there.

P: Doyle [Rogers, Paul's brother] and I have known each other for a long time.

R: E. Harris Drew was chief justice [of the Florida Supreme Court 1955-1957, 1963-1965].

P: Oh, of course, E. Harris Drew. He was out of Jacksonville.

R: Well, he lived in West Palm Beach. His brother, Luther, was a loser; his brother was not much.

P: They had a big stationery store in Jacksonville on Bay Street, and they were in the printing business, too. Drew is still living over in Tallahassee. When you came to Florida, Cary Hardee was the governor, and John Martin, who had been the mayor of Jacksonville, became governor in 1924. He is the one who built all the roads.

R: I had no connection with any of those people.

P: William Jennings Bryan's daughter, Ruth Bryan Owen, was the Congresswoman when you were here in this district. She had everything from Dade County up to Daytona at that time.

R: Well, I have his picture here. We had a big meeting, and it was the governor, Paul Roger's father, and E. Harris Drew. They had the big crest of Florida, and I am on the end there shaking hands with them.

P: I have the date as 1934 as when you began barging.

R: That is about right.

P: And you did that to cut down on freight costs.

R: We got fifty cents a yard, and freight was eighty cents a ton. A yard was about a ton and a half.

P: How about this ready mix concrete operation? When did that come in?

R: I think that was in 1934.

P: The date is not that important. Just tell me a little bit about it.

R: It was 1934; that is when these first trucks came out.

P: Tell me--I am an amateur--what is ready mix concrete?

R: You put rock, sand, and cement in a drum. Then you put water to it and mix it up.

P: And that is all in the truck that is moving around?

R: It is going around and around while you are on the way to the job. [It is called] ready mix or transit mix.

P: And that, of course, was cheaper and faster?

R: Oh, yes. Sure.

P: And when you got there you just opened whatever the vent was and poured it out onto the place where it was supposed to go.

R: Well, you had to pour it from a chute (carried on the truck) into a wheelbarrow. Then you could take it from there. Sometimes into forms or slabs for paving.

P: You sent along the man to smooth it out and finish it up, or they had somebody on the site?

R: They had their own people.

P: How popular was ready mix concrete? Was the public ready to receive it?

R: Oh, yes. It went like ice cream when it first came out.

P: Were you the first person in this area [who had ready mix]?

R: Yes, I was the first man in our area.

P: Where had ready mix been used elsewhere in the U.S.?

R: I went to see about ready mix in New Orleans at Jankee Service, the biggest company then in the South. We spent a week over there to see how they did it. Then we came back and had to get enough money to pay for it.

P: Where did you get the money?

R: Well, that is when we hocked my wife's diamonds and anything we could.

P: Anything that you could take to the pawn shop and get some money?

R: That is right.

P: But it all paid off.

R: Oh, yes.

P: Now, where did you get that slogan, "First with the Best"?

R: That came along about that time. See, as we went farther, first we got aggregate, and then we got ready mix concrete.

P: What is aggregate?

R: That is stone and sand, and you mine it.

P: Where are you getting all of this stuff from--the stone, the rock, the sand?

R: Miami. See, we bought acres and acres of land. We will get into that later.

P: All right, but I am talking about the early 1930s. You are a small-time operator then.

R: I bought stone from Maule Industries, which had a plant at Ojus, twelve miles north of Miami. They would load it on FEC [Florida East Coast Railroad] and ship it to us.

P: Where were they getting it from?

R: They dug it out of the ground right there.

P: Okay. So it is not shipped in from out of Florida.

R: No. They dug it right there. There are lakes all over the place when you drive to Miami, and you will see them.

P: So Florida was rich in those kinds of mineral resources then.

R: Yes. Dade County had more limerock than all the rest of the state.

P: All that rock, sand, and so on was there. And I know that was true all the way up the east coast of Florida. In the Ocala area, for instance, there was a lot of that. So you, then, bought your basic commodities from the Maule Industries.

R: That is right.

P: Later on you were able to produce these things yourself?

R: Well, old man Maule got mad because I was doing so well in the ready mix company that he wanted to raise the price way up.

P: So what did you say, "The hell with it," and went into your own business?

R: I trucked my own.

P: So you cut out the middle man.

R: Yes. Then, of course, he died.

P: Did you take over that industry? Did you buy that company?

R: To start off, I did not know anything about mining. When you do not know something, it is good to get a partner, so we went in with Shands and Baker. Ted and Tom Baker were in Jacksonville, and they call themselves Florida Rock today. We started in with them, and then later we bought them out.

P: Is this Shands Bill Shands's brother?

R: Bill [William A.] Shands financed Tom Baker.

P: Right. And it was Shands and Baker?

R: Yes. Now, later, it was named Florida Rock when we made that deal.

P: I have Bill Shands on tape, too [FP7, Oral History Archives, University of Florida]. He was my neighbor in Gainesville, so we were good friends.

R: Is that right? He was quite a fine man.

P: Oh, he was a wonderful man.

R: I do not know that I ever met him. Maybe I met him once or twice. He financed Tom Baker.

- P: And then he, of course, became a political power in Florida. [Shands served in the Florida senate from 1940-1958.]
- R: Oh, yes. He was great with this and that, medicine, and all kinds of things.
- P: Well, that is the reason we got the medical school in Gainesville and why we named the hospital [Shands Teaching Hospital] for him, because we appreciated all that he did for us [the University of Florida] in the 1940s and 1950s. Anyway, then you start out. Would you say that the ready concrete was the thing that promoted you to big time?
- R: Being original. "First with the Best." That is where we got that slogan. We came there first with the aggregate, we came first with ready mix concrete, we came with steel--always we were innovating. [We had] the first bins so we could load up fast.
- P: Is this all coming out of your head?
- R: That came because I was lazy. I did not like to work hard to get something done.
- P: I heard you say that with the milking of the cows, and yet, on the other hand, everything I have heard since then has shown me that you are a workaholic.
- R: I worked to keep from doing work. I worked harder to keep from working than anybody you have ever seen. That is the truth. [laughter]
- P: I love that philosophy, Mr. Rinker. That is absolutely great.
- R: It is the truth. See, if I could get Jim or you to do twice as much for the same price, that would be no hard work [for me]. That is the way it has been. [That is how we got] the ready mix concrete, the aggregate, and the unit trains. We operated the first unit trains in the state of Florida.
- P: What do you mean by unit train?
- R: That is where you hook a locomotive on down here, load it up, and that locomotive takes it to the destination. It stays with it, and it goes back. It used to take them twenty-eight days to make a round trip with a car.
- P: Now, were you using Florida East Coast tracks?
- R: This is later; only ten years ago is when we started doing that. But, you see, we could do in twenty-four hours what they used to do in twenty-eight days. Of course, we made a lot of money on the turnaround on those cars and engines. We were always doing something like

that.

P: Mr. Rinker, when the September 1935 hurricane came along, which was pretty tragic for Florida because all of those men got drowned near the [Florida] Keys, it hit all of this area. It was particularly serious down there. Do you remember that those WPA workers were drowned?

R: I think it blew the top off the Florida Theater, which I owned. You remember I said I canceled all of my insurance?

P: You did.

R: There is film of that theater up there, and they showed that thing going like this. The top of the theater, the towers, went sailing away. There is film of that.

P: That hurricane also knocked out the Flagler railroad to Key West, and that is when they built the overseas highway.

R: The same thing blew the top off my theatre.

P: Now, did it do any other damage to any of your property?

R: Somewhere along in there (I have forgotten the dates) we had built a place up on Pine Street, and it was supposed to be deeper water and easier to bring stuff in by barge. Up there we erected a bin, and we had an office in an old two-story house. We had a bunch of barges sink in that storm, all four of the barges out in front. I worked and worked trying to get that rock and those barges out. So the whole thing was a catastrophe. The old man who owned the barges died of a heart attack. I worked day and night trying to get those barges up. In fact, I think there are still some of those barges down there. We have had a lot of bad luck along with the good luck.

P: Now, the two earlier hurricanes, in 1926 and 1928, generated insurance money. Did the 1935 hurricane do the same thing?

R: Well, I suppose it did after I got over the shock of losing all those barges. See, you have to get your breath every once in awhile when you get the devil knocked out of you financially and every other way. Then we came back to the other place and fixed that place up.

P: And you are back in business again?

R: Then we were back in business.

P: Of course, there was a lot of construction that was needed because of what had happened.

- R: Yes, we always came back and built something bigger--bigger or better. That is how we came up with that "First with the Best" [slogan].
- P: And there was a lot of federal money being spent in Florida and in south Florida under both the WPA and the CWA in order to get these post offices, recreation buildings, and bridges back up. You must have supplied a lot of the rock and sand for that.
- R: Yes. See, we always had the best equipment, and everybody gave us the business, if the price was right. That is all you could every ask for, if the price was equal.
- P: Did the WPA deal directly with you? That is how they worked; the WPA did its own construction.
- R: Yes, they bought stuff directly from us.
- P: The other agencies worked through private contractors, but all of it was being funded with New Deal dollars.
- R: They worked directly with us. They were good to us, and they were also bad to us. See, they gave us priority to buy trucks and cranes. I bought a crane from them, and by golly they came along later and allowed me rental on that crane and took it away from me and sold it to another man.
- P: Were you big enough to get caught in these New Deal problems, like the NRA [National Recovery Administration] and so on? Had you gotten to that point yet?
- R: Well, to the extent that I told you. That was a brand new crane. I suppose it cost maybe \$25,000 or \$30,000, which was a lot of money then. When they took it away from me, we had big trouble with the OPA [Office of Price Administration].
- P: Yes, but that came later. The OPA was really the 1940s rather than the 1930s. How many employees did you have around 1933 to 1935?
- R: I read someplace I had thirty way back then.
- P: That would have put you into the situation with the NRA, the contracts, supervising your wage structure and the hours of work, and so on.
- R: No, that came a little later than that.
- P: Well, 1937 is when we got the wages and hours bill in operation.
- R: But we did not come under those regulations. We were not that big. It was the big contractors that they really got after.

- P: Yes. Thirty employees was large, but not huge.
- R: No, not like a big contractor.
- P: I would like to know about this trip to Europe in 1936. I was going to say that you were almost broke in 1935 because the hurricane was disastrous to you, and suddenly in 1936 you are like Mr. Vanderbilt and go off to Europe.
- R: You would not believe it, but just the day before yesterday I found the itinerary of that trip to Europe from New York. The first thing you wonder about is the cost of the trip.
- P: You and your wife went?
- R: Yes, and a friend of ours who operated a radio store. I found the book, and the cost of thirty-five days around Europe, visiting Rome, Switzerland, England, France, Belgium, and Holland, was \$377. That included food, hotels, transportation. Now, we did not have what they call a conducted guide, but they always met us--this was American Express--at the train to make sure we got on the right train or the right boat to go to the next place. I just found that this last week.
- P: But even \$377, while it is a lot cheaper than today's, was a lot of money then.
- R: Well, remember that I was making money then. We had a big job down there close to the post office in West Palm Beach. It was 3,000 cubic yards, and it was only about ten blocks up there. So we made money like we never had made before. I have forgotten the figures, but we had money in the bank for the first time in history.
- P: Mr. Rinker, you had already come a long way from that farm and that Model T that you drove in down to Delray.
- R: Let me tell you about our trip to Europe. I had no set of books like we have now about forecasting income, how much your tax was going to be, how much money you need to buy a bunch of trucks, or stuff like that. All I knew was I had money. So I bought this ticket from American Express, went to New York, and got on the *Europa*.
- P: You went in class.
- R: The fastest and best that they had running. Well, the thing was full, so they put us in the officers' quarters upstairs on the back of the ship. It was like this all the time. We had one big place to shower, so we would wait until the women got out of the way, and then we would go in and take a shower. The bathroom was down the hall, and you had to see if the ladies were in there. You took your turn. That is the way it was.

Hitler's picture was everywhere. [It was in] 1936 when the Olympics [were held in Berlin], and Hitler was now becoming famous. We came back on the *Bremen*. The woman golfer who was accused of being half man, Babe Didrikson, was on board the ship for the return trip. When we got back to New York, she was on the stage of the Paramount Theater. Also on that stage was Paul Whiteman. He always dressed like a general or something. Babe did not know me from Adam, but I saw her running around the ship. I looked at her with awe because she was a world-champion athlete for a woman. That is what happened on that trip to Europe and back, and I was the biggest shot in West Palm Beach.

In the meanwhile, my competitors had built new plants. I had an old plant, so I suffered a little bit; I had a financial relapse there for a while. Then we had a big war. There was a Jewish fellow by the name of Giller who had a rich father, and he gave him a new plant and a big office. Burnup & Simms. I do not know whether you have ever heard of them or not, but they are on the stock market.

P: I know who Giller is, but I do not know the others.

R: Did you know Giller?

P: I know who he was, yes.

R: Anyway, the Burnup & Simms firm is still around. Riley Simms is still alive. In fact, he is active in the college right here. There was a war, and we sold concrete for as low as five dollars a cubic yard delivered in the form. Can you imagine that? Do you know what that sells for now? Fifty dollars.

P: Five dollars in the form?

R: Yes. Well, as a result of that, Giller went broke, and we bought him out. Burnup & Simms weathered the storm because they had other business. So we took off again. Burnup & Simms and Florida Rock have always been our competitors. Burnup & Simms installs telephone lines all over the nation today. So that is life: up, down, up, down.

P: Now, I have asked you about the situation between when you got back from Europe, which of course was a break, and the end of the 1930s. I have, for instance, that in 1937 you moved to 433 Seventh Street, and Allen Gay joined the company.

R: Yes, that is right.

P: Why did you move?

R: Well, the company was getting bigger, so we had to have bigger offices. We built that office, and

we built three additions onto it on Seventh Street. We had meetings, and we were getting into education. We could not just wait until a guy learned to do something by accident, so we had many training programs for our employees. We had a big training room in there with video and all that sort of thing.

P: Presumably the company is larger now. You have more than the thirty employees.

R: Oh, yes. By this time we were getting to be big-time operators.

P: By 1937 what would you estimate was your number of employees?

R: The only way I could do that would be to look at one of these operating statements to see what our sales were.

P: Did you have over a hundred? Five hundred? I am sure that the growth was continuous year after year. I am talking about the 1930s, now, before World War II. You are really basically still small, although you are growing, and growing rapidly.

R: I would just have to look that up.

P: All right. Let me ask you this way. If you were making a comparison with other companies doing the same kind of work that you were doing in this area, where would you be? Number one? Number two? Number three?

R: When we built that office over there in 1937, we were number one all the time. Yes, sir. We broke out early from the pack.

P: So you were number one in sales.

R: Later we were number one in concrete and concrete blocks. We were a big block manufacturer in West Palm Beach.

P: By the end of the 1930s, before you begin supplying all of this to the construction of military installations, were you considered one of the top companies in the state in this business?

R: No, not in the state, just in this area. But we did work for the government all around the state.

P: And, of course, you were doing that throughout the 1930s, right? I am speaking of work like WPA.

R: And the 1940s.

P: Of course. Now, who is this Allen Gay?

- R: He was a mechanic, and he was a man who knew how to read people and get work done. Ordinary people would break down, and he was the man who could go over there and get us out of trouble.
- P: Was he an important person in your organization?
- R: Yes, very much. He is still alive, but he has had a stroke and is in bad shape.
- P: So he is not in the business anymore?
- R: Oh, no. He retired a long time ago.
- P: Also, I have here a note that the following year--once again, I am not worried about dates as such--that you opened your first concrete block plant. Tell me about that. What is concrete block, and what would it do?
- R: The first concrete block plant was very slow by today's standards. It made a lot of noise, and it took nine men to make, say, 1,800 blocks a day. Later, when we got the next one, the big fibrolite with a Besser block machine, we could make 4,000 blocks with three men. So we took that on up until we got twelve block plants, and we made more blocks than anybody in the Southeast.
- P: When did this concrete block come onto the market? During the early years of the twentieth century they used brick.
- R: That is right. Everybody used brick, and they used clay tile. So gradually we made brick, and we made blocks. We had to move out the brick. We sold brick up north, in your country [Jacksonville].
- P: Where did you get brick from? There had been a big brickworks over in Pensacola.
- R: Merry Brothers, Columbus [Georgia] Brick.
- P: And they made brick in Jacksonville.
- R: No, they did not. They made it up in Georgia and shipped it down. I do not think there was any brick [plant] in Jacksonville.
- P: Did they ship it by freight?
- R: Yes, rail car. There were brick plants in Savannah, Columbus (Merry Brothers), and Macon.
- P: When did the block begin to take off? In the 1920s?

- R: Well, old man Maule started blocks in 1927 or 1928. He was in aggregate, and we copied him. The blocks we made at first were not any good, so we made them better and better.
- P: Now, in the 1920s, certainly in construction of the more prestigious residences and business, they were still using brick?
- R: Oh, yes. In the early days they never used blocks. They were no good.
- P: I do not remember when block began to take over.
- R: Well, it took a long time. From the 1920s, when I first started, I would say it took twenty years to where block was the predominant building material in Florida.
- P: Well, when you came into the game in the early 1930s, were they already manufacturing block and using block in construction?
- R: A few were in south Florida, but not in Jacksonville, Orlando, or St. Petersburg.
- P: I had understood that during the boom, when they were building so many houses and so on, they used block and then stucco to cover the block.
- R: Yes, they did, but they were bad blocks. They cracked.
- P: Did the stucco give them whatever protection they needed?
- R: Well, it added to them. In your country they did not stucco them, but down here they did.
- P: You see a lot of buildings all over the state that date back to the 1920s.
- R: That is right. Some of them are still there.
- P: We have a lot of them around Jacksonville.
- R: And they have a concrete frame around them so they can withstand a hurricane.
- P: But obviously the demand was big enough so that by 1938 you could open your own business in that.
- R: Yes.
- P: Were you manufacturing the block?

R: The first block plant opened in 1937 or 1938. Then right on top of that we built our first fibrolite plant.

P: Where were you shipping this concrete block? Was it just in this area?

R: The fibrolite (3 hole concrete block) got such a good reputation that we did a promotion on it. We polled all the architects and all the building officials around the state, and we would haul them all the way to Tampa, Orlando, and all the way around.

P: So yours was being used all over the state, then.

R: Yes. Then later they said the walls were too thin, and they were. It was a two-hole block, and we had to go back to the three-hole block. But by that time we knew how to make a good block and how to build them so they would not fall apart.

P: And certainly during the military construction they used block very extensively because it was faster and cheaper for them to operate than brick.

R: Oh, yes.

P: And by the 1940s you did not see very much brick construction at all, certainly not in the South.

R: And masons did not like to lay blocks because they were too heavy. See, tile was lighter, and brick was lighter. But later they finally got to it. Now they lay them all day long anywhere.

P: Where were you getting your financial backing from in the late 1930s to be doing this kind of expansion? It was very rapid.

R: I had very little help.

P: You had to take it out of your own pocketbook?

