

P: This is Sam Proctor interviewing Clark Butler at his home here, in Gainesville, Florida. It is May 31, 2002. This is for the University of Florida Oral History Program. Clark, first of all, what's your full name?

B: Samuel Clark Butler.

P: Samuel? We share another thing, but you obviously, dropped the Samuel, along the way.

B: Yes, they always call me Clark.

P: What's your birth date?

B: March 2, 1919.

P: Where were you born?

B: In Dixie County. Cross City, Florida. At that time, it was a little tiny community. It's still small.

P: I know where Cross City is since I come from Jacksonville. So, you were born a native Floridian. Let's talk a little bit about your family. Who was your father?

B: Edward J. Butler.

P: What about your mother?

B: Mother was Erma Butler and her maiden name was Harry.

P: Were both of those native Floridians?

B: Yes.

P: When did the family come to Florida?

B: My great-grandfather and grandfather came to Florida in 1848.

P: Before the Civil War.

B: Yes.

P: Where did they come from?

B: From up in the Carolinas. My grandmother, the Henderson family, came from Hendersonville North Carolina. The town was named after their family. I guess, back then, it was a good long distance, but only about thirty or forty miles separated them. They lived in a village just south of Hendersonville. The history of it, the little bit that I've learned, is that my family never really felt that slaves

should have been a part of the way of life and they gave up their slaves about ten years before the Civil War and moved to Florida.

P: What brought them to Florida?

B: I never really could get the whole story, but the first part of the Butler family, (who came before my family), settled over in the Lake Butler area. I never really understood why, except they that they weren't satisfied with what they were doing and so, they decided to try a new frontier. Maybe I inherited a little bit of that.

P: Were they always farm people?

B: I'm not sure of that. I was the last child and my father was the last child of his family so I don't know as much history as I would like. My grandfather built a school in Dixie County and, as it was in the old days, the teacher had to stay at somebody's home. So, the teacher stayed at my grandfather's home. Therefore, my father, for that particular era, had a pretty good education. Because of his intelligence and his ability, he was kind of the community leader. We moved to South Florida, near Plant City, from Dixie County, when I was one year old. Daddy was fairly respected in the community. I was always very proud of him because when there was an issue in the community, people would come to my home and visit. Daddy was a very good father and I had a very good mother. There were five children and we grew up on a nice farm near Plant City.

P: So, your father was a farmer.

B: Yes, but at one time, he was a county commissioner in Lafayette County. Mayo, was the county seat at the time. He, also, had a blacksmith shop in Mayo for years.

P: So, you had a happy childhood?

B: It was during the Depression, but it was a happy family. I had a very good family.

P: What about your sisters and brothers--how many did you have?

B: I have one sister and there were five boys; so there were six of us in the family. I see families now having problems, but we just never had any kind of antagonism or battling. It was just a very close-knit family.

P: You were the youngest of the five boys?

B: Yes, I was the youngest.

P: Did all them work around the farm?

B: To begin with, yes. My oldest brother never moved to Plant City, but there were three other brothers and we all worked together. One of them joined the Army when I was not, yet, a teenager, but we were just a close-knit family. When we moved from Plant City up here, my brother (that was just a few years older than I), was working his way through college here in Gainesville.

P: What brought you to Plant City?

B: I was only a year old. Daddy had a very good friend in Plant City who was a very successful farmer and he invited my father to come down because the opportunities were so much greater.

P: This is before the Depression, of course.

B: Yes, in 1920, right after World War I.

P: The economy was flourishing in Florida at that time, too.

B: Daddy felt there wasn't the opportunity in Dixie County that there was in Hillsborough County. Tampa and that area was very prosperous, a big seaport town, so, he felt that the opportunities would be better for us there. We had an excellent school and we lived close to it. He gave us an opportunity to grow up with an excellent school system, not that other areas weren't, but we all know that back in those areas, there were many counties that were so poor that they did not have good schools.

P: What kind of farm was it that your father ran?

B: The terminology would be a truck farm, it covers a lot of area. Our main money crop was strawberries. Then, we had a variety of vegetables that would grow in the spring and then, again, in the fall of the year. We were very fortunate that, after being there a few years, the opportunity and money was there to buy this farm for \$500, on time. As we progressed, we were able to build a nice home. Until the Depression . . .

P: What happened to the family during the Depression?

B: The family stuck together; we worked very closely, together.

P: You were just ten or twelve years old when all of this was beginning to happen?