R: That is right.

P: The banks in this area were not backing you?

R: We had construction loans that we financed. But we did most of ours in-house.

P: I was thinking that it took some money to open a concrete block plant.

R: Well, you would be surprised. We built a block plant at Fort Pierce in 1945, after the war, for \$100,000. A block plant today costs \$4 million. See, labor was cheaper, and land was cheap.

P: I can go back even farther than that in Florida. The first two dormitories we built on our campus, in 1905 and 1906, each a block long, each four stories, both still in use today, together cost \$70,000.

R: Now you know what I mean.

P: I know exactly what you are talking about, Mr. Rinker. And the inflation, of course, hit in the 1930s, so it was costing you more than that.

R: It just all came up. If a man worked for ten dollars a week, he was a good man. I was getting twenty-five, and Mr. Hanson and I got a dollar for each hour we worked in the concrete.

P: When they passed the first federal wages and hours law, it covered interstate commerce. I do not know whether it covered a business like yours or not.

R: Yes, it did.

P: The minimum wage at that particular time was twenty-five cents an hour.

R: That is right, and that was high.

P: That was high because this was the Depression period when people were glad to get something to eat. So you opened the concrete block plant, and obviously there was a market for your product.

R: Oh, yes.

P: And you say that you were shipping not only in this area, but elsewhere in Florida.

R: Yes. In fact, we shipped those no-account blocks all the way over to Fort Myers and Clewiston when they were building the air force base over there near Arcadia.

P: Yes. That is where they were training those British pilots. Do you remember that the RAF [Royal Air Force] came in at that time, even before we got into the war?

R: Right.

P: They were shipping them over by way of Canada.

R: We had ready mix plants over there. We got twelve cents for those blocks to haul them all the way over there to Clewiston and Arcadia.

P: Is that what put you in place, then, to do all of the tremendous work that you did at Camp Blanding [near Starke] and elsewhere in the state at that time?

R: Yes, that is right. I maintain later--I was getting a little smarter now--I had some money, and I was doing the financing on Blanding for a man by the name of Culver. I kept the books. Of course, he went broke. [laughter]

R: It sounds to me that a lot of the people you were dealing with went broke, and yet you kept moving to the top.

R: Well, they got drunk. He [Culver] had an airplane, and he needed to carry all his money with him, and he had women with him. He had two Cadillacs and an airplane. He would send his airplane out to get his girlfriend, and they would go here. And that guy would take a Cadillac and drive from Jacksonville to Camp Blanding in one hour. Listen, in those days, driving a Cadillac that fast over that road that went from Jacksonville to Blanding . . . I thought he would be killed.

Let me tell you what happened to that guy Culver. He wanted me to go up to North Carolina on a job with him, but I said no. I had enough of him, anyway. From Jacksonville he went to North Carolina. He got a cab to go into town, and they hit something. He broke his neck and died. That was the end of him. He did not leave his wife enough to buy milk to feed a cat.

P: I had not heard of Culver before.

R: Oh, you will not hear about him. He made his own bins. [laughter]

P: But remember, I was out of Jacksonville then, and I remember the beginnings of Camp Blanding, of course.

R: Harry Johnson was the CEO. Harry Johnson was the father of Camp Blanding, and he helped us do that.

P: I knew of Harry Johnson, but I did not know him.

R: He was my good friend. He and I used to fly a lot together.

P: And he had a very fine reputation, of course.

R: Yes, he did.

P: Now, you are broadening out in 1941. Reinforcing steeling and associated products are being added to your product line. Tell me about that.

- R: This is a long time ago. At one time we were going to have everything--lumber, millwork, paint--so that you could come to our place and get anything you wanted. You could buy an apron and everything from a trowel to wheelbarrows.
- P: You were Home Depot.
- R: That we were. But the minute we got wise that you cannot sell everything, that was when we started making money. We stopped selling the lumber and roofing, but kept all those hard materials. Hard materials are bagged goods, masonry supplies, blocks, cement, concrete, and that sort of thing. From that day on, we have never stopped. That was the turning point of our career.
- P: By let us say 1941, because you really launch yourself beyond that, . . .
- R: Yes, we got our education.
- P: But would you say that by 1940 or 1941 you would be considered a rich man, in terms of the times in which you were living?
- R: I guess so, for our kind of people. We were rich, but not in comparison to the Vanderbilts.
- P: I understand that. You did not inherit a great deal of money.
- R: In Indiana I would be a big operator.
- P: And everything you had you made yourself through your own labors.
- R: That is right.
- P: You are like very many of the other people I have talked with: they really took advantage of their native ability and intelligence and worked hard. They got the breaks, but they were smart enough to see what the breaks were and to move with the times. But yours is kind of amazing because you built during a depression period.
- R: That is right, and bought during a depression period. Buy low and sell high.
- P: But you were willing to take these calculated risks.
- R: Thinking back, we were the "First with the Best"--the first in aggregate, the first in ready mix, the first in everything. We got rid of some things [that we did not need]. Everybody was in the lumber business, everybody was in the roofing business, and everybody was in the hardware business. What business did we have that they did not have? From that day on, with what I had learned about people and getting teams, [we moved ahead of the pack]. You tried to

do a better job than the next guy, and this plant better than the next plant. When I learned that, that thing alone (that is the Huckleberry Finn thing again) made it. Now all I had to do was stay out of the way.

P: Well, you needed to do more than that, Mr. Rinker.

R: I had to come up with the money and all that.

P: But you were more than a bystander.

R: We got up to where we made \$30 million a year net, and we made all of that in the building materials business. I did not know anything about the finance business we do now.

P: Mr. Rinker, are you branching out into other investments? You said that you bought the Florida Theater, which seems a little strange for a man like you in the kind of business you are in.

R: I was diversifying. You get bright ideas of diversifying, like lumber and all that sort of thing.

P: How did you happen to buy the Florida Theater?

R: A man by the name of Sam Nichols went to the First Baptist church, and he told me, "You ought to buy that theater down there." I thought I would be a big shot if I had a theater. [laughter] At first he was going to get a hotel, but thank the Lord we never bought a hotel. I thought a theater would be fun. He said, "You ought to buy that theater."

P: Why was it for sale? Did the owners go broke?

R: It was not doing any good. I thought I could just walk in there any time and not have to pay. [laughter]

P: You would not have to buy an admission ticket.

R: It was just foolishness of a young fellow who wanted to be a big man.

P: The Florida Theater was a beautiful theater.

R: Paramount Theaters owned and operated it; I did not. I went up to New York to see the man up there, and he was putting on the floor in the office. He did not pay a damn bit of attention to me.

P: Is that the theater that is out at Palm Beach?

R: It is in West Palm Beach, but it is across the street. That is the new one that was built there. This

one is across the street, on the corner of Clematis and Narcissus.

P: Was it the big theater in town?

R: It was the only theater in town and seated 1400 people. They had movies and all kinds of things. They had regular stage shows with regular actors and all of that.

P: So you could entertain people like Wallace Beery.

R: Not Wallace Beery (even though I saw him in Hollywood). I would tell friends, "I own the theater. Come around. Would you like to get into the movies?" [laughter]

P: But that did not last very long, did it?

R: No--ten years.

P: The hurricane blew off the roof, and you put it back on?

R: I got educated in a hurry, and I got rid of it.

P: Did you lose money on the theater?

R: I broke even; I sold it for the same as I had bought it for. But I had it all those years and never made a dime.

P: Did you begin to buy land in this area? Were you investing?

R: [We bought] land in Miami and where we wanted to expand. We were always looking for land.

P: So you were buying land in connection with your business, not just for investment purposes?

R: That is right. It was always in connection with the business. We financed customers who had big pieces of land and not enough money to go ahead with their programs. Then they bought materials from us. That was good.

P: Did you ever work with Ernest Graham of the Graham dairies? He was a great holder of land in the area.

R: We bought a lot of land from him.

P: That is what I wondered about.

R: I have pictures of him here when he was running for governor.

P: He ran for governor in 1944.

R: We have pictures of him down there in our machine with my son. We worked with them a lot.

P: He is another of the early developers, and I thought you had occasion to deal with him.

R: Yes, we bought a lot of their land where they had the old factory.

P: Of course, he bought the land from the Pennsylvania Sugar Company when they came down. They thought they would also get into cattle.

R: We knew them all.

P: Did you ever get into any cattle business, citrus, or anything like that?

R: Their cattle grazed on our land. We got an agriculture exemption, so we saved a lot of money on taxes.

P: How about citrus? Were you ever into that?

R: No. Well, we bought land to operate our business, and we got a few fruit trees.

P: But you were not a rival to Ben Hill Griffin [Jr.] or somebody like him.

R: Oh, no. The biggest thing we had was forty acres or something like that.

P: Where were you in terms of sales and employees in 1940, right before you begin all of this big construction for the military?

R: I have no memory or record of that.

P: But you had obviously progressed greatly during the decade of the 1930s.

R: Yes, we made a lot of money with those new mixers.

P: The ready mix concrete and all of those things had really brought you into somewhat of the big time, which meant that you were ready to do all of the major construction of the 1940s.

R: Right.

P: In 1940, where were you physically in West Palm Beach? Where was the plant? You had moved to what location?

R: On Lakefront; Sixth Street and Lakefront.

P: What did you have there in terms of buildings and so on?

R: We had one ready mix plant. I showed you a picture. All it was was a batch plant. We had a place to throw cement bags up on top and put them in a box, and then that could be dropped into the mixer. At that time you had to take the top off the mixer and drop the cement in; that is how modern it was. We threw the waste bags into a container to haul them out every night.

P: And you had an office building, of course.

R: There was no office building at the Lakefront [plant].

P: Where was your office building where you kept your accounts?

R: It must have been still down there at Roseland Drive.

P: Okay. And you had your bookkeeper there and somebody manning the telephone and so on.

P: Yes.

P: Did people who wanted to buy your commodities just call you on the telephone, or did you have salesmen going out selling these things?

R: We had what we called salesmen. Actually, they were "sales service." They would go out and find out when they wanted it, and we would say: "Okay. We can handle it by 9:00 in the morning" or by "3:00 in the afternoon."

P: Would salesmen go out, then, to a contractor or whoever it was and say, "I understand you are getting ready to develop this?" Were you the salesman?

R: I was the salesman.

P: I see. What area did you cover? Just West Palm?

R: Yes, just around there.

P: You did not attempt to solicit business in Dade County and Miami, or north of here?

R: No. That is all we had when we were first here.

P: I am talking about the end of the 1930s. You have the ready mix concrete going, and you now have what amounts to a fleet of trucks. How large a territory did you service?

R: Let me tell you how that worked out. If you had a job over in Clewiston, for instance, we would put a ready mix plant out there, or we would put one where the Englishmen were training to be pilots. There were lots of people, so we put a ready mix plant there--not blocks.

P: But the point that I want to find out is, I understand that after you got the job, you put the plant there.

R: Right.

P: But how did you get the job in the first place, at Clewiston or wherever it might have been?

R: Somebody who was working in the office (I have forgotten who) would contact the contractor. But then all the deals were made by me.

P: Of course, you had competition, and you wanted to get in ahead of your competition and get as much business as possible.

R: That is right.

P: So you sometimes had to go to the contractor.

R: Yes, we did.

P: Okay. You also had a reputation, so the contractors came to you.

R: They knew if we got the job that we would perform. We had a good performance record.

P: So many of them called you and said: "Mr. Rinker, I am getting ready to build (whatever it was), and I am going to need" such-and-such. "Will you be able to give it to me, and what is the price?"

R: They did not call me mister: they called me either Doctor or Rinker. We were not up to the "mister" class.

P: You got up into that later on?

R: Oh, yes, when I got to be a big shot. I seldom got to the top man then. [laughter]

P: All right. I wondered when that transition took place. As I understand it now, it was around 1940.

R: Well, later than that. If I was intimate, I was either Doc or Rinker.

P: But you tried to be intimate with all of these people you were doing business with so you could do the business in the 1930s.

R: Oh, yes. They called me Doc when I was an insider.

P: Mr. Rinker, let us talk about the war years now, because on the basis of what I have read, that launched you into big, big time. Is that right?

R: Yes.

P: You are doing millions of dollars worth of business?

R: I do not know where it started. The biggest job we had where we made money was in Sanford. We got a number 2 priority that allowed us to buy two-yard mixers. See, up until this time we had a yard and a half.

P: About when would that have been? After the war?

R: No, this is just before the war was underway. We were getting ready for war.

P: Okay. That is what I want to do. I want to get all the information leading up to the wartime construction.

R: The work that we did in Fort Myers, for instance, and the work we did in some of those areas out there were just little things. The Buckingham gunnery field was one; we had one there. There were three inches of bullets on the ground all over the airport. They were just shooting, shooting, shooting. But maybe we poured 2,000 or 3,000 yards.

The first big job we had was in Sanford. We broke a world record there. Somewhere I read it, but the actual fact is that with six two-yard mixers--we were just pouring paving right around there--we poured 727 yards in one day with bagged cement. Now, the record for some of this stuff does not say that. That record stood until well into the 1950s.

P: The Congress enacted the first peacetime draft law in late September 1940, and there is this tremendous pressure to build the training camps to take care of the new draftees. Now, we are still a year away from the war. Pearl Harbor came December 7, 1941.

R: But they are getting ready, though.

P: They are getting ready. Of course, Roosevelt had begun pushing for rearmament ever since 1937, so the government is already beginning to spend money. But the real pressure began in the late summer and early fall of 1940, and I am presuming that is when you came aboard with

your Sanford project and all of the others.

- R: In Sanford we made a lot of money for that period; that is all I can say. And we did break a record. In 1940 I went to New York and to South America. They had confiscated the *Essex* in Fort Lauderdale, and as we went on down to Buenos Aires, the *Ajax* and two other British ships chased the [German battleship *Admiral*] *Graf Spee* into this port [Montevideo], and she was sunk in the mouth of the river [the Rio de la Plata near Montevideo, Uruguay]. [The *Graf Spee* was engaged by three British cruisers on December 13, 1939, and the captain scuttled the ship four days later. Ed.]
- P: But you are already into 1941/1942. That is when the *Graf Spee* was sunk.
- R: In 1940 I went to South America; I have that on a pad. That is where a plane zoomed us one day, and everybody fainted. All it was was a French flying boat.
- P: Were you down there just on vacation, as you had been earlier in Europe?
- R: That is right. We went to New York on a streamline train. That was the first streamline train, and they said you could sleep on it. I found out you could not.
- P: You went from New York to where?
- R: It was a forty-two-day round trip to Buenos Aires, and then back up to Rio [de Janeiro], Sao Paulo, and Trinidad.
- P: All through the Caribbean?
- R: Well, not all of it. We did not go to Puerto Rico.
- P: But you did a lot of traveling in the Caribbean and in South America.
- R: Oh, yes. Later, we went out to the haciendas. We traveled all over the place.
- P: I want to get to the involvement with the military. Which of the army encampments did you work with; which did you supply and pour concrete for?
- R: The biggest one that we had with a contractor and the military was the Sanford base for women, the WACS. That was a big one. We had the guy breathing down our necks all the time about quality and all that.
- P: Did they come to you as they had done in the early 1930s, when the man called you and said he needed twenty, or whatever, loads of rock?

R: No, we had to hustle. We had to go out and get this one.

P: Did you go to Washington?

R: No. They had the army and navy engineers down here, and we would go to Jacksonville to find out what was going on. Then we would go down there and find out [what they needed]. They were young kids, maybe thirty years old, in charge of the work.

P: All right. The army engineers had its divisional offices on Riverside Avenue in Jacksonville.

R: Colonel Gee was there. Have you ever heard of him?

P: Yes, I have.

R: Colonel Gee was the man we talked to.

P: And you went up there to find out what was going on and what they were planning, and then you made a bid for that?

R: Yes. He would say, "Go on over there and see the man." In other words, he paved the way for us.

P: Let us talk about Camp Blanding, because that is obviously one of the largest. I remember when you got started on that project in 1940. Was that as large as Sanford?

R: It may have been, but it was stretched out. We did not make any money there.

P: It was a huge encampment that took care of 70,000 to 80,000 men.

R: Yes, but they would start and stop, start and stop, start and stop. At Sanford we started and poured concrete every day. We poured the aprons, and there were a lot. At Camp Blanding we poured a footing here and a footing there. Then troops would come through, and they would not let us go through with the concrete. With concrete, you cannot mix it or it will get hard. That is when Colonel Johnson went out and said: "Hey! You have to let these guys continue their work or we will not have any war." They had about ten generals and one colonel out there. Each general had his group, and he was training them. The colonel's job was to coordinate the whole, so to tell the general he could not do something was pretty hard for a chicken colonel to do. But he did his best, and he helped us.

P: Now, your job was to lay the foundations, to pour the concrete for the foundations?

R: I kept the books at Camp Blanding and furnished the money. That is where that fellow Culver got mixed up in it. Then he had a no-account guy with him.

P: But in Sanford your company poured the foundations?

R: We had our people pour the concrete and furnish the material. Cement was very short, so with our priority 2 we went to New York to get the Penn-Dixie Company [for the cement]. They said, "We cannot supply it." I said, "I have a priority," but they said: "Sorry. We cannot do it." I said, "Well, you just wait until I have somebody call you." So he said, "We will take care of you, Doc."

P: Mr. Rinker, did your company do more than just pour the foundations? Did you actually build any of the buildings?

R: We only brought the concrete. They put it down and finished it.

P: Many of the buildings in those encampments were block buildings.

R: We never built a building.

P: You did not?

R: We did not lay a block. We did not finish the concrete; we just supplied the concrete.

P: Was that of your own choosing, that you did not supply the block?

R: Oh, yes. We did not want to have anything to do with that. My goodness. Just to get the concrete there (the cement and the aggregate), get it in the bin, and pour it was a big job.

P: In other words, that was as big as your company could take care of at the time.

R: Oh, yes. We never did the other. We never laid blocks, and the only time we finished concrete was with Mr. Hansen, and that was when we had a little driveway.

P: I understand a lot of concrete block was used in those camps.

R: Oh, yes, but we never laid blocks. Never have we laid blocks--other than in our buildings--that I am aware of.

P: Have you ever poured concrete for the state, for highways and that sort of thing?

R: We have only furnished the concrete--the aggregate, sand, and cement. But this is later.

P: I know. The highway construction really does not develop until the 1950s.

R: No, we never paved a highway, a bridge, or anything like that. The only bridge we ever built was

that one I told you about. I wanted to make sure it would not fall down, so I put railroad irons in it.

P: What of the encampments in Florida, other than Sanford and Camp Blanding, was your company involved with?

R: I have that written down here someplace. We had two plants down in Key West. We never made any money in Key West. It was a mess. We could not get water, we could not get anything fixed, and after going all the way down there, we would have to come all the way up here to get a spark plug.

P: And that was not an easy drive.

R: Oh, it was a terrible drive. We never made any money in Key West. We learned a lot, but we never made any money. That is where Allen Gay came into the picture. He went down there, and we could not do any good. We had no personnel department. You will laugh, but we hired one man, and he went down and burnt up the warehouse and all of our cloth bags that cost ten cents apiece--he was out on bond for arson.

P: For arson. That is an interesting association.

R: We hired two guys who were out for murder down there. We did not know about it. Why, after a while they were convicted. But they were out on bond [when we hired them]. [laughter]

P: You were desperate for labor!

R: Not really, but after that we started checking people. Good night! A pair of murderers and an arsonist.

By the way, let me tell you a good one about that warehouse we had down there. There was an old guy down there who had a body in that warehouse that burned. When we went to rent that warehouse, he had a woman, his girl he loved, in a tank. Damn, I do not know if we got it or the police went down there and took it out.

P: He was just saving it, preserving it. He wanted to keep her forever.

R: Maybe that is why that guy burned it.

P: Now, I understand that you would actually build a plant, open an operation, at Clewiston or Sanford or wherever it was, [and use it] until you finished the job.

R: And then we would walk off. When you say we built a plant, you must understand that these were portable plants. They were not permanent. We would put them on a little foundation and

get water and lights to it.

P: I understand. And the telephone maybe. Then when you were finished, you moved it off and went to the next job.

R: The biggest [building] we ever got was a trailer for an office.

P: Did you do any work in Miami at what they then called the Thirty-sixth Street Air Base? I know that they paved that area for trailers, to begin with. Of course, it is now the Miami International Airport.

R: Our first big plant that we built in Miami was built to take care of that. I would say that we poured maybe a third of all the concrete that ever went into that airport. Not the runways; I am talking about the buildings and maybe an apron or something like that.

P: Did you know some of the contractors who were working down there?

R: Oh, we were up to the big time then, when we got to that.

P: Did you know Mr. Rooney, the electrical contractor?

R: Rooney was a good customer of ours. At first he was bad pay, but later he got to be good pay. Then the old man died, and then the kids ran it, and they did well. I do not know whether you think so or not, but as far as we were concerned, they paid us.

P: The reason I asked you that is because I have a little connection with that air base. Right before I went into the service I was the man in charge of the contract division at the Thirty-sixth Air Base in 1941-1942. The military was breathing down my neck.

R: Did we build that plant down there in 1941?

P: It was 1942 when they first laid the concrete for the trailers.

R: I do not think that is right. There is something misfiring here. David Brinker opened that plant, did he not? I am misfiring somewhere. I must not have supplied any aggregate, cement, or concrete; I do not know what you are talking about.

P: And here I thought that our connection--yours and mine--went back to the 1940s.

R: Well, they may have in some cases. I do not say anything about Miami on this. All these are the early days. Later is when we poured the concrete.

P: Read the names of the places where you were involved.

R: Here on this list is Key West, Fort Myers, Sanford, Daytona, Boca Raton, Camp Blanding in Starke, Arcadia, and Clewiston. Morrison Field was here in West Palm Beach when there was nothing here. On the ends of the runways they had to have a place to turn the airplanes around, [and we poured that]. Here is Clewiston. We sold steel to Macon, Georgia.

P: Did I hear you say Starke, Florida? Is Starke on your list?

R: No, Starke is not on here. We did Camp Blanding in Starke.

P: You did do some work in Boca Raton?

R: Yes.

P: At the air base there?

R: That was some other kind of a base. We had a bad time in Boca Raton. I liked to go nuts. I really did.

P: Florida Atlantic University is on that property now.

R: I know that. But I liked to went crazy; I literally did. We had women truck drivers and women batchers--they weighed out the stuff to go into the truck--in the batch plant.

P: Tell me again what they did.

R: Well, a batch is like in a bakery--you have a batch to make cookies. In this the batcher would mix the rock, sand, cement, and water, open it up, and dump it in the mixer. So they were batchers.

P: And you used as many women as you could because of the shortage of men?

R: Well, we used them because we could not get anybody else. They also would drive the trucks, and, boy, that was worse since they were not qualified.

P: Did you do anything over at McDill Field in Tampa?

R: No. Maybe a little, if any; we may have sold some steel or something.

P: Did you do anything for the navy out in Pensacola or at Eglin Field?

R: We flew in there, but we never did any business with either one.

- P: None of those businesses in the Panhandle area?
- R: Now, let us not go that far. We have not touched on this, but we had to get material wherever we could. We went over into lumber mills in Alabama and Georgia. They still had the railroads running out to where they got their logs. We would buy the rail and take them to Atlanta, Georgia, and they rolled [steel] bars out of them. They were not worth a cuss because they would break; they were very brittle. But they were better than nothing. So we would have them roll this steel and ship it down to us here in Florida. We turned right around and shipped it back to Macon.
- P: Did you have to use scrap metal?
- R: No, this is just rail steel.
- P: I understand, but I just wondered if there was any additional.
- R: We had it rolled up there at Atlantic Steel Company.
- P: But you did not buy scrap to send out to them.
- R: No, they did their own. They took it from a rail and rolled it into a bar like that to make one-half inch or quarter-inch bars. Billet steel is limber; it will roll. But if you hit rail steel over something, it would break. Billet steel has been treated, kind of like you treat a steak.
- P: So by the end of the war in 1945 you had done work all over Florida and some in Georgia, too.
- R: Let us not say all over. Here and there we would pick up one. We poured no concrete in Georgia. If we had something that they wanted we would sell it to them.
- P: Had you become a big company by 1945?
- R: Well, big for my size. After all, we started out when there were 1,300,000 people in Florida, so that is where we were. We were big for our size.
- P: When we use the word big, what are we talking about in terms of sales? Do you have any statistics or anything to show what you had in 1945-1946?
- R: Well, for instance, I bought four five-yard mixers. Do you remember I said we got priority on two? That made me a big operator. I paid for them. I was finally getting money so I could pay for stuff. So all the way up the ladder, everything is relative until the time we bought big ships. I do not know if there is a way to explain it.
- P: In your fleet of trucks, how many trucks would you say you had by 1945? It seems to me that that

would be one way of measuring it.

R: We did not have very many, I will tell you that, compared to 600 or 650 later. We opened a plant in Fort Pierce in 1945. That came from Fort Myers, and we moved it over there. And we opened one in Lake Worth in 1946. Well, I suppose we had three or four in Fort Pierce, maybe three or four in Lake Worth, and maybe ten at West Palm Beach. So that would be a little over twenty.

P: All right. Were your trucks identified by a special color paint or a logo?

R: Oh, yes. We had the "Rinker Materials" on them.

P: What was the color of the trucks?

R: We first started out with orange and purple, like Gulf Oil. But the purple was too much trouble to keep clean, so we eliminated that. Then we had orange trimmed in white. That would not show the cement so much.

P: So when a truck came down a road or a highway people could identify it as being a Rinker truck. And you had your name on the side of it, so you were identifiable by that particular point in time.

R: When they were coming down the highway, that was the only truck coming. It was not like the highway was four lanes wide.

P: You said that in 1945 you built or opened the plant in Fort Pierce?

R: That was that old portable plant at Fort Myers, and we hauled it over there. The office was just a little bit bigger square than that thing right there. Allen Gay's wife was our bookkeeper, and when it rained she had to put a raincoat over the typewriter--and her, too, because the rain came down in the office. That is what we opened with. It was kind of like my office.

P: So none of these plants, or whatever you want to call them, were permanent? They were all portable? You finished the job, and then you put it on wheels and moved it somewhere else?

R: Or we junked it. As we grew in Fort Pierce we just junked that and build another one. Then we would junk and build another one. That little old plant and the little office might have cost \$2,000 to pipe the water and power in. I might have told you this, but our first portable block plant may have cost \$3,000 or \$4,000. A modern block plant costs \$4 million, one that is fully automated. I told you about our building a block plant in Fort Pierce, and it was on another location from where the ready mix was. It was in the north end, and the ready mix was in the south end. That thing was complete. It was a nice-looking plant, all

enclosed, with kilns to cure them, and it had a big sign on it that said, "Welcome to Fort Pierce."

P: What was included in there?

R: It was a complete Besser block machine, which was high speed, and kilns, pallets, and lift trucks to move them in.

P: What are pallets used for?

R: Steel. They put three blocks on a pallet. That whole thing cost \$100,000. Now, the modern one, like we have today, costs \$4 million.

P: Where did that \$100,000 come from?

R: I was making money all the time. I was rich.

P: In other words, you were writing checks for this out of your own pocket? You are not going to the bank, are you?

R: Well, I might have been. Whatever it was, we did not have any trouble paying for it, even up to a quarter of a million.

P: The point is that by this time, with your established reputation, I am sure you did not have to convince anybody at the bank or any lending agency to back you up.

R: I do not remember borrowing money to do that.

P: But I presume that you were using somebody else's money rather than your own.

R: We had been banking with old Reynolds who had the bank in Palm Beach. I do not know if you ever knew him or not. Ed Ball agreed if we would come over to him that he would loan us money at 4 percent. Well, there we were paying 6 and 8 percent, so we went with Ed Ball.

P: How did you get to meet Ed Ball? Did he come looking for you, or did you go looking for him?

R: I did not know him from Adam. I just knew the local bank because we were doing business with them, and I knew the local banker, McKinney, over there. But I did go to his office in Jacksonville to meet him, to finally make the deal, because moving out of one bank and into another, even as small as we were, was a big deal.

P: Did you become a social friend of Ed Ball's?

R: I do not know if you would call it that or not. We had a friendly relationship--"Do not hit me, and I will not hit you."

P: But you did not go hunting and fishing with him out to Wakulla Springs?

R: No, but I drank whiskey with him.

P: You did not go to Wakulla Springs?

R: No.

P: Where did you meet him? In his apartment in the Robert Myers [Hotel], or in his office?

R: He used to be in the Robert Myers Hotel, and then he moved over to another place on the lakefront.

P: But his base was in Jacksonville.

R: Where I first met him was either in a bank or in that hotel near the bank, the Robert Myers Hotel.

P: He had the suite upstairs.

R: I guess you might call it a suite. There were papers all over the place and whiskey in the corner.

P: That is right. He liked to drink bourbon.

R: Yes. I like black Jack Daniels, too. [laughter]

P: Well, there is nothing wrong with that at all. That shows you are a good healthy Southerner.

R: It is the only thing I care to drink now. [laughter]

P: The reason I am asking you about Ed Ball is not only did you do business with him, but I notice you also become a director of the Florida East Coast Railroad.

R: That was the first board they had after reorganization. See, they went bankrupt. They had two tracks. I was one of the charter members. Of course, I am the only one left living.

P: Is this because of your friendship with Ed Ball?

R: It was strictly business. He was all business.

P: Were you ever acquainted with Alfred I. DuPont before he died?

R: Yes. That is the one that was on the board. I knew him. Was that the young man or the old man?

P: That was the old man; that was Ed Ball's brother-in-law.

R: Then I never knew him, but I knew his wife, Jessie Ball DuPont. I was on some boards with her.

R: Did you ever go out to her home, Epping Forest, in Jacksonville?

R: No, I never did. Later I got an invitation, but I did not want to go. In fact, I was there not long ago. They have a club out there now, and it is very nice.

P: I know. Herbert Peyton owns that property. Do you know Herbert of Gate Petroleum Company?

R: No.

P: Well, I am going to go up to Jacksonville next Monday to do an interview with him [FBL9, Oral History Archives, University of Florida].

R: That is a story in itself. That is a beautiful facility. It is a beautiful club.

P: My brother belongs to that, so we go there. Do you know the guy who owned it and lived there for a long time, and then lost it? What was his name?

R: Raymond Mason. Raymond invited me out several times. At one time he had three or four airplanes. But he went broke.

P: Partially broke, only partially.

R: Anyway, he was not the tycoon that he used to be.

P: He still has the castle in Ireland.

R: Well, I guess that is not much. I have seen a picture of it.

P: That is all I have seen is pictures of him.

R: It is an over-sized barn. [laughter] Have you been there?

P: I have never been to the Ireland castle. I knew the Masons, from when I was in Epping Forest.

R: I knew them fairly well.

P: I knew her [Jessie Ball DuPont] better than I knew Raymond.

- R: Raymond used to be on the train to Miami and back a few times every year, and I always went on that train because I could watch all of our plants. But we saw the ass end of them, and they looked terrible. So every time we came up on one, somebody would say, "Here comes a Rinker plant," and everybody would say, "Boooooo!" [laughter]
- P: Let me ask you about the development of, I guess you would call it, your plant range after 1945. In your notes, do you have the dates of when these different plants got set up? We are talking about permanent plants, right?
- R: Well, yes and no. See, some we bought when they were nothing, and we tore them down and built a plant. This has them right here: stock market crash was 1931; I never paid the oil bill; the company opened at the lakefront, on Sixth Street; now we are starting to spend some money. But the first one was very little. An old crane cost \$500, but it was not worth a hoot. You could not move it. You get off the tracks. The first bins were portable.
- P: I have 1945 at Fort Pierce, 1946 at Lake Worth, 1948 at Vero Beach.
- R: Wait a moment until I catch up here. "A plant opened at Fort Pierce called Rinker, Inc." That was the one I said you had to put a raincoat over the typewriter. That was a pile of junk.
- P: That sounds like a temporary plant to me.
- R: That is all I could afford.
- P: I know, but what I am saying is how long did you stay at Fort Pierce?
- R: We are still there.
- P: Okay, but you have a different facility now. The rain is not coming in the ceiling anymore.
- R: I would say we built at least four plants, and every time they got bigger and better. "First with the Best." Every time we made them better.
- P: And then the following year you built one in Lake Worth?
- R: Yes, and it was the same way--it was a little portable. I have forgotten where that one came from. Mr. Hansen's son worked down there. He is about seventy-five now.
- P: And in 1948 you went to Vero Beach?
- R: Yes. Now, I have pictures of that thing. All I have to say about that is we had one heck of a time with that. We bought that from somebody, and we had a whale of a time with our zoning.

We tore that one down and tried to make it pretty. We put Rinker on the wall. I suppose we built about four plants there. We kept building them better and better. That is the way we came up.

P: Mr. Rinker, what was the reason you were building those plants? I am asking an obvious question now.

R: To be more efficient, to cut out the labor. Better mixers.

P: And to be able to get the orders delivered more quickly.

R: That is right--not to tie up the mixers.

P: That also indicates to me that business was growing, because orders were coming from these areas.

R: That is right. And they knew us. See, we had a good reputation as a performer.

P: And Florida is growing after 1945.

R: Constantly growing, but it had its ups and downs. There would be terrible depression, then it would go again, then depression, then it would go. Ever since 1926 it has gone up and down and up and down. I was given a book on the history of America that tells about how it went up and down, up and down.

P: These cyclical inclines and declines.

R: Yes. Florida was very bad at it.

P: If somebody would put a graph over there on the board that charted your progress from 1940 to 1991, would it also be this up and down business?

R: Yes. Now, that does not mean that we did not improve our facilities. When everybody else quit, we made ours better because we got cheap labor. We got that from Henry Ford.

P: There was a tremendous growth in Florida after 1945 for a variety of reasons. The state was more industrialized, and many of the service people liked it and stayed. There was a real population growth in this state after 1945.

R: Many people thought they were going to get rich. They thought, I am going to build a plant, but they did not know how to run it. In Lake Worth in 1946 we knew how to run it.

P: You drove your competition out?

R: Well, we knew how to make concrete, and they did not. Here is a man who had Wilson Concrete who got money from friends in Cleveland. They gave him a whale of a lot of money, and he went down there and built a big, nice office. When I say big, I mean 4,000 square feet. I never had an office that big in my life. Then he built a block plant and a ready mix plant. But the dang thing is, he could not get any production out of it, so he went broke. I bought him out, and he used to work for us. Chuck Wilson was his name. Then I bought his partners out; there were two of them, and I bought them out. I bought out Wilson in 1953, and three years later Portland Industries merged with us. I must have given them some Rinker stock and bought them out. Anyway, we bought them out. I do not recall anybody staying with us. In 1954, "Portland Industries in Vero Beach Purchased." There were three in that operation, and we put in a good plant.

We stayed with that good plant for quite awhile, and then we decided to move up on the railroad because it was too much trouble to bring stuff in by water there. They charged us big fees to come into port. When we came into our own port on Sixth Street we had nothing to pay, but up there it was twenty-five cents a ton for this and minimum rent, so we got out and moved over to the railroad. And Lake Park moved everything out, and we built a new plant there. Well, come ten years later, we built another larger plant--bigger, better, and more efficient.

P: Right now--today, March 1990--where are your plants located?

R: Every one of them is in the best locations money can buy.

P: For the tape, name where the plants are.

R: I will have to show you on a map, there are so many of them. I ran across one the other day. Maybe you will know these places. Here is Daytona Beach, Ormond Beach, Bunnell, Palatka, St. Augustine, Jacksonville--there are three of them there, in west Jacksonville, southwest Jacksonville, north Jacksonville--and up to Yulee. That is the last one we built.

P: I know Yulee. That is near Fernandina Beach.

R: Yes. Then we bought land north of there to develop so we would be in Georgia.

P: You started at Daytona. How about going south from Daytona down to Palm Beach. Start up here at Daytona and move south.

R: What we would do if a plant was not good or not well located [is we would get rid of it or move it]. Say we bought five plants, like from Pete Snow. We might keep only two of them because the others were in bad locations. Many times we would buy a plant, and we would wipe them out because they were not in the right location.

P: I understand what you are saying.

- P: So to tell you, here I have five W. J. Snow plants in Pompono, Boca Raton--you mentioned we were in Boca Raton--Delray Beach. Delray we kept, but Boca we took out. And we took out the one at Royal Palm Beach. That is way out on State Road 80. I guess we had one in Lake Worth, but we took that one out. It was not any good. Does that help?
- P: What you are doing is what I want. Just for the records, I wanted to find out where the plants are located today in the state. Do you have any on the Gulf coast?
- R: Yes. We went over to the Gulf coast and bought one in Palmetto, and then we bought additional land in Palmetto and expanded Palmetto. And we bought land in Tampa, but we never developed it. We have good property in Lakeland.
- P: Is there anything north of Tampa, in Cedar Key or along the Gulf coast there?
- R: We never got there. The boys are getting tired on me now.
- P: How about south of Tampa and Palmetto? Did you have anything at Sarasota or Fort Myers?
- R: We had a block plant at Palmetto, and we had a ready mix. We pulled out of Fort Myers, and we should have stayed. We should have stayed in all of those places, but we had to go where the most business was at the time.
- P: Somewhere along here you mentioned Rinker stock.
- R: Well, we were incorporated.
- P: That is what I wanted to know. When were you incorporated?
- R: Oh, jimminy Christmas. We got incorporated clear back, early.
- P: At one time you were a partnership. Is that right?
- R: Well, let me tell you. Every time we started a new plant, we opened it up because we saved \$5,500 in taxes. Eventually we merged them all together. Now, let us talk about where. Where did I say I gave somebody stock?
- P: Somewhere along there you said, "I gave him some stock."
- R: Who is *he*?
- P: It was either Chuck Wilson or Portland Industries; I am not certain which you were referring to. But I was wondering where the stock came in.

- R: When we started merging them and putting them all together, we figured this one was worth this much and that one was worth that much. One guy put in \$3,800 in Stuart. That is the guy I play golf with. He sold his stock for \$1.5 million and gave it all to his kids.
- P: So it is like people who invested in Coca-Cola to begin with.
- R: That is right. And John Dicks--I do not know where I gave who stock.
- P: I do not care about that. I was just wondering when you were incorporated. But you have never gone public? Rinker has never gone public?
- R: No, never.
- P: Okay. That is really the question I wanted to raise.
- R: I used to say, "Partner, let's you and I go into business, and I will give you a share."
- P: When you said stock I was getting ready to ask you if you had ever gone public and whether or not the stock was out on the exchange.
- R: Lots of people have tried to get us to do that, but it is more trouble to report than it is to make your money.
- P: Okay. That was really the question I wanted to raise.
- R: Here we were buying, buying, buying, buying. Sometimes we just bulldozed the buildings or houses down and built ourselves a plant.
- P: What about this buying out or whatever it was you did with Portland Industries in 1948?
- R: That is what I was talking about, up here at the port of Palm Beach. See, in 1950 Wilson Concrete merged with Rinker Materials, Inc. I have forgotten what happened, but Wilson Concrete merged with Rinker Materials. We changed the name from Portland Industries to Rinker Materials, so that made it all one corporation. So in 1950 to 1953/1954 we eventually moved all that stuff up at Lake Park because of the cost of bringing it in there. Remember I told you that the port charged rent and twenty-five cents a ton? Well, that is more than we made, see.
- P: Now, at the beginning of the 1950s, you obviously were larger than you had been in 1940, and you were larger in 1940 than you had been in 1930. Did you continue this major growth through each of these decades?

R: Oh, yes.

P: Even with the cycles?

R: Well, when things went bad, that is when we got busy because you can do everything cheap. We always took advantage of when there was a nose dive.

P: Did you begin having any problems with labor unions?

R: Oh, yes, we had all of that. When we bought a cement mill they had eleven paid holidays. That was in 1976. Well, you know you cannot give anybody eleven paid holidays. There were all kinds of silly things like that, so we went to war and to tried clean that out.

P: Had you had problems with the labor unions earlier than that? In the 1940s, for instance?

R: No, we had no trouble in the 1940s.

P: The 1950s?

R: The first labor trouble we got into was when we went into the cape.

P: That is much later, then. So the labor unions were not bothering you at that time.

R: Only when we started getting into government. In West Palm Beach they tried to get a union on us.

P: So the cement workers and people like that were not yet unionized by the AF of L-CIO?

R: Oh, yes, they were unionized, but we had no union people. They tried to unionize us at West Palm Beach, but without success.

P: I see. So you kept the unions out until the 1970s.

R: For a long time. Now, later we had a lot of trouble with what they called the gypsies in the cement mill. We had a lot of trouble at the port with the stevedores. You would pay those son-of-a-guns a hundred dollars, and they would sit on their fannies all day long. Sunday they got double time.

P: What do you mean by gypsies?

R: That is an abbreviation for the union they were in; I have forgotten the name of the union.

P: The stevedores were unionized very early.

R: And they were tough.

P: In fact, their unionization goes back into the nineteenth century. How did a company like yours deal with them?

R: I cannot tell you. It was so tough; it was really tough. But in the end we got rid of them, so we had all non-union.

P: You worked only non-union labor? Is that right?

R: We had non-union labor. We unloaded the ships ourselves, and we did it at the cape the same way.

P: And the same thing was true with your employees within the organization--all non-union?

R: No. Now, later we had one big union.

P: Was this a company union?

R: Well, I think you could call it that, because we did all the work and we did all the negotiation.

P: How well did you treat your employees?

R: The best, always. We paid them more than they ever got anyplace else. See, the union collected the devil out of their paychecks for dues. They really murdered them.

P: So you held on to your employees, non-union as they were, by giving them higher pay. How about benefits? Were there sick benefits and that sort of thing?

R: Yes. They had better benefits [than they would have gotten elsewhere]. And we formed the foundation where we gave money away to worthy causes, and we educated more kids. We had little boys' ball teams; we had as many as a hundred of those kid ball teams. Man, they did more good for us than anything you have ever seen.

P: Did you have a good pension plan early on? Back in the 1940s, for instance?

R: Yes, we had the best way back early. We had the "First with the Best": the best pension, the best educational program. Now, today you would say it was not any good.

P: But I am talking about for the times in which you were set up.

R: For the time we had good programs. We had profit sharing.

P: You did have profit sharing?

- R: Oh, yes. Not for the union, now; this was for the management.
- P: Social security came in 1935. Your people were covered under that right from the very beginning?
- R: Oh, yes, they had to be.
- P: But in addition to that, you had a pension program?
- R: We had a retirement plan, and we had educational programs so you could go away to school or stay here. The foundation was a separate corporation. We did not send anyone to medical school. It had to be something in our business. You could be a lawyer, an engineer, or something like that connected with our business. It is kind of like Florida Power and Light says, "Stick to your own business." Do not be in all kinds of business. You have been reading that in the paper, haven't you?
- P: I have been reading that, and I have also talked to Marshall McDonald [CEO, Florida Power and Light Group]. I think I told you that I did an interview with Marshall [FBL5, Oral History Archives, University of Florida], and I know that he is a good friend of yours.
- R: I know him well.
- P: Talk about the growth of Rinker in the 1950s and 1960s, because I want a general picture of your growth after World War II. That is really what I am getting at here now.
- R: I would have to go back to 1945, 1946, 1948. I have a thing here that tells you everything I did.
- P: You just talk and tell me about the progress and growth of your organization as you supervised and directed it.
- R: We had three plants; that is what we started with: West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, and Fort Pierce. Those were the first three. The next one to come along was in Jupiter. Maybe you remember the plant we had there.
- P: I am not sure I know it, but I know Jupiter.
- R: Then we built one in Stuart and one in Vero Beach. They were not worth a cuss, but they were plants. We were there, and we could sell the material. Later we built them bigger and better. We have a good plant in all of those places now. They are the best that money can buy.
- P: That is, they are good buildings, good equipment, and all of those wonderful things.

R: And dust collectors and all of that. Of course, they are nothing you would want in your front yard, but for a ready mix plant they are good--the best. So we started, and we just kept right on moving, always tearing down and building better. In 1958 we bought a plant, constructed and opened at Boynton Beach. That was the best that we knew how to build at that time. Later it was not worth a hoot and became obsolete, just like your Model T Ford.

P: I was just going to say that it is just like an automobile or anything else. It is wonderful when it first comes out, but it quickly gets old fashioned.

R: Then we wanted to go into Cape Canaveral, and we made a deal with a fellow by the name of Holloway. Mr. Holloway was an alcoholic. I went to Africa with my family (My young sons were David and John; David is about fourteen, and John is about eleven) and spent eleven weeks down there [leaving Holloway in charge of constructing the plant]. We gave him plans for the steel for the bins and the ground storage to store the rock for the run up to the bins for batching. See, you have to have big ground storage. And we gave him plans for the kilns to cure the block with the steel in there. Well, he--Holloway--decided they did not need any steel. So the ground storage bins caved in. The roofs on the curing shed fell in because he had decided he did not need to lap the roof, the corrugated iron. [You have to set] two laps over to make it one. Every damn one of them had to be taken down and done over again.

P: He was trying to save, and he lost out.

R: What this man did almost ruined us. We had to go back up, tear that thing all down, and build it over again--every one of them. I also told him, "Brother, you and I had better part company," and we parted company. He was a guy like I was in the early days. He wanted to sell everything: wheelbarrows, trowels, cords to measure with. We bought him out, and he up and died then because of cirrhosis of the liver or something due to his alcoholism. That eliminated him.

Then we moved into Orlando, and we ran into another alcoholic. It is a funny thing to take advantage of an alcoholic. We bought out Nelson Concrete. He was a good old boy. E. O. Jensen had a plant out there. I made a forced landing out there during the war when I was flying with the Civil Air Patrol. We erected a portable plant for 3,000 or 4,000 yards there and poured the concrete for the turnpike. Pompano, a Fort Lauderdale division, was formed, and a separate entity from the Boca Raton division. Now we are getting big-shot ideas. We started developing districts.

P: Now, this is after 1945?

R: Now we are into 1960. Say you were going to run Jacksonville, and you would be in charge of all the plants in Jacksonville--say there are ten of them up there. That is you. Now we come down to Orlando, and that man had fifteen. Then we come down to Cocoa, and he twelve.

Then we come down to Fort Pierce, which was a district for awhile. Palm Beach was also a district. We had seven districts at one time: Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Fort Pierce--like that. Then would come a depression, and we would shut it all down to three districts.

P: Who conceived of these different ideas as you are moving? Is this your thinking, or did you have advisors?

R: We were all working together to make money, because it was all profit sharing.

P: I mean this business of divisions and where you are going to go and where you are not going to go.

R: Oh, I got that from reading books about how people grew up and how they divided up the work: do not try to do it all yourself. I originally thought you had to watch everybody. But then I found out that if I put you out there in competition with him, you would work like a dog to beat him.

P: Did you operate your business in terms of the managers or the division supervisors sitting down with you on a regular basis and saying, "This is where we should go," or did you run it as a one-man show?

R: Well, I guess there was one man. I was the leader. But every Monday morning--finally, now; this is not the finish--we would have a meeting at 6:30 or 7:00, and all the top management people and finance and accounting would come to that meeting. They would tell what kind of trouble they were having or what their plans were for next week. Everybody else had the advantage of listening to the problems that central had, and central knew what the problems were in the field. They all shared. Central shared its problems with all plants, but the districts only shared in their own. The districts would come once a month; central met every Monday morning. I would meet with the heads of the finance department, the accounting department, the engineering department--every department--during the week. We met as a group, and I would also meet during the week with the individual head men.

P: Was there ever any question within the organization as to who the boss was?

R: Oh, yes, but they did not say. [laughter]

P: Not only did the buck stop on your desk, but the decisions came entirely from you? Did you override management?

R: Oh, sure. Back in 1970 we had a commitment from the Chemical Bank, an open letter of credit, for \$40 million to build a cement mill in Kaiser, out in California. We were supposed to build it with a turn-key job, and they would install it and turn it over to us. Well, then a depression came. I saw it coming. They went in there, and I said, "Man, we cannot go

with this." They said: "You have to go. We have already ordered the equipment, and if you do not take it, somebody else will get it, and then you will not get it for a long time." I said: "If you can sell that in China (or wherever it was), you sell it. In ninety days I will tell you whether I want to take it or not." In ninety days I told them I did not want it, and everybody thought I was crazy. Shoot. Man, the economy fell apart.

P: When you say "everybody," are you talking about your people?

R: My people.

P: Your people thought that you should do it, and you thought that they should not. You made the decision not to do it, and it turned out to be the right one?

R: What happened is this. There was the Lehigh Company, which I had tried to buy for years, but they would not sell it for \$35 or \$40 million. I went to see them right after that, and I bought that mill at Miami for \$10.5 million. Chemical Bank offered to loan me the money, \$40 million, to build a new one. This was an operating plant. Of course, we bought other stuff from them. The mill was \$10.5, and we bought property in Jacksonville, twenty acres in Orlando with plants on it, and some down in Miami. The whole thing was \$12.5, and we made a deal on 3,000 acres of land. Of course, they were hard up because they were losing \$4 million a month in Florida, so they paid the taxes for ten years on that 3,000 acres of land other than what we mined. I do not know whether you followed all of that or not.

P: I want to ask you if you were ever wrong in any of the decisions that you made.

R: Was I ever wrong? Lots of times I was wrong and made mistakes--bad ones. I made a bad mistake in Lakeland, and I made a mistake in Boynton. We had two plants in Boca Raton where I had set a crane in the water near the barges, and the crane went in the water right where the barges were, so they could not unload. And we were taking care of all that work in Boca.

P: Those are mistakes that you made, but how about mistakes of judgment in terms that really cost the company large amounts of money?

R: Sure. Everybody does things that are mistakes. I told you about hiring those women, but I do not know what else I would have done.

P: In other words, then, the buck did stop at your desk.

R: I pulled some of the biggest boners you have ever seen. Well, so did Henry Ford. You name one guy who ever went anywhere who did not.

P: Did you stand up in front of your managers and say, "Gentlemen, I flubbed"?

R: Absolutely. I sure did. Everybody made a bit.

P: I want to go back and ask you a question. When World War II came along, why did you not go into the service?

R: I was on a priority 2 (or whatever they called it) because I was involved in defense work, and I flew in the Civil Air Patrol in my spare time.

P: And of course you were married and had a family.

R: I was married and we had three kids, so there was no way they were going to get me.

P: You were not yet forty years old.

R: No. But even later, see, I was too much in the military. In fact, I took movies with an eight-millimeter camera. We were not supposed to take any pictures of the submarines sinking or the ships going down or burning, but I did. I was a captain, and I had red stripes on here to keep me from being shot if they caught me. I took movies of these ships burning, and we sent them to [General Henry H.] "Hap" Arnold. We could not get them to give us any bombs, so he said, "Give them anything they want."

Then we carried little 100-pound demolition bombs, about this long. Now, what the hell did we know about dropping a bomb? We had sights on the side of the airplane like this, and if you had it exactly level and the winds were exactly straight, it would go at a certain speed where you wanted it to. But invariable it would go this way or that way, or it went over or under. We practiced in the sand. We put in a thing 300 feet long with lime, and we practiced all day to try to put one in the middle of that thing.

So there were a lot of stories about me--some of the biggest lies you have ever heard! They told me I sank same instead of sinking a submarine at Canaveral. Well, sure, we saw one coming out, and here was the water coming over it. I was scared to death, so I got down about twenty feet out of the water, and we turned that bomb loose. It headed that way, and that is the last I ever saw. I turned and ran like hell! I have not been back since. So they wrote a book and said I sank it. [laughter]

P: I want to see that book that has you in there.

R: Do not believe it. They wrote it up in the *Reader's Digest*, and there was a picture of me in *Look* magazine.

P: That is good. They should take care of our famous citizens.

R: I will tell you, if they won the war telling lies about everybody in that war like they did about me, I

do not see how we ever won a war. [laughter]

P: Mr. Rinker, did your company supply any of the concrete for Disney World?

R: Lots of it. I would say we supplied more to Disney World than anybody.

P: Who was your contact there? General Portland?

R: I did not have anything to do with that. Our people handled the whole thing. We had a young guy over there by the name of Karl Watson. We made him president, and he knew them all. He was a good salesman. So we supplied most of the concrete, and we have a plant on there now. It belongs to them, but we operate it. And we had plants on the north side, south side, and east side--there were four plants--so that we could supply in case we got into a jam. And these were good plants.

P: I hope they gave you a lifetime pass so you could get into Disney World and EPCOT forever.

R: No, they did not do that. [laughter] They gave me a special "honored guest" status over there, and they said: "Come on over. We will give you guides," and all of this. There were six of us, and the bill was \$6,000.

P: The guides were for nothing, right?

R: Yes.

P: We are continuing the interview with Mr. Rinker at his office here in West Palm Beach. Today is now Saturday, March 10, 1990. We are going to continue our discussion about the growth of the Rinker operations. We started talking about the development and growth after World War II, and Mr. Rinker was telling me about his opening plants in Fort Pierce in 1945, in Lake Worth in 1946, and in Vero Beach in 1948. I want to stop here for just a moment and ask you about the merger with Wilson Concrete. What brought that about? That was in 1950.

R: There were three movements or groups of people: Chuck Wilson, and two groups of stockholders. I cannot recall how we put all three of them together, but in the end we bought them all out.

P: Did they come to you, or did you go to them, or was it a mutual kind of thing?

R: Chuck Wilson used to work for us, and he got into trouble. He could not pay his bills. We heard about it, and I went to see Chuck. So Chuck Wilson was the first man I went to talk to. I bought into his part of that business. Then there were two other groups of stockholders in there, but I have forgotten how we bought them all out. It took three years to work it out.

P: What kinds of products did they have?

R: They had a ready mix plant and a block plant, and they brought in rock and sand.

P: So the acquisition of that made your organization a larger one.

R: Oh, yes.

P: And then three years later you bought or merged with the Portland outfit?

R: Well, it took three years to do whatever I did. Now, you have to remember that they were bringing stuff in by water, but they had to pay dockage and high rent. When we bought it, we had to do the same thing, so eventually we just moved out altogether. We could not afford to pay the high rent and dockage on every ton of material that came in there.

P: Were they also in West Palm Beach?

R: West Palm Beach. Everything was right there at the port.

P: So when you say they were bringing things in by water, you meant that they were coming up the inland [Intracoastal] Waterway into Lake Worth?

R: That is right, and then into that slip up there.

P: So none of these were ocean-going vessels.

R: Oh, no. This was long before any ocean boats came.

P: Did you eventually get into ocean boats?

R: We may have bought in a little at that point, but the water was not deep enough for big ships. It was all right for small ships. We may have brought in some [bigger ships], but I do not recall bringing in very much.

P: All during this period that we have been talking about so far, up until the 1950s, you are bringing in a lot of rock, gravel, sand, and so on from the Dade County/Miami area?

R: That is right.

P: Is there an inexhaustible supply down there?

R: Well, no more. The biggest supplier of aggregate in the state is in Dade County.

P: Has that always been true?

R: That has always been true.

P: Does it continue to be today?

R: Continues to be.

P: And those lands have not been built on because they have become so valuable?

R: Well, when we dug out the rock, it made a lake. So if you go around Miami now you see lakes, lakes, lakes everywhere.

P: And those were the original gravel pits, then.

R: Well, that was before they dug it out. In the old days, if you looked down all you saw was rock land.

P: Is there a limit to the amount of raw materials there?

R: Oh, yes. In most of them you can go down as far as maybe sixty or seventy feet. You dig down with those big shovels and bring it up. There are other places where you can go only forty feet.

P: Where are future resources located if you exhaust all those in Dade County? Are there other places [to get rock and gravel] in Florida?

R: We will move west, but then we get into the drainage district, and they will not let us dig out there.

P: Move west toward the Gulf coast?

R: Yes.

P: How about north, to the Marion County area? I notice so many rock pits in that area.

R: Yes, but they are very shallow, and they do not have much rock. They are maybe eighteen feet deep. You can dig maybe only ten feet of rock. It is like mining coal.

P: Were the Cummer interests in Jacksonville ever into this? Do you know them? They were big in lumber.

R: I have heard of them, but [they were never into this] to my knowledge. They might have been in a small way, but they were never a rival or competitor to us.

- P: What did this Portland Industries give you?
- R: At the time we were going in, we thought they would give us water access and that we would be better off. But we did not check all of the costs. That is what I meant when I said we found out we had to pay twenty-five cents a ton for dockage and high rent. So we said, "This is not for us." We tore everything down and moved it out. That is later, now.
- P: I notice that in 1956 you expanded into Jupiter and Stuart.
- R: Yes.
- P: Do your notes show what the continuing expansion was after the middle of the 1950s and on into the 1960s?
- R: I would say that Jupiter was rebuilt at least three times, maybe four. There was a little thing that we put up in the first place, and then we improved on that a little bit. There are pictures here of when we put up two bins and had two belts running. Then later, like ten years ago, we built a very modern, up-to-date plant on a very narrow strip of land, like sixty feet. That was hard to do. That meant we had to run a conveyor this way and that way to get it up there. So today if you go to Jupiter you will see this bunch of walls. I do not advise you to get a piece of property next door to it. But we were always working to make it better.
- P: Let me just sum up something and ask you if I have the right impression of this, Mr. Rinker. You would go into an operation. You have a job--Clewiston or wherever it might be--and open a plant there. It might be just a temporary plant. When the job is finished, you pull up stakes and go back home. But in other places in the state--and Jupiter is an example--you may come in that way, but because business continues, you decide to maintain yourself on a permanent basis there and have a larger and more permanent plant.
- R: When you go in permanently, you cannot afford to move it. The thing that we went into Clewiston with was a portable thing. It was like your taking a wash machine out there and washing clothes, and then going down to the next to wash some more clothes.
- P: All right. Where are your permanent operations or the permanent places in Florida today? Would you say there are twenty of them? Ten of them?
- R: Oh, no, a hundred.
- P: Okay. Then we do not need to list them. Those are the ones that you began to mention yesterday, then. We may want to insert a map with this.
- R: Those permanent installations were not built all at once. Once we knew we were coming into a

place, then we started building big batchers and big block machines. It was very expensive automation.

P: When you say very expensive, give me a ball park figure of how much a plant like the Jupiter plant would cost. What kind of an investment were you talking about?

R: About \$2.5 million. A lot of that was in attorney's fees to get the permits.

P: And how about the number of employees? Again, use the Jupiter plant as an example.

R: Jupiter might have twenty-five employees. There was no block plant.

P: Is that people in the yard, in the office, and everybody associated with the plant?

R: I would have worked twenty-five.

P: Some plants were larger than that?

R: Oh, yes. If you had a block plant, some would have as many as fifty, but they do everything. They make blocks and bend steel, they have a warehouse and high-production ready mix plants. See, the ready mix concrete plant might have fifteen or eighteen people in there, the block might have fifty, the manufacturing and distribution might have ten, the steel yard might have ten, the warehouses might have ten. That means truck drivers, foremen, and the whole department. We were highly departmentalized.

P: Now, did you continue this same rapid expansion and growth in the 1960s and the 1970s?

R: We have been growing ever since the beginning--one truck, two trucks, three trucks. We have kept on growing, making bigger and better trucks, bigger plants. The day I quit we were still improving the batching so that we could keep trucks coming and going. We had automation where we could write a ticket and load a twenty-five-ton truck in one minute. He could come by and get a ticket, and he was gone. In the early days I told you about, one bin could load a truck in three to five minutes. Well, you had to write a ticket, you had to stop to check it and do all kinds of things. You could load the truck, which held only five tons, not twenty-five. In one minute you got only two or four yards. Later, we were loading twenty-five yards. With the early truck mixer we loaded one yard and a half, but later they got up to where they could load eleven in the same length of time. Are you with me?

P: I understand.

R: That is a lot to absorb. It took me sixty years to do all that.

P: Is this modern technology, new methods of moving these things, the secret to what you were doing?

R: That is right.

P: Did you have to come up with any of these things yourself? Did you design a lot of these?

R: Oh, yes. We visited other plants to find the best they had. Maybe they had one or two things. We were always trying to get more production for less work.

P: Did you have or operate an experimental lab?

R: Oh, we had labs in every district to make sure we made the best mixes, to get the best yield for the lowest cost, and the best service for you.

P: You used the word *quit* before, and I know you are referring to when Rinker sold its operations in the 1980s. At that moment, approximately how many people did you have on your payroll?

R: We had 2,350, plus contract people we would call from agencies. See, we added on and took off.

P: Those were day laborers?

R: No, they could be anything. They could be clerks, bookkeepers, financial people, people to run errands.

P: These were people you needed because suddenly you had some extra work, and it might cease after a week or two months.

R: Right. They cost more. We had to pay them a premium to supply us with work.

P: Sort of like stores taking on clerks at Christmastime.

R: Right. Well, at Christmas we had less because we cannot work during winter.

P: I meant that it is that same idea of when you need extra help.

R: Yes.

P: There were agencies in all of these towns?

R: They are everywhere for hiring. I would say we had 2,300 permanent employees.

P: Does that include you administrators and people in your office?

R: Well, you could not hire administrators.

- P: I meant people who were on the payroll one way or the other.
- R: From me down.
- P: Okay. We talked about the earlier depression, and yesterday you were talking about the up-and-down business cycles that hit the nation and have had an impact on Florida. One of the most serious ones, of course, was the recession or depression of the 1970s. That was really bad for contractors and builders all over the state. How did you go through that, and how did it impact your business?
- R: Well, it hit us like everybody else. We forecasted at the beginning of that year how bad it was going to be.
- P: The oil crisis came, and that really lit the match under this whole thing.
- R: In 1976 we bought the Lehigh Company and a cement mill. Well, we bought that mill for \$10.5 million. I had offered him \$35 million three years before. In addition to the mill, we had a ten-year option on 3,000 acres of land, and he paid the taxes. Now, we bought other land, like in Orlando. The total money we laid out was something like \$12 million or \$12.5 million. So by being very anxious to sell it--Bill Young was the president--he was willing to do most anything. Of course, that meant I carried all of that land for ten years for no cost, because he paid the taxes. You cannot do any better than that. It was not quite 3,000 acres; actual operation may have been 2,600, and the mill, railroad tracks, and things like that occupied maybe 400 acres.
- P: It sounds to me, the way you are telling it right now, that in the 1970s you continued to grow and prosper. I had read in your notes that you felt that the 1973-1974 depression was as bad as anything your company had to go through.
- R: It was a bad one, but not like 1926 when there were bread lines--I mean *real* bread lines. You did not get any slip; you just got in a bread line to try to get something.
- P: The point is that when the Arabs cut off the oil and then the prices went up, there was a serious recession throughout the United States, and this was particularly hard on the construction business.
- R: The amazing thing is that all of our competition went broke, but we managed. I told you that we sold airplanes and we sold trucks. We could sell used trucks to South America--they could not buy new trucks because of the big import fees. We sold mixer trucks. Anything we had, we sold it.
- P: Was that because you were retrenching?

R: To get money. That is right.

P: Now, we are talking about the 1970s. You are retrenching in the 1970s.

R: Right--1973 to 1975.

P: And you are selling off all of the surplus things that you could do without.

R: Yes. Now, the year that was so bad (I do not remember what year it was, but it must have been between 1973 and 1976) is when we bought the Lehigh mill.

P: But 1973-1976 was a serious period of retrenchment for the Rinker company.

R: We had to stay liquid. All of our competition had to close down their plants. They had no money, so they went broke.

P: Did you need this? You were having a cash-flow problem yourself.

R: Yes. If we had not sold the airplanes and trucks [we might have gone under, too]. A lot of the trucks we had just set up. They were new trucks that we had just bought. We had them on contract; we would buy them fifty at a time, or ten at a time, and we had just set them up. Well, that did not work out very well. I did not know about it, but trucks have to be run every day or so. We were supposed to, but the boys got careless and did not, so that practically ruined many of the trucks.

P: What were you doing with airplanes?

R: Oh, I was rich! [laughter]

P: You had a fleet of airplanes?

R: Oh, no, I had just two.

P: And you got rid of both of them?

R: I got rid of both of them.

P: That must have been a great sacrifice for you.

R: Shucks. Airplanes were a luxury.

P: What did you use to get around? Your thumb?

- R: We found you could drive a car and fly on an airline. But the important thing was to stay liquid. Other people did not have that much sense. I knew we had to have money. Consequently, when we liquidated and got some money, we bought the Lehigh company. We bought our competition out if they had what we wanted.
- P: Have you employed business analysts over the years to make these predictions for you of when the business cycle was going to change, or did you use your own good common sense?
- R: Well, I was raised on the farm, and on the farm we had very little. See, everybody had to feed their own pigs to buy their own suit of clothes at the end of the year. There was always a little runt that the sow would lay down, and the stronger piglets would take all the milk, so we took the runt. My job was to feed it with a bottle every morning and night. He got fat until he got to 200 pounds, and I sold that 200-pound pig for maybe twelve dollars, or six cents a pound. That is the way I got my clothes. We had to count the nickels on everything on the farm.
- P: So you carried that philosophy on into your business life?
- R: I heard my mother debate the price of a suit, and she would get fifty cents off. That was my training.
- P: And that has been your philosophy ever since?
- R: Well, you learn from your parents by listening to them. It was just one of those things. You have to get up and work. We must have worked seven days a week. I was just reading a memo of the things I belong to and the things I did. I do not know how I did it.
- P: I know you have had a lot of help from the people you had employed as managers, but it sounds like this has been basically a one-man operation.
- R: Well, there is always one leader. It is like you and your thing. There is always a spark plug, as I call it. If you go back in history, you would find out there was the man who started something, and there would be a lot of followers and a team. Like Rockefeller. The man who started something is always the leader. He could be a king, a great military man, or anything like that.
- P: Why did you decide to dispose of the Rinker company?
- R: Age. It was getting too much for me, and I could not keep up the pace. He can go out and stay out all night and go to work the next morning. I have to go to bed at 10:00. The other night when my son was here we stayed up until 10:30, and I usually get up at 5:30. So last night I was all tuckered out!

- P: So you still keep the same hours you kept when you were living on the farm.
- R: Well, not the same. Why, when I was a kid, we would drive all night to go to a football game in Jacksonville, and then we would drive home the next day. We would go to a dance Friday night, drive all the way to Jacksonville and go to the football game [on Saturday], and then come home Sunday. That is youth. I cannot do that now.
- P: But you were early-to-rise and early-to-bed when you were living on the farm, and you worked hard all day.
- R: Oh, yes.
- P: Now, it sounds like you have basically carried that all throughout your life.
- R: Well, you know kids now like to work a little while and then go play. My dad got up at 4:00, and then I had to get up and get the cows in and milk them. I told you how I sat on a stool, and when it was snowing outside, I was inside the barn.
- P: When you sold out, did you go to them, or did they come to you?
- R: Oh, people have been trying to buy us out for ten years, and I would listen to them. But most of them did not have the money. They were just talking. When it came down to the money, they did not have it. There were four or five companies that had the money, but they did not want to spend it. One of them was Canada La Farge. They are one of the biggest cement companies around.
- P: And they were one of the prospective buyers?
- R: They had a big branch over here called Canada La Farge. The head of that in the United States was John Redfern. He was on the board in France, and was the administrator of their operations in North America.
- P: What other companies seemed to be interested?
- R: Oh, the British wanted to buy us out. There were two outfits in Britain that had been after us for years. They came up, and they were going to do all of these things. They brought some duchess from England. I was looking [at this book recently], and she autographed it for me. They were great. They had a lot of big estates, but actually all she did was look after those estates. She did not own them. They had about six of them around England. She gave me a book when they came over here. She was a stately, beautiful woman. She is about seventy-five years old. But she did not have any money, either.

- P: How about the Japanese?
- R: The Japanese never came. See, we are on the wrong side of the ocean; they are on the other side.
- P: How about the Germans?
- R: We talked to them a few times. I went over there and met with them, but we never got anywhere with them. There were two big outfits in Germany, in Heidelberg and . . . I cannot remember the other one. I met the head man and spent about a week with him on the Rhine River. Their offices were on the Rhine, and his home was on the Rhine.
- P: But you sold out to an Australian firm.
- R: The Australians were full of stuff and raring to go. They had a lot of money from the liquidation of their oil and mining interests. They had about four different kinds of businesses, but they decided to get out of that and go into the building material business as a better business to take control over the world.
- P: But they are on the same side of the world as the Japanese.
- R: But you have to understand their worldwide operations. The Japanese dealt more with the west coast in their cement and shipping. The Japanese had a lot of cement mills. The Australians had none. They were clear on the other side of the Earth. Pioneer Cement was another company over there that had cement, and we visited them on our first trip to Australia, maybe twelve or fifteen years ago. They spent a lot of time wanting to buy us.
- P: How long did this negotiation take place that finally resulted in the sale?
- R: Six months. It was fast. They said, "We will not be long." I would say that maybe it was even less than that. We closed on July 20. I would say it took six months. That is very fast to do an audit.
- P: Was there any problem as far as price? Did you get what you wanted?
- R: Yes. We always try to get more and they always to get less, but we were happy.
- P: You were satisfied?
- R: We were very happy.
- P: You have never been sorry about this?
- R: Well, sorry to the extent that they run the business entirely differently from us. That breaks my

heart. But they run the business, and they are billion-dollar people.

P: Where are their corporate headquarters?

R: Their headquarters are in Sydney, Australia. Their headquarters in the United States are in Atlanta, Georgia, because of transportation. They are all around the United States.

P: So although the company started here and has grown over the years in West Palm Beach, are there no affiliations with West Palm anymore?

R: When they bought this, they said were going to make West Palm their headquarters. In fact, the man who is living here whom they selected for the head would like to stay here because he lives in Boca Raton. But they changed their minds, and they have already opened their offices in Atlanta. His name is David Clarke. He came to Atlanta and had an office there. Then when they made this deal, he moved down here. He lives in Boca Raton. His idea is that from Miami, West Palm Beach, or Orlando, he can go anyplace in the world as well as he can out of Atlanta. That may not be so, but I think he can.

P: Has the fact that they have moved from here had an impact on the economy of West Palm Beach and the area?

R: Only in the way they operate. I would say it had very little impact. It might make the costs of building materials a little higher because of the way they run the business.

P: How about the employees who no longer have jobs?

R: Well, of course, that was not so good. They fired a lot of people. They let go anybody who made a lot of money, and they hired or promoted people who made less.

P: Were you able to take care of your top people--the administrators?

R: Oh, yes. We gave them \$5 million to spread. That guy who was here a while ago got \$800,000 just for closing the deal.

P: So people who had worked with you over the years were protected.

R: Oh, yes, they were well paid. There are four of them who got \$800,000 each. Then there was \$400,000 and \$250,000.

P: Everybody was helped, then, and not hurt as a result. The loyal, dedicated employees were taken care of. You protected them.

R: Right. But strangely enough, even though they made all that money, they saw how much money I

made and were dissatisfied. They thought I made too much money. See, my family had 71 percent, and 71 percent of \$515 million is a lot of money. They did not look at their \$800,000; they looked at what I had. But that is human nature.

P: Well, when you start looking at that \$800,000, it can get your feelings back in order again.

R: When you are making \$100,000 a year and all of a sudden get \$800,000, there is eight years in one check.

P: We were talking a little earlier about the problems with labor unions, and I want to get back to that. I gather that they did begin to plague you somewhat after World War II as you were expanding your operations, and you were able to hold them off.

R: We had continuing strife, in a nice way, with the union. We had some trouble with them in Cocoa, which is near Cape Canaveral. They got all mixed up. Even though we were union, they came down with their guns--high-powered rifles--and shot right through the motors and through the radiators. Sometimes they came that close to our people. Over at Disney World they got all mixed up once in awhile, even though we were union, and do some crazy thing. Maybe they were drinking whiskey or did not know what they were doing. But normally we developed a better and better relationship with all of our laboring-class people. We got rid of--that is a bad word to use--the stevedores. We got rid of the gypsies, the United Cement and Gypsum workers. We called them gypsies. We got non-union people working side-by-side with union people, which was unheard of. Generally, they found that we treated them fairly and that they did better with us than they did with their unions. Well, that made the management people at the union unhappy. In the end, they went broke, too. They had a man who took the money. They had no money. So we almost had a non-union company, you might say.

P: You were not plagued with strikes or with threats of strikes, were you?

R: Oh, yes. We had security; we had a security man, down at the mill, especially, out on U.S. Highway 41. There is a two-mile road there that came into our cement mill, and we had guards out there.

P: When was this, Mr. Rinker?

R: In the 1980s.

P: So that was relatively recent, then.

R: Yes. But mostly after we bought the mill, from 1978 to 1980. Finally they found out that the union leaders were taking all the money and that the workers were getting the bad end of the deal, so they went along with us. We have a union contract there today, but it is nothing

like it was in the old days, when it was impossible, where they have eleven weeks vacation. If anybody in your family died, you got three paid holidays and all expenses. If they died in Seattle, they had to pay your fare out to Seattle, or that sort of thing. And it could be a cousin, a remote relative not in the immediate family. So we took all that out.

P: Did you have any special employment policy as far as minority groups were concerned? Did you employ blacks, Hispanics, all of the things we hear so much about?

R: Yes. However, it was not the best situation because we could not understand what they were talking about. The Spanish would always stick to their leader. But we learned to live with it. The main thing was that we had trainees all the time who were training to be management people. And they had to work; they had to do everything. To be able to manage, you have to know what you are managing. That gave us a lot of trouble. Maybe we would have four management trainees in a district. Well, if you had a lot of districts, that was not very bad. You cannot have too many trainees, and there was a big turnover in training.

P: How high up did any blacks go in the organization?

R: Oh, we had maybe four of them at one time. They were pretty well up. In other words, they were district people or area people, and good people. They were good people. We did not put them up there just because they were black.

P: This is not the kind of a business that women would have ever played a role in, is it?

R: Well, some companies do.

P: Were any of them ones that you dealt with, like Lehigh?

R: They had women in the lab and here and there, and they wanted to be salesmen. Well, we say that to be a salesman you have to be kind of an operations fieldman to know whether a truck can or cannot get into a place. Women do not work out on that so well. We had our troubles.

P: Well, that is all right. It is part of the historical record.

R: It is part of those things that college kids need to know.

P: Well, I was just going to ask you, Mr. Rinker: If you were invited to a high school graduation to be the speaker or to a university to talk to a class about your own career, what advice would you give to young people?

R: To tell you the truth, I do not know. That depends on what the subject was.

- P: I am just talking about your philosophy of life and work and so on.
- R: It depends entirely on the group I talked to and what the thing was we were discussing. In the early days, I did this in high school. That was one thing. Now, when I got further along, it was much more difficult to make such a talk that was comprehensive to the college people, because they had already been indoctrinated by the college professors on how you should live: "You are entitled to a living. The government owes you a living, and you should not take less than a living." It is kind of like the strike now in the baseball world. The owners want more, and they say, "We are not going to play ball." You hear this every day. So that is what you run into in the colleges today. There are very few colleges that say: "You have to work your way up. There are no free lunches anywhere on the face of the earth. You have to earn it."
- P: But basically that is what you would be saying to them, right? "Work, work, work."
- R: But they do not want to hear that.
- P: I know, but whether or not they are receptive to what you are saying, what would you say to them?
- R: That is it. I would teach that sort of thing. But you have to give it to them in a certain way. It is kind of like the hamburgers I told you I had to eat so many of. At least they were good hamburgers, until I ate so many of them they made me sick. That is way too much to a college student who might listen to me. The professor teaches him every day. He does not make just one speech, so he has the advantage. It is kind of like your wife. If I told you something about your wife, where she talks to you every day, she would just say, "That guy is just trying to make trouble between us."
- P: In terms of your own reflections, now, you are a man in your eighties. You have worked all of your life, starting out as a kid on the farm. You have been in this business now since the early 1920s--a long time. Would you say you have led a satisfactory life? Have you been happy?
- R: There are some days like you and like him or anybody else has where I am so depressed that I do not know what I am doing. The next day I get up in the morning, and something good happens and I feel great. That is life. Isn't that the way it is? You get up in the morning and feel good; the next morning you have a stomach ache and feel badly. Isn't that right?
- P: But over the eighty-plus years that you have been an active man--and you have been active for a long time--as you think about it now, would you say you have led a satisfactory life in terms that you have achieved what you have wanted?
- R: I do not know of anything on earth that, if I had to go back and live over, I would still do the same

thing as I did. Now, maybe I would not want to repeat a mistake, but you have to make mistakes to not make mistakes. You learn by making mistakes, not by doing things right. You learn when you do something wrong, or you learn when you find out there is a better way to do this than the way you have been doing it.

P: What motivated you to do all of the things you have done in the business world? Was it just the desire to make money?

R: The thing that motivated me was that I was a little guy, and everybody was bigger than I was. I weighed about 110 or something like that when I graduated from high school. Everybody was bigger than I was, so I had to do something to maintain my position with people. You understand that. My neighbor across the street is 6'4" and good looking, and here is me on this side. I went over there to a cocktail party one day this week. He has an airplane, and he flies here and there, and they just built them a new house. It is a funny thing about small people--they have to work twice as hard as a big man. Well, you are short. Those big guys give you a complex. "What are you doing there?" Does that make sense?

P: It makes sense, but it seems to me that there had to be more than just that that was driving you.

R: Well, remember my mother had a lot of drive, and my dad was more stable. Now, you are born with genes, my wife always said; you are born with drive. My wife, Ruby, has more energy than any woman I have ever seen. She has more than I have. In fact, she goes so fast she gets in trouble. She is like a Concord flying overhead at 60,000 feet--you do not see anything down there.

Anybody involved in human studies knows about human beings--there is always that desire. I do not know what yours has been in life, but I love to travel. I want to see the world, and, oh, we like to travel. I go everywhere and see how those people live--blacks, headhunters in Papua, New Guinea (and Port Moresby). I have pictures; I will show you some of them. They are so ugly, so dirty and filthy. From a distance they do not look that bad, but when you get up close you see the big sores on them. Sixty years ago they were eating people.

P: But the thing that has made you move through life has been your desire to prove yourself the equal or the superior to other people. Has the desire to make money played a role?

R: Money was only a thing to make the world better. I say money is like sex: if you use it right, it is wonderful; if you make it common, you are in trouble. Anything that can help is good. When you are young, you can enjoy both, but when you get older, you can just enjoy money.
[laughter]

P: Don't give up!

R: I have not. [laughter]

P: Since childhood on, you have always been a religious man, right?

R: Well, my parents were religious people. They took us to church on Sunday, and we sat on a hard bench. I was religious because I had to go to church. I did not like the hard bench, and the preacher was the dullest person you have ever heard. I would squirm and do everything in that church that a kid does when he is doing something he does not like. But the background was good. When I came to Florida, and when I had children, I knew that there was a God and that they needed to know something about the New Testament and Jesus. So when I went to work, I would drop them off at church and give them a quarter, and then I would go to the office. Then it was over on Railroad Avenue. When Sunday school was out, I would go pick them up.

But then I had a guilty feeling. It did not seem right for me to leave them there with a quarter. So one day I decided I would give them \$1,000 because the church was helping my kid. That got their attention, so they thought that maybe I should get over there, too. I finally went over and started going to Sunday school. Of course, people around town said, "What are you doing in here?" I told them, "I just thought I would come over here and go with the kids." Well, there were people who thought I was Mr. Big and that I had no business being with the common folk.

From that day on, for the most part I was like most people--I would go to church for a while, and then maybe I would go to Europe and forget about church. On the other hand, if I was really enthused, I would work with the missionaries in South Africa, for instance, or in London I would go to church to see how they go to church there. I went to see the Vatican and watched the pope. In fact, I was within fifty feet of the pope where he was shot on the next day. I was there, and I could not believe it. I found out that a lot of people did not like the pope. Well, a lot of people do not like our preacher, either.

P: Have you continued being involved in church affairs ever since?

R: Ever since.

P: Do you go to church now?

R: Yes, and I listen to Robert Schuller from seven to eight every morning, and then I go over here to the chapel. Right now our church is having a bad time getting a preacher, so I have turned that over to Jerry Jackson.

P: What church do you go to?

R: First Baptist is the one I am a member of. We have put money into that thing for years and years.

P: I thought I remembered your saying earlier that your mother was Methodist.

P: No, she belonged to that Christian church. My secretary is the Methodist.

P: What about your wife Vera?

R: She went to the Baptist church. She is not so religious as I am, and her mother was not.

P: So you kind of, in a way, carried the torch, starting out by making an example for your children.

R: Right.

P: Tell me the names of your children and when they were born.

R: We have talked about that before. Marshall--you met Marshall the other day--David, and John.

P: Is Marshall the oldest?

R: Marshall is the oldest. He will be sixty-three this year. David will soon be fifty. He was born the day after Christmas. And John will soon be forty-six.

P: Where do your children live?

R: The one who was here yesterday [Marshall] lives over near Clearwater in Dunedin, and he is moving down to Clearwater into a bigger house.

P: And he is married. I met his wife.

R: He is married. She has been married before, but both husbands died.

P: Do they have children?

R: Yes, they both have children. Marshall has children and grandchildren.

P: You are a great-grandfather in addition to being a grandfather?

R: Five times. I have five great-grandchildren.

P: All right. Now, where is your second son?

R: David and John live down near Atlantis [south of Palm Springs]. They both have nice homes.

P: And they are married.

R: They are married, and both of them have four children.

P: So you have a sizable number of grandchildren and also five great-children.

R: Oh, yes.

P: Did you make your boys work when they were in the business?

R: Oh, yes. They did fine when they first started out, but then they did not have anything other than their salaries.

P: Did they go to college?

R: Yes.

P: Where did they go?

R: David and John both went to Stetson [University at Deland, Florida]. David graduated from there, but John fell in love and married. Marshall went to Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida.

P: Are you close to your boys?

R: I am very close to the boy whom you met the other day.

P: What about your grandchildren? Are you close to them?

R: No. The little ones I am, but they do not know any better.

P: But the older ones are not coming to you seeking advice, help, and counsel?

R: No, they do not come around. Every birthday I send them \$100 or \$200. Now, they are talking about, tax-wise, giving a million dollars away to all of them. I guess giving money to people other than your wife or somebody you love is about the worst thing you can do for motivation known to man. It is an awful thing to say, but that is it. You kill the incentive. "There is no need for me to be any better. I am doing fine. What do I want any more money for? I would have to work."

P: Money can be a good thing, but it can also be a bad thing.

R: It sure can.

- P: Very early on, John D. Rockefeller realized that his money was like a mountain--it would crush him if he did not do something about it. He began giving it away. Has that been your philosophy, to give money, too? You have been very generous.
- R: We started this foundation way back there. I think we started the foundation in 1965 or something like that. I told you about the little kids playing Little League. We had a hundred teams, and they played each other. We were very proud. And their dads were proud of them. That was the finest thing we ever did. We also helped with education. Now, when we got to the colleges, we did not send them all the way. We would give them money in accordance with how much income they had, what their grades were, and what they were going to study.
- P: So you have a scholarship program, then, that you have subsidized.
- R: We did. We have a new one now that we put \$40 million into it when we started. We left the old one and have started a new one.
- P: I know you have been very generous to the University of Florida, you have been very generous to the school that is here in [West] Palm Beach [Palm Beach Atlantic College], and you have also been very generous to Stetson University. Where have your other philanthropies been? Your church?
- R: The biggest by far is this church in Palm Beach Atlantic. It is little, but I was close to them. We have been helping Stetson along for a while.
- P: Palm Beach Atlantic is the college here.
- R: Yes, and the church.
- P: Oh, there is a church affiliated with it?
- R: Oh, yes. Jess Moody was in the church. He did not start the church, but he started the college, so we had two. But the college always got more money than the church.
- P: And Stetson?
- R: Stetson and Rollins. The University of Florida has matching funds. We helped the school in Boca Raton [Florida Atlantic University] a little, very little. We hired one of those guys to work for us, but we did not like the way they handled their money, so we quit them. There are maybe nine different things. The hospital, for instance. We have always given money [to Good Samaritan Hospital in West Palm Beach].
- P: So you have been interested in education, religion, and in matters relating to health.

R: Yes. Good Samaritan there. In fact, I called them this morning to see a man over here from Sweden. He made a lot of money over there, but he has come over here and has no Medicare or anything like that, so he owes the hospital a lot of money. That man helped us in many ways to line up shipping from Europe for cement and ships. He was a big fellow, and he had a lovely little wife. He cannot pay his bill at the hospital, so I am trying to help him out because of what he did for me way back then.

P: What do you mean, you gave the University of Florida matching funds?

R: We gave money, and the government was able to match that money.

P: Okay. I understand. I know what the program is.

R: Over here at Palm Beach Atlantic there are no matching funds, so we have given them more money by far than any other school.

P: And this is your community. You have lived all your life, and this community has been good to you.

R: Jerry Jackson said the other day, "It looks like we have given them \$13 million." That would be \$26 million if it had been given to the University of Florida.

P: Who is Jerry?

R: Jerry is our in-house lawyer.

P: I have met him then.

R: He came in this morning asking about Germany. He is doing a lot of the legwork for me that I used to do in the college and the church.

P: So he has been an advisor and a friend to you for a long time. Have you any others in the organization like Jerry?

R: Oh, we do not have any organization anymore. See, it was just Hagan, Jerry, and four girls.

P: You have retrenched.

R: Yes. We used to have about forty of them. All of them are active here or there.

P: You said you like to travel.

R: Oh, I love to travel.

P: What started that?

R: I was born that way; I do not know why. I remember my first train trip, and I remember the old canal that runs from the National Road that runs east and west across Indiana. In the olden days there was a canal that went down to Connersville. I reckon it was about twenty feet wide. There was a train that went to Connersville from Muncie, Indiana, and I would get on that train and look out and see that canal. Dad said: "Don't you ever get near that. You would drown. That is deep." That is my first travel that I remember.

P: And you went to Washington, of course, as a youngster, when you went out to live with your sister.

R: Oh, I went everywhere. That is when I saw my first mountain. I had seen pictures, but never the mountains, and never a big river like the Columbia.

P: And I remember your telling me early on that you went to Europe in 1936.

R: That is when you asked me where I got the money. I am still trying to figure that out. All I know is that it seems I remember we had \$10,000 in the bank.

P: And you used it.

R: I bought the round-trip ticket for the ship, and the travel including everything was \$1,200 for my wife and me.

P: You could not do that today.

R: That was for thirty-five days of travel in Europe.

P: And you had a wonderful time.

R: I would not say that. That whole trip was twenty-five plus fourteen days travel, whatever that adds up to, by the time I got back home.

P: I think I remember your telling me that you also went to South America in the early 1940s.

R: In the winter of 1940, and the war had already started in Europe. We went to New York and got on a ship, and the name of that ship was the *Uruguay*. It was an American ship that belonged to Moore, McCormick, and they changed the name of it to the *Uruguay* from the *Pennsylvania*. They had three of them, I think. On that trip we had some excitement, which I told you about.

P: The *Graf Spee*.

R: The *Graf Spee*. And going down one day there was a submarine that came up beside us, and women screamed and fainted. It was a French submarine, but we did know that then. Then there was a flying boat that zoomed us. My golly, it was nerve wracking! But I was young and full of stuff, so I took it all in stride.

P: Did Vera like to travel?

R: Oh, yes. She is just like my mother. She says, "Anytime you want to travel, I am ready."

P: Where else did you go? Everywhere?

R: Well, it is a big world. My goodness, you could spend a lifetime in China alone. But I was thinking the other night that [I have been to] all continents [excluding Antarctica] at least more than twice. But they are very large. I have been around South America clear down around both ways. You know it is rough as the devil when you go through the Strait of Magellan. That is beautiful. There is white snow up here and green grass on both sides. It is a beautiful trip. If you ever get a chance, you will want to do that.

P: You have been to Africa?

R: Oh, yes. That is where I spent eleven weeks with my wife and two kids. But that was a whole trip. That was almost three months (fourteen days by ship).

P: Have you been to the Orient? Have you been to China?

R: I have been to China more than once. One place I have not been to much is India. I have been to Bombay and Calcutta, but that does not mean anything. I have not been into China. I have been to Shanghai, I have been up to Beijing, and I have been up to where they have the horses, Xian, or something like that. Maybe I have spent as much as three weeks or a month in China altogether.

P: Are your traveling days over?

R: No. We are talking now of going out to see my sister, who is ninety-four (deceased 1/22/91). Her husband is also ninety-four. I want to see her before she dies, [so we are planning a trip] maybe out to Seattle and back down to the Garden of the Gods. I remember the Garden of the Gods, but I have not been there for years. Then we would like to go to England one day and go up to the lake district. There are little villages up there. It is not very far from London, but you would think you were a thousand miles from London. People still have their cows.

P: You may go there this summer?

R: Well, it depends on how I get the boys set as to whether or not I can leave. See, giving away money is a hard thing.

P: Vera is dead now, right?

R: She is dead. She died March 20, 1985.

P: I knew it was relatively recent. What did she die of?

R: Heart.

P: She had had a bad heart for a long time?

R: Ten years.

P: And you have remarried?

R: Yes, I have a wife now.

P: What is her name?

R: Ruby Marian Stewart.

P: Was she a Palm Beach woman?

R: Her people are religious people. She started out in Dayton, Ohio. I was raised in Muncie, Indiana, and it is eighty miles from Muncie to Dayton.

P: But you did not know her then.

R: No, I did not.

P: Where did you meet Ruby?

R: She lived down the street. She worked with the school board for a long time. She studied and got an education. I met Ruby walking next to the Everglades golf course. She has eyes like an eagle, and she would walk along the golf course and pick up six or eight golf balls, and then she would give them to me. [laughter] So that is the way I got to meet her. She was walking along there picking up golf balls, and she gave them to me, and gradually we got acquainted. Now, she came to the hospital when I was up there for my prostate operation. I thought it was going to kill me. Everybody came, and there were flowers all over the

place. I thought I was going to die for sure because there were so many flowers. But she would come over and be real quiet. She would bring in a newspaper. Then she went to New York, but she came back. It was one of those affairs. She just handled herself better than some of the other women.

P: So you have been happy for the last four years, since you have not been living alone.

R: I would not go too far. Any person who is happy all the time with his wife is either a liar or not very sharp. [laughter]

P: I like that philosophy, too, Mr. Rinker. I would like to ask you about some of your activities outside of the business itself. First of all, I know you were a member of the Council of 100. How did that come about?

R: Well, you know how it is when you are a rich man. There was an old boy up there who decided I ought to be a member. Claude Kirk was governor, and, for the record, he was the most useless governor I think we ever had, if that is possible. He decided I should be a member of the Council of 100. I told him I could not do it because I was too busy and so forth.

P: Well, Claude was from Palm Beach, too. Did you know him before he was elected?

R: We do not claim him. I thought he was from Jacksonville.

P: He was from Jacksonville, my hometown, but he was living in the house next door to Paul Maddock.

R: I think that was later.

P: Yes, that prefab house. Paul was a good friend, too.

R: I knew Paul. The next governor who came along was Reubin Askew, and he was a pretty nice fellow. The organization was a little better, so I joined it. I said: "Okay. I will be a member." But I never went to the meetings much at first. Later I did, and they had some nice meetings. They were some fine people.

P: So you were not really closely involved in that operation at all.

R: No. Then when I wanted to retire, they put my son on there. After that, they put Karl Watson, who was the president of our company, on.

P: How did you get onto the Florida East Coast Railway board?

R: Like everything else. When they reorganized, they were looking for outstanding citizens to serve

on their board.

P: Ed Ball was running the operation.

R: Ed and I were about like this. He finally called. I had had some heart attacks, and I said: "I had a heart attack. I cannot serve." "Oh," he said, "I have had heart attacks all my life. Why not come up here?" I told him I would let him know. Then I told him, "Well, if you had a heart attack and are still alive, and you are much older than I am, I will do it." So that is the way I got on the board.

P: Did you do anything?

R: I went to all the meetings. I had selfish interests there because they hauled all of our rock. Getting rates, getting trains, and getting cars to take better care of me than they did my competitors, it was good business. I went to all the meetings. I would get on the train in Jacksonville and ride all the way to Miami. I did that until it got so rough with the riots where blacks would throw rocks at the cars and all that.

P: Of course, the Florida East Coast had a very rocky history anyway, particularly in the 1960s before that big strike came along.

R: Right. We sure did.

P: Then they reorganized and dropped all the passenger traffic.

R: Right. They sure did. They used to lose our cars. We had cars with rock on them, and some of them were in bad shape. Sometimes they would find our cars in Kansas or New York. It was the same way up there. We would order a car up there, and it might be three months before we would find it. That is when they had all that trouble.

P: I gather from what you were indicating a moment ago when I asked you about the Florida East Coast directorship that you and Ed Ball did not always see eye-to-eye.

R: But we had a common interest. He wanted to haul our rock, and we wanted the best rate we could get.

P: Why did you not see eye-to-eye with Ed Ball or a man like Ed Ball?

R: I have never known two rich men who had anything in common who got along. The way they got that is because they wanted all the tricks in the book to make them get it. Ed Ball was like that, and I was like that. Now, there may be exceptions. There are good friends. I have had good friends in the business who I would not do anything to hurt. But others I would put my foot out and trip them every once in a while.

P: What about some of the community activities you have been involved with? You have been in the Community Chest, obviously. I have seen records of that.

R: I did that for two years. That was all part of this "you help the other man, and he will help you." That made me known as a man who believed in helping his fellow man, so people would buy and sell from it. That is true of the church. Well, I have told you that. If you help the other man, he will help you.

P: You were in the Rotary [International]?

R: I was in the Rotary for a long time, then I quit, and then I went back again.

P: You have been interested in playing golf for a long time, obviously. You played it yesterday afternoon.

R: It was along in 1940 when I started. I could not hit the side of a barn.

P: Are you a good player now?

R: No, I am going bad now. [laughter]

P: Do you play often?

R: I try to. I like to play two nines and one eighteen. That is about all I can take. Now, when summer comes, I am not going to be able to do it because it will be too hot. I have my golf clothes on now.

P: Do you have your regular buddies you play with?

R: There is nobody as bad as Butler and I. Remember the man I told you about?

P: Who is he?

R: He is the contractor that I sold that piece of land up there for \$3,800, and he got for his family about \$1.5 million when I sold the company.

P: Where do you play?

R: Everglades. I am one of the oldest members of the Everglades Club.

P: That is a very exclusive club.

R: Yes. Getting in is worse than getting elected to the Senate.

P: I know. Addison Mizner built that property for Paris Singer many years ago.

R: Yes.

P: I think it was originally supposed to be a hospital.

R: It was at one time, during World War I.

P: Then when they found that it was not going they turned it into a social club.

R: That is right.

P: I had dinner there only once with Mrs. Post. I knew her slightly, and she had arranged a dinner party there one night. I do not think I have been back in it since. But I saw the Orange Court with all the orange trees growing.

I want to ask you about something that I did not explore quite like I wanted to earlier. How did you know Addison Mizner?

R: Addison Mizner made stone to imitate old stone, and he would buy sand and cement from us. He mixed the two together using white cement to make a white wall. I got to know him because he did not pay me. I went along with him because he had some good-looking secretaries, and I was just as interested in talking to a good-looking secretary as I was about making money. He was a big man, and he went around with dirty white bucks. He did not keep them clean. I did not know him really well. I sold him stuff, and I collected. The other one, Wilson, I did not know; I never saw him. All I knew was that he was bad medicine.

We had a lot to do with Boca Raton. One time when business was really bad we rented cars to them down there for them to use as a cab service.

P: That is when Addison was building the Boca Raton project?

R: It was built by then. This was later. It was built, and we rented cars to them. There were rich people who brought all their chorus girls down, a whole trainload, and sent them back. And all those girls rented cars. We charged them thirty dollars to go to Miami and twenty dollars to come to Palm Beach, and they could stay as long as they wanted. Now, that does not seem high, but now it would cost you \$300, I suspect.

P: Was Harold Vanderbilt a particularly good friend of yours?

R: I never knew him. I have seen him, but I never knew him. I only used his airplane.

P: Did you know any of the people who were building the big places out at Palm Beach?

R: No. Well, I will not go that far. I did not know Joe Widener well (only slightly). He owned the Hialeah [race track], and I did not know Mr. Vanderbilt. I used to see him, and I knew who he was, but we were not friends. See, he was king, and I was a peon. The other one was Vanderbilt's sister, Mrs. Balsan. I said that was not right, but she was. That was the third house in that depression that kept us alive. Remember I said there were three houses that kept us going?

P: As you became a rich man in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, did you mingle with the Palm Beach society folk?

R: The minute I got in the Everglades [Club] I was mingling with the rich people.

P: Were you invited to their homes and parties?

R: I will tell you how we really got started with the rich people. Believe it or not, we bought Ripley's house. Have you ever heard of Ripley, of Ripley's "Believe It Or Not"?

P: Yes, I knew of him. I did not know him.

R: He had a house here that he owned. He had a bunch of geisha girls there, and he had a royal Chinese junk out there. He had the house all furnished with believe-it-or-nots. Between those geisha girls and his drinking, he did not live long. He died when he was about fifty-five, maybe, and they put up the house for auction. I bought the darn thing for \$75,000.

P: When was this? After World War II?

R: Oh, yes, it had to be. I bought it for \$75,000. He had paid about \$250,000 and had all that believe-it-or-not stuff in it. He had collected it from all over the world. I lived there for two years, and then I sold it for \$200,000. How is that?

P: Where did all of the believe-it-or-not stuff go? Did he move it out?

R: Most everything was left in it. Now, there were some things that people bought before I got in the act, and they opened a believe-it-or-not place in St. Augustine. Whether there is anything in it or not, I do not know. I have never been in it.

P: I have never been in it, either.

R: It was full of believe-it-or-not when we got it.

P: Where is this house?

R: Right up here in the north end of Palm Beach, on High Mount. The beach club is down near the ocean, and the house is just before you get to the turn where it goes up on the ocean--740 High Mount, I think.

P: Where do you live now?

R: Everglades Island.

P: Did you build a house there?

R: I built that house. It is a half-mile long and 600 feet wide.

P: That is your house or the island?

R: That is the island. There are fifty-two houses on the island. Well, there were. Two houses have been torn and made into one.

P: How long have you lived there?

R: Thirty-five years.

P: So you are an old-time resident there.

R: And I look straight across to the house I built in 1940 on Flagler Drive. I look right across like that and I can see it.

P: How did you happen to get into the Everglades Club? That just does not seem to fit an Indiana farm boy.

R: All you have to do is get yourself a big house like I had on High Mount and you are in style.

P: I see. They came looking for you, then.

R: Oh, man, I was somebody. [laughter]

P: You had a tuxedo?

R: I told the man that I bought the house from, "I would like to be in the Everglades Club," and he said, "I will fix it." That is all there was to it.

P: What kind of a political person have you been?

R: In politics I am the world's worst. I know how to get into politics, but I have never been active in politics.

P: You have never been run for office?

R: Oh, no.

P: And nobody has ever tried to press you into it?

R: Well, they used to try to get me to run for the head of the school board, but that was not for me.

P: Nobody here has ever tried to get you to run in local politics on anything?

R: People have tried everything. It is like my biography. They have been trying to write my biography for twenty years.

P: Well, I have been doing it right here now. We have a great outline.

R: You are cheating. [laughter]

P: Have you supported politicians?

R: Oh, yes.

P: Have you given them money?

R: You know that eagle there in my room? That cost \$15,000 and is not deductible. That is where I got all those things.

P: You could get a real eagle for \$15,000.

R: I could have a flock! [laughter] It used to be \$10,000.

P: Where did the eagle come from?

R: The Republican party or the president.

P: How long have you been a Republican?

R: For so long it has been more popular to be a Republican than it was to be a Democrat. I have voted

Republican as long as I can remember.

P: Did you vote for people like Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover way back in those early days?

R: I do not ever remember.

P: Those were the 1920s, and you were of voting age.

R: Yes, but I did not know anything about Washington then. I just knew about West Palm Beach. Now, I was active in local politics. We tried to get the guy in that I wanted.

P: Were you a Roosevelt man in the 1930s?

R: Yes. Who was the other guy who ran against him?

P: Well, that depends. In 1940 he ran against Wendell L. Willkie.

R: In the early days I was not a Roosevelt man. He was a Democrat. He had become an action man.

P: He ran against Herbert Hoover in 1932.

R: I would have been for Hoover.

P: Hoover ran for a second term in 1932. Roosevelt was opposed by Alfred M. Landon in 1936 and Wendell Willkie in 1940.

R: I do not think I would have been for Willkie.

P: But ever since then you have been pretty much an Eisenhower-Nixon man?

R: I may not have even voted. Nobody knew what I voted.

P: So you were really a politically active person.

R: No, I never have been. We supported people many times substantially. We went out and raised a lot of money for them.

P: I see you have all those pictures in there of Ronald Reagan.

R: We support them, but once you get started, why, we get five letters a day. Every Republican in the United States wants us to share money, but I put them in the wastebasket.

P: That is a good place for them.

R: There is no way to satisfy them.

P: Were you invited to the White House during the Reagan years?

R: We get invited to the White House around five times a year. The Eagles get to go everywhere.

P: I have not heard about the Eagles.

R: Well, you have not been around. You are supposed to be a historian. Shame on you!

R: Gainesville is just too secluded for that kind of activity.

R: Shoot. If you belong to the Eagles, why, they go to Paris, and they go wherever you want to go. In fact, they have one [group] going over there right now, I think. And you can go to the White House and around and around and around. [laughter] Ruby said, "You ought to go to them." I wrote them a letter telling them, "I am eighty-some years old, and I am busy down here." [laughter]

P: But Ruby would like to participate in some of those. She would probably do very well in there.

R: Oh, Ruby would take me out every night of the week. There is something going on all the time.

P: There is a lot of activity here in the Palm Beach area.

R: Oh, this is the biggest money-raising place you have ever seen.

P: I know. There are all kinds of fund-raising activities.

R: There is a thing here in the office that has an article on people who get on the *Palm Beach [Daily News]*, or "The] Shiny Sheet." What they will do is get their name in that thing. People will just do anything to get their name in those things.

P: How did you and Marshall Criser [president, University of Florida, 1984-1989] get to be buddies?

R: He was the best lawyer we ever got our hands on.

P: Marshall was your lawyer?

R: He was our lawyer. He would be as diplomatic as anybody you have ever seen, but he also could be tough. We engaged him on two tough deals. One was in Jupiter to get the permit. It was awful. The railroad did not want us to have too much say--they wanted to control me--and the city did not want the plant in there. So he helped us get that. The other one

was Palm Bay, which is just south of Melbourne. We had that one in court for maybe three or four years, and he got that one.

P: So you knew Marshall through the law firm to begin with.

R: Right.

P: Was that the law firm that handled your affairs?

R: He handled more, I would say, than anyone else. Now, we never stuck to one lawyer as such. We had a problem on zoning in some place--Miami, for example. We had a man in Miami who was an expert in zoning. In each town where we did business we would have a local lawyer there. We never had one lawyer handle all of our credit, for instance. In Jacksonville we would have a law firm, and Orlando had one. Every town had a lawyer. We have never been a business to turn over everything to a lawyer to handle for us.

P: But Marshall and Paula became personal friends of yours, right?

R: Oh, yes. They have been to my house, and he always tried to get us to go up for the football games. But I am getting old, and I do not want to stay up too late. He would often have a party over at his house after the games. I have been to a few. No football games, but I went to his house when his daughter got married and a couple of things like that.

P: Did you fly up to Gainesville in your plane for that affair?

R: Yes.

P: A friend of mine, Bill Goza [William M. Goza], said that he had met you at a party that he [Marshall Criser] and his wife had given at the country club.

R: That might have been the time.

P: That was one of the pre-parties before the wedding.

R: Yes, and they had a big party at the house. So there were a lot of friends. You cannot be good friends with everybody or you will be going four places every night. So I just go to the things I have to go to.

P: So Mr. Butler has been your golfing buddy for a long time.

R: This guy is an Irishman and the omeriest cuss you have ever seen. But he is always a lot of fun. I have been playing golf with him since 1940.

P: Have you been involved in state politics?

R: Only if we had some problem.

P: But you have not put money into political campaigns?

R: Oh, yes. You cannot go anywhere if you do not [have your congressman's ear].

P: I know you have done it in national campaigns with [Ronald] Reagan and [George] Bush.

R: There is local, then state, and then national, and sometimes you need all of them.

P: Is [Florida Governor Robert] Martinez a friend?

R: Well, he came to our office, and we have had him come over to make speeches for our people. I am a Republican, so we support him.

P: You come out of a Republican background. Indiana has always been strongly Republican, so I am presuming that you came out of a family that is Republican.

R: That is right. My dad was a Republican.

P: So you just brought that political affiliation with you to Florida.

R: Well, when I first came to Florida, politics were never heard of. That is true. It is true that my father was a Republican in Indiana.

P: In addition to playing golf, Mr. Rinker, what do you do for fun?

R: I used to fish, but fishing is bad. You can fish all day and get drunk as a monkey on a boat. We used to have Mr. McKnight, who is the head of a company in St. Paul, Minnesota. He had a 125-foot yacht, and he said that it was the most expensive cocktail lounge that he had ever been on. And he had a fishing boat that was sixty feet long. Mr. McKnight was administrative head of 3M; and a Mr. Bush was the financial head who lived in Winter Park in the winter.

P: So you used to go fishing. Ocean fishing or lake fishing?

R: Ocean fishing, not much lake fishing. I went to Acapulco fishing, I went to Mexico fishing, I went to the south Pacific.

P: It sounds to me like you were a serious fisherman. Were you a good fisherman is the question.

R: Remember how much time I got to work. We used to go fish salmon.

P: Were you a good fisherman?

R: No, I was not a good fisherman. If we got a big fish on there, I would hold on. I did not tear up the reels and all that.

P: Did you go in for sports? Did you like to see football?

R: I played tennis a lot. I am not much on sports. I am more for golf than football teams or baseball teams.

P: Do you like to read?

R: Oh, yes.

P: What do you read?

R: Anything I want to know about. I would study psychology, philosophy, or what makes people tick--anything that would help me solve a problem I had. I would go to seminars on finance and accounting.

P: Do you watch television?

R: Sometimes.

P: What do you like?

R: "Have Gun Will Travel." Do you remember that?

P: Absolutely. I do, too. [laughter] I am young enough to remember that, too.

R: Chester was a hero, and he went down to South America.

P: [You just pay attention to the] parts that interest you.

R: Yes, the parts that I wanted. In other words, if I go to Australia, I read the part about Australia that I would like to know about. Or Africa, the same way.

P: You get yourself prepared.

R: Well, I have been fooled by those bears I showed you. We went all the way up to Spitsbergen (near Arctic) to see those polar bears, and I did not see a darn bear.

P: They did not show up?

R: They do not show up at that time of year. They are not there.

P: The travel agent did not tell them that they were on your way?

R: They were a big gyp. [laughter] There were not any narwhals anywhere. Do you know what a narwhal is? He has a big ivory horn.

P: Did you know Jack Nicklaus? He was a big golf man over here.

R: Yes. He used to rent our airplane. He had a place over here on the islands. They gave him a house to play or fish. There was really good fishing. Once in a while he would use our airplane.

P: Did you ever get to know a man who was associated with him by the name of Charles Perry? Chuck Perry?

R: Are you talking about Perry the newspaper man?

P: No. I am talking about the man whom Claude Kirk had brought down here from Ohio in the 1960s. He then left government and became the chief advisor and administrator to Jack Nicklaus. He lived here in Palm Beach.

R: I was never close to Jack. He and I might see each other at a party. He was a fine man, though. I respect him. He is well thought of.

P: Is he still based here in the Palm Beach area?

R: He still has a house up here.

P: How well do people have to know you before they start calling you Doc instead of Mr. Rinker?

R: Oh, I do not know.

P: Marshall calls you Doc, and the people at the University refer to you as Doc Rinker.

R: I do not know. I am Doc to some people. I do not know what makes that. Either you know me or you do not.

P: Mr. Butler, the guy who plays golf with you, obviously calls you Doc. But all of these people who work here in the office for you call you Mr. Rinker.

- R: Well, as I say, I am eighty and he is thirty. If Jerry is forty-four, then I am old enough to be called mister.
- P: Okay. I just wondered where the line went.
- R: I have never known. I have never appreciated a kid--I mean a thirty year old--calling me Doc.
- P: I understand. I do not have my students call me by my first name, either, in class.
- R: Well, then you know how that works.
- P: I just wondered how informal you were around the office with your business associates.
- R: We keep an arm's length. One thing I learned early in the game was never to get drunk with your employees. I learned that the hard way. Because all they say is: "I was out with him and got drunk, so I do not have to do anything he wants. I just do as I please." Or they say, "The boss said to do this."
- P: What about your health? You have mentioned the fact that you have had some heart problems. You had a prostrate problem, although that is nothing that is sensational.
- R: Well, you just do not know all there is to know about prostrates. That is where you get educated. In fact, almost 90 percent of men over eighty years of age have prostrate trouble. Now, some are serious, and some are not. I may have had some malignancy, but I guess it turned out that there was not. But, Lord, I will tell you that if anybody ever suffered, I did.
- P: What about this heart condition?
- R: The heart condition existed back maybe twenty or thirty years ago. We were playing golf down here in Florida. We went up to Denver, and it was cold. We went down to the golf club, and I went out there, and I was stiff. I took a mighty swing, and that gave me some kind of a big pain. We went on out to California after that. I think this was around 1952, when I was president of the ready mix people. They had a big plane that belonged to Ideal, and there was a bunch of us--all golfers--that went to Pebble Beach. They have a private club there, and I went out to play golf. Then I went to a cocktail party that night, because I was president, down at the yacht club. I went in to say hello and so forth, and then I thought I would disappear. I started to walk back to the hotel. On the way back, I could not breathe. Gradually this thing started up in here like this, and they put me in a wheelchair and brought me back. Don Warren, who is my friend today, talked to me. He said: "Now, just take it easy. Walk a little bit, then walk a little more. Breathe deep. If you get dizzy, stop." At first I could hardly walk to the door. I walked a little farther and a little farther. Finally I came back. In six months I was okay.

Always I have had a warning. When my ear starts to ring, that means that my blood pressure is getting low.

That means I had better breath deep and had better start taking it easy. The good Lord has been good to me that way. See, lots of people die of high blood pressure. Well, I am the other way. Your heart cannot circulate the blood if there is not enough pressure to get it around to all your essentials.

P: But for a man your age, you are in very good health.

R: Not right now. I am going to try to get there again when I get all my teeth put in. At my age, it is like an old car: you have to fix this and fix that. I had something wrong with my rectum, and they went in there and clipped something off. Well, when they did that, that took care of that so I did not have any problems, but it also screwed me up so that I cannot go to the bathroom normally. So as you get older, you just find one little thing right after another. Now, I have a hard time seeing. These things [glasses] weigh a ton. That is normal. But there are some people who are healthy as a horse at ninety and ninety-five.

P: But very few. The fact is you get up in the morning and you come to work every morning.

R: I get up in the morning and work out on my rowing machine, and I ride a bicycle.

P: And you drive yourself to work every day.

R: Oh, yes.

P: And you play golf.

R: I play golf.

P: And you eat.

R: And I eat.

P: And you sleep well.

R: I do not sleep well; I never did. I wake up in the night and read.

P: Have you been a smoker?

R: Oh, yes. I went through that, but I quit in 1940. I used to be a chain smoker. I would have one there, one in my mouth, and one over here, all at one time.

P: In those days it did not seem to be a bad thing.

- R: No. At night when I would wake up the first thing I would do was light a cigarette.
- P: Mr. Rinker, you have played an active role in professional organizations. Were you president of the ready mix organization?
- R: I was president of the national ready mix people. I was president of the "block heads," as I called them--the National Concrete Masonry Association. I was the only man in the United States who was president of both of them. I thought that at one time I would be the head of the cement manufacturers, but now I am getting older, and the people who are running it are like fifty-five. I went and listened to them talking, and I said, "Man, I do not want to listen to all that goof." So I never went far in cement. I belonged to the PCA, but then we started to send our young people to the meetings.
- P: You used to go to their annual meetings, all over the United States?
- R: Yes. See, when I got into that was after 1976, when I bought the mill. Then I thought I ought to join that association. We were importing cement from all over the world. Then the American company did not like us. The fact that they did not have enough cement to furnish the United States did not make any difference. They thought they ought to do the importing, but they did not know how to import. They did not know how to handle ships, and they did not know how to deal with Europeans.
- P: You never had any plants outside of the United States, did you?
- R: No.
- P: Have all of your plants been in Florida?
- R: I have only one cement mill, but we have two sets of silos for imports.
- P: Were you in charge of making these arrangements with the foreign countries that you did the purchasing from?
- R: Oh, yes. The first thing I would always do was go see the head man so I would not have a salesman telling him a lot of things that he could not back up. So I would meet the head man. Now, if it were shipping, it would be the same way. "Who is the head man who controls all these ships?" We would meet them in New York or in Europe. Always know your head man if it is a big customer or a big supplier. That is one thing I always did.
- P: In your personal, day-to-day life, Mr. Rinker, would you consider yourself to be a conservative man. Not conservative politically--you have already indicated that--but in terms of dressing, living, and so on? Are you careful with the dollar is what I am really asking.

- R: I have always said I am very brave if I know what I am doing. I am very brave if I think I know what I am doing. Remember I told you about not building that mill when everybody said to go ahead with the mill? Well, I went against everybody there who said I should not do it. Of course, that was the right thing. Ninety days from then the thing was like that. That is what I told you about. Then I had to go back to Chemical Bank and ask them, "Who would give me a letter of credit for \$40 million to do anything I want to do?" I wanted an open letter of credit. Then I would go back two or three years later to borrow \$10 million to buy the same thing. The mill was insured for \$40 million. They would not give me any money, so I had to do this and do that. Finally they gave it to me. So I was very brave, but cautious, if I thought I knew what I was doing.
- P: What about your day-to-day life? When you travel on an airplane, do you always travel first class?
- R: Yes, if there is any on there. Oftentimes when you travel there is none.
- P: I know, but I am just wondering in terms of how you handle your own personal life on a day-to-day basis. You can afford anything, but I just wondered if you are willing to do that.
- R: When I first started out I went tourist with the cheapest dang thing there was on the airplane or ship. Then I got up a little bit, and then I got up a little more. Finally I wanted the best thing on the ship.
- P: And the best thing on the plane, and the best thing in a hotel?
- R: Well, not too much. I wanted a comfortable room. Now, a lot of people get a big suite of rooms, but I never did that. But I wanted a nice room.
- P: Were you ever a card player?
- R: No. I played, but I was not any good.
- P: And you obviously were not a big drinker.
- R: I never could drink much.
- P: As you look around the world today and look at the United States and so on, what bothers you? Crime? Drugs?
- R: A lot of things that I should not be worrying about. Poor [President George] Bush--I worry about him. And I worry about our governor [Bob Martinez]--is he doing right or wrong? I worry about Senator Connie Mack, the nice guy on the west coast [Fort Myers]. I have met him and talked to him, and I thought he is a pretty nice guy. Now, I do not know about

Martinez. He is doing his best, and he is a Republican. So Marshall Criser, who has always been a Democrat, now thinks he had better be a Republican.

P: But the thing is that we are living in such tumultuous times. So many things are happening in the world. I am not talking about just the political events in Europe. I will leave that to somebody who knows more about it. I am talking about the things that we read in our daily papers. Are we going to hell with ourselves, with drugs, crime, and all these other things that fill our newspapers day after day after day?

R: That is right. My wife bought herself a new telescope. We have a full moon now, and it is a beautiful thing. But the clouds obscure the moon. I told her last night: "The world is like looking through that telescope at that moon. The telescope multiplies sixty-to-one, and you can get the darn thing right down to you." Now, this morning it was just as clear as a bell, but I did not get up. That was 3:00 in the morning, and it was cold out there. But I told her: "Life is like that telescope and that moon. If you are trying to see the holes in the moon, you can see them clearly with that." Now, I have a pair of binoculars, and you can see the shades and all that. They are ten-to-one. But that telescope will show you everything on that moon. In fact, my son was making fun of it. He said, "Yeah, I see the man with the flag."

P: Are you looking at the contemporary world in terms of what you are seeing on that moon?

R: Yes, when it comes in and out of the clouds. It moves into the clouds, and then it comes out clear.

P: Do you think that you and I are going to leave a world safe for our grandchildren?

R: I say, "Lord, help me to help all my fellow men to the best extent of my ability, and have it be pleasing in Thy sight." And when I die I am going to be able to say I did the best I could. No man can do better than the best he can. That is my theory.

P: You are going to let them worry about taking care of themselves.

R: When I am gone, everybody else is going to handle it. I have seen it over and over again where they all get to fighting over the money.

P: Well, you have lived a long life, and you have lived through many changes.

R: And have led an active life.

P: It has been a very active and involved life.

R: I have been from one end of the world to the other, this way and that.

- P: And when you think of what Palm Beach was like when you arrived here in the 1920s and what this area, state, and nation are like in 1990, you have lived through some changing times.
- R: We used to tell a story that there were mosquitoes big enough they would fly in and get ten gallons of gas in before they realized it was a mosquito. They were awful. Unbelievable.
- P: Do you think that is one of the big things that changed the whole aspect of Florida--eliminating the mosquitoes?
- R: We used to be in Delray. There is a little lake down there where that man who does my financing lived, and the beach in that lake was white. But when you walked down there it [the air] was black. Every step you took, the mosquitoes would come up like that. It was solid with mosquitoes. In later years they got rid of some of them, and finally there are not any, are there? But we have other trouble. We contaminate the vegetables and trees and fruit.
- P: Have the various businesses you have been in contributed to the pollution of the air and so on?
- R: Yes, but not as bad as they make it sometimes. They are ridiculous. When you have a well or plant or tank out here fifty miles in the Everglades, they want you to dig down sixty feet and do all this and do all that. Then you do something else. The next thing [you know] you have to pull all your tanks out. But they are right, because we cannot have everything contaminated. You could kill all the animals, all the fish, and all the game. We read about the elephants in Africa. They say there is no food for the elephants. They shot and killed 200 of them because there is no food for them.
- P: But have you been a pollutant in this area?
- R: I have been a pollutant to a minor degree. Early in the game we bought sweepers to cut down the dust and to eliminate the drainage so it went the right direction and did not contaminate the drinking water or the sewage. But most of it we learned late. We would dump stuff into the storm sewers and clog it up. That was in the early days. We did not know any better. Cement and water contaminates the pipe. There are big pipes about this big. But as we learned, we knew. We were not angels; we just could not get along with flooding the yard, because it stopped our drainage.
- P: But you think that the industry has pretty well rectified those problems today?
- R: They are working hard trying to make sense out of saving the game and the fish. Industry is generally doing better. You read about this oil company [Exxon] and those ships [the *Exxon Valdez*]. They were going to put the president of the company in jail if he lets that happen again. [On March 24, 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, Gulf of Alaska, causing a major oil spill.] Why, that is like putting me in jail because one of my drivers got drunk and hit somebody in Jacksonville and killed them. How in the thunder

can I control that? All you can do is fire him. You cannot monitor every man who takes drugs or drinks whiskey and be held responsible. I had 2,300 employees. What about the president of that oil company?

P: Let me get back to this Australian company, corporation, or whatever it was that you sold out to. Are you an advisor or are you on their board, or was the break complete?

R: I had a five-year commitment to be an advisor, and they took me into the meetings. But they operate so differently from me. I would tell them how I did it, but they did not want to hear that, so they did not use me so much as an advisor. So I do not go to the meetings anymore.

P: Did they pay you for those five years?

R: Yes, they have (just like clockwork). On July 20 (1990) it will be two years.

P: Do you miss that day-to-day grind that you were involved in when you had the business?

R: I miss being involved. They would go buy a company. The four companies have spent \$640 million, and I knew every one of those companies and the people in them. It made me feel bad that they did not let me talk to them. Maybe I would not have done any good, but . . .

P: Mr. Rinker, now that you are not an active participant in the business and there is no drive, why do you keep the same work routine, including working on Saturday?

R: Because I want to make sure that money goes out in the way to be used like it should be. I told the people in our office this morning that I used to do things--we made blocks, and we made concrete--that would help you make a better house or a better barn. We kept on making better and better products. Now, when you are dealing with money, I do not want to help anybody do anything. We are all struggling just to make money. You can say, "Well, you helped finance the world," but if you call your broker he will say, "No, I think it is 680." You call him back, and he will say, "No, I cannot give you that." It is the darndest mess just to handle money and not do anything that people can use. If I raised apples, you would eat the apples, or if you had oranges, I would have an orange grove. I miss that badly. I think that messing with money is for the birds.

P: But what you are doing now is distributing your money, and you are trying to do it wisely. Is that what it is?

R: That is right.

P: So that is what this office here does.

R: Just like you and I right now. I am trying to work with a man who is going to work with students to better understand life.

- P: But you came into this whole business with a strong Protestant work ethic, and obviously that has set the standards for you all of these years.
- R: That is right. I always knew there were no free meals or free rides anywhere. If you want to get anything [you are going to have to work for it]. I have learned that the more people give you the less you have to do anything for yourself.
- P: Now, you come to work every day at 7:30?
- R: Yes, unless I am sick.
- P: And you work until when?
- R: Until I go play golf or go to a meeting or something.
- P: So you are here every day until the middle of the afternoon six days a week.
- R: Sometimes I work on Sunday.
- P: So you work forty, fifty, or sixty hours a week. You work until the job is done.
- R: Or I go to sleep.
- P: Obviously, you have a loyal cadre of workers here who are willing to go along with you.
- R: We had the most loyal people who are all working to reach the objective, whether it was making blocks, more concrete, more steel, or a better building. All were working to that end. Now, when they reached that end, they did not always turn out the same way. Some of them took that money and got into trouble. If you have ever read about Carnegie when he built the big steel company [you would know that] when they sold it there were forty millionaires in Pittsburgh, and they murdered each other and divorced each other. They did not know what to do with money. Did you ever read the story?
- P: And Mr. Morgan's partners were like that very much, also.
- R: Right.
- P: A lot of money can be disastrous for some people.
- R: Remember my story about money and sex. It is wonderful if you know how to use it. It can be marvelous.

P: If you know how to use both of them and use both of them with caution. We hear about safe sex. Maybe we ought to hear about safe money, also.

R: I read this morning about some people who they are giving medicine to cure AIDS, and six of them died.

P: I saw that in the paper this morning.

R: I think they are better off, maybe.

P: What do you think we have not talked about, Mr. Rinker, that ought to be talked about in terms of your life, your goals, the history of your business, and so on?

R: The only thing we have not talked about--I do not know whether it will be interesting to students--concerns the last ten years, when we made a lot of money, money I had never dreamed of. Our family owned 71 percent of the company, and if we made \$30 million net, that is \$21 million. Besides that, I had a salary, a car, and all expenses to go to Africa or anywhere. I never paid one dime for my travel. We have gone to South America, North America, South Pole, North Pole, and I have never paid for any of it. The company has always paid all of my expenses because I was working. I was seeing how they did things in China, how they did things in the North Pole, how they got cement where it is cold, and how they got cement where it is hot.

But that was rewarding. What I am doing now is not rewarding. The only thing I do is try to see that the money goes the best I can.

P: When you were a young kid on that farm in Indiana milking those cows on a cold morning, did you envision what was going to happen to your life in terms of your power position with money?

R: Never. I never dreamed of it, even when I was forty. When I was fifty, I never dreamed that anybody could make a million dollars. That was beyond me. In Indiana, where I came from, you would drive fourteen miles to see him.

P: You came from a poor family?

R: Poor but honest. Well, we were considered wealthy to many people because we had a car, a farm, and plenty to eat. We were not wealthy, but I had kids come home with me. I had basketball players out there, and they thought we were rich because we had a car. That was way back there.

P: What do you attribute your success to?

R: The fact that I was a small guy, and I wanted recognition. I got my drive from my mother,

remember? She was full of energy. She loved to travel. She could go anytime. She would say, "Where is my hat, Honey?" I took her to Washington state, I took her to Colorado, I took her to New Orleans, I took her to Panama. She was right there. In those days there was no radar or no nothing. But she would go. She was a sport. That is about the way I was.

When I was down in Africa they brought me to that place that is on the border between Sudan and Egypt. They took me and one boy in one room, and they took my wife and the other boy into the other room. They made me take all my money out and all my traveler's checks out and put them on table. I did not know whether they were going to cut our throats or what. Finally, I said: "You had better let me out of here. Everybody in the world knows I am here, and if you do not get me out of here, you are liable to have your throat cut and shot." The lieutenant went back to another, and he said, "Okay. You can go." Do you think I would do that today? [laughter]

I came across on that train, and they could not speak a word or English. See, the thing ran once a week. It would come into a little oasis, and there would be camels and goats. Everybody came to see the train. I would go out there and climb up on the locomotive. We could not tell them what we wanted to eat, so we pointed to this or that. Do you think I would that today? [laughter]

P: Getting back to this question, what do you attribute your success to? You said frugality, and you are conservative.

R: My mother's drive.

P: But it had to be more than that. Do you think you were smart? You had to have something up here.

R: I was thinking about that last night. I can think about my dealings with people I am close to, and I try to think what they are thinking. They call it empathy; what you say is not really what you are thinking. I have to think, How do you think? As I am talking to you, how are you thinking? And then is what you are thinking good or is that bad, as far as I am concerned, in my opinion? You have your opinion, and I have my opinion. That ability, I think, has had more to do with my success in high and low places than any other thing.

How I got it I do not know. As a kid I would think about my sister's husband's father's company. I was eight years old. He had a coal car off the track eight miles away, and I thought, Gee, you will lose money. You have to go down there and get that coal off of that ground. Or if there were a flood from rain, that would kill our corn. "Now we will have to plow all of that up and plant that corn again." I do not know where that came from. I guess that is a reasoning power that only God gives to some people. Does that make any sense?

- P: Well, you got the breaks, too, and you were smart enough to realize what they were and to take advantage with them.
- R: If I got in a fight with a man in a high place I would think, "How far will that man go?" I would talk to the attorneys and ask, "How far will those men go to win their case?" We had it all the time. We always had that, and it happens today. "How far will this man go to get what he is trying to get if I do not want him to have it?" In other words, I think he is a crook and is trying to do something that is not right. That ability, I think, is the answer to my going so far.
- P: Have you taken pride in the fact that you have gotten all of this public recognition? There is a school at the University of Florida named for you, as well as buildings on the campus.
- R: They say that the worst thing you can get is pride. You can get a lot of that and think you are pretty smart and an angel. Well, you are not. Have you ever read that? The more you think you are smart the more trouble you are going to get in. What you have to think about is what is it that you do not know? What is it I do not know about this thing that you do? I do not know if you have ever thought of that or not. In other words, if I am so smart, why am I not like one of these guys who turns out to be a billionaire in thirty years? You read about them every day. They made a billion, and they are broke now.
- P: But you are not broke.
- R: I know it.
- P: You worked hard, and everything you have you made. Nobody gave you anything.
- R: That is right.
- P: So there must be a lot of personal satisfaction in those achievements.
- R: Well, there is. There is no question about it. I am happy and proud that I can help those kids on those ball teams and those kids going to college.
- P: Have you had any personal unhappiness, though, with all of these wonderful things that have happened?
- R: That is a foolish question. I have had everything happen to me that ever could happen to anybody. Sure! You cannot do anything without unhappiness. That is what makes you happy--when you have it running smoothly again. We have had to fire people. We have had to do everything.
- P: Then you lost your wife.

R: That liked to have killed me. I had been married for sixty years, and losing her really liked to have killed me. I just felt I could not do it.

P: But you survived.

R: I have also read that other people go through the same thing.

P: Has the fact that you have not been closer to your children and grandchildren been a worrisome thing for you?

R: Certainly. It makes you feel like the devil because you love your kids and try to do everything you can. But what am I going to do? Cry? Am I going to go down and tell them they are all a bunch of imbeciles? As long as they live a clean and respectable life . . .

My fifty-year-old son takes kids around the world on tour. He loves it. Well, when I was young I loved to take other people on trips around the world. I liked to travel, and I liked to make arrangements for the cars, the places we went, the hotels, and all that. I liked to do that. He does that. Now he is going down trying to be a Ph.D. I asked him, "What in the world is a Ph.D. going to do for you at fifty years old?" Well, he is doing it. He studies. As long as it is honorable, I think that is fine. It is not what I would do. Heck, in the first place, I could not get a Ph.D.

P: Maybe you can get an honorary one.

R: I have those. I do not want you to call me Dr. Doc, though. [laughter]

P: I love that. Before another ten, fifteen, or twenty years, I want to get to the point of knowing you as Doc.

R: Well, you are already in big as far as I am concerned. [laughter]

P: So what else should we say?

R: I do not know any more we can say. You will have to put that together and see if you drop dead when you try to make some sense out of it.

P: I was going to say it has been a marvelous interview. It has been a great interview.

R: The last ten years of my life have been beyond anything I have ever dreamed of. But that was true each year as I came up the ladder. Almost each year we were doing better. I would think, Man, this is great. I am better than I was. Now, some years back there it was pretty rough. I did not know whether I was going to make it or not.

- P: But you did. You survived.
- R: I stuck with it. I did not have anyplace to go. I would never get in a bread line. Generally in life that is it. If you always work and try to help somebody else, he will come back and help you, unless he is a bum. We had people work for us who would get to be sales manager, and then have all their salesmen make out false expense accounts. Or we would have people who had worked hard and then have their people line up women for them. "I am going to Orlando (or I am going to Jacksonville), and I want you to line me up a girl." Well, when you help those people, that is not so good.
- P: You get rid of those people.
- R: You tell them, "Either straighten up and fly straight, or go somewhere else." I have a theory on another thing. I do not know whether you believe this, but cancer comes from people working on things they cannot find the right answer to. Or they are doing things they know are not right, and they have a guilt feeling. Or they have something wrong with them and are not paying any attention. They think, I will get well anyway. In other words, it is damn foolishness; they are not thinking. Now, that may be 100 percent wrong. It can be hereditary; there is no question about it. You could have a bad heart. If your ancestors all had bad hearts, you can have one, too. That is not what I am talking about.
- P: You sound like you are a very introspective man in that you think about what you are going to do. You do not just jump into something carelessly.
- R: Oh, I think and think and think and think. I run people crazy asking questions. "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?"
- P: Before you made a decision?
- R: If it were a major thing. I even might be a very small thing but could grow into a big thing. Now I have told you everything I know.
- P: You have told me a great deal. I do not know whether you have told me everything you know. We might have to spend another twenty hours going into Doc Rinker's head and heart. But you have told me a great deal, and I think it is important that we have gotten all of this down. Now it is part of the permanent record. It really has been a wonderful experience for me.
- R: It has been wonderful for me. I have never talked to anybody like you.
- P: That is good. Mutual respect is a two-way street.

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Marshall Edison Rinker, Sr.

Interviewer: Samuel Proctor

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