B: Yes. I remember when the bank closed. I was about ten years-old and I remember my older brother and daddy going down to Plant City, which was

about five miles. Daddy was going to draw some money out and the bank was closed. He had, (I can remember this), seven dollars in his pocket and that was it. My oldest brother, Bill, was like a second daddy to me. He was the one that came to Gainesville. Daddy was in his seventies, then and we started the little produce stand after that.

P: Why did you leave Plant City?

B: I had a brother up here, working his way through college.

P: Was Bill the brother who lived in Gainesville?

B: No Bob, or Robert. Robert was four years older than I. During the Depression, he was out of school for four years before we were able to get enough money to pay his first semester's tuition.

P: So, was he the first to come to Gainesville?

B: Robert, Yes. After he was here a couple of years, I came up and spent the weekend with him at a boarding house. By that time, I was about sixteen or seventeen. I was so impressed with Gainesville when I rode the bus back home. I was working on Saturdays and Sundays at a grocery store in Tampa. I was basically a bag-boy and the store had a big, open-air, produce market out in front. While in Gainesville, I had watched how the boarding houses received their food shipments, at that time. There weren't any fast food restaurants. The boarding houses had cooks and they all were up and down the back of West University Avenue. While I was here for a couple of days, I got a chance to look around. There were many, big, two-story houses that, basically, were converted to places with a bunch of students living in them. I watched the produce that was brought in to the cooks in the back alley, there, such as the big fraternity house, there, on the corner of University Avenue.

P: Sigma Alpha Epsilon, I think it was.

B: SAE, yes. And they just tore down one of the buildings, this week. Bob was living in a boarding house right down the alley from there. The produce that they brought in looked like it had been thrown out for two or three days. It was wilted and yellow. So, I went back home and I said, Daddy, when I graduate from high school, I don't want to be a farmer. It's just me and you and mama, now. All of the family is gone. I think my brother Bill was managing the produce department in this store in which I was working, on Saturdays and Sundays. We lived sixteen miles from Tampa. We would drive and go to work at seven on a Saturday morning. In those days, stores stayed open until twelve, at night. I got two dollars and a half for working from seven until twelve at night. Then, on a

Sunday, we'd go back and work from seven until seven, at night and I got two dollars. But, I was one of the lucky boys that had a part-time job at school. The only reason I was able to get this job is because Bill was the produce manager.

P: Because of your brother.

B: So, as a result, I pleaded with daddy that when I got out of high school, we'd move to Gainesville, if we could save up enough money.

P: So, what did you do? Sell the farm?

B: No, there was no market for the farm. We had our home and a sharecropper's home. When we left in May, daddy and my older brother came up to Gainesville.

P: Is this Bill or Bob? Bob, of course, is here trying to go to school.

B: Yes, it was Bill. Bill was the oldest left, he was thirteen years older than I. So, he and daddy came up.

P: They came up in the family car, whatever it was?

B: It was a Model A Ford, 1930 model.

P: Wasn't too sporty, but you were glad to be able to arrive in something, right?

B: So, they came up and located the little service station.

P: What did you do with your mother, in the meantime?

B: Mother was one of the greatest mothers because she made the most of whatever was available.

P: But did she come to Gainesville?

B: Well, wait a minute. They just came up to get a location, to see if we could find a location we could rent. Do you know where our store was located on Eighth Avenue?

P: Was that a service station, to begin with?

B: It was an old service station. It had gone broke and it didn't have any real building. This lady named Miss Edwards, an Afro-American, she leased that open lot to us for \$8 a month. It was a blessing to her because she had, basically, no income. She was a practical nurse. As we grew, our rents were increased, as we built more and more. She pointed us out to many people.

She'd come in the store, (and she was educated for that period), and she said, I'm probably the only person that has a black son and a white son. She would put her arm around me. She said, this is my other son. Anyhow, we took care of her. When she died, I was the only white person that went to her funeral.

P: So, your father came up and you rented this location of Miss Edwards' property, for \$8 a month?

B: Yes.

P: Did the family, then, move to Gainesville?

B: Yes, we moved and when we got here, we had \$300. That's all the money we had.

P: That was big time.

B: Yes, \$300.

P: You're mother, also. came?

B: Yes, we all moved at one time. By then, we had traded one of the vehicles for a one-ton truck and put our furniture in it. We came up and rented a house.

P: Where did you live?

B: On Eighth Avenue. There was a vacant house and we rented it for \$30 a month. It was a nice three bedroom house, right on the corner of Eighth Avenue and NE First Street.

P: So, you were within walking distance of this business.

B: Yes, we were just four blocks from where we opened up our little fruit stand.

P: Was it fruits and vegetables?

B: Yes. We were down to \$55 of the \$300. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June in 1939, Bill and I went over to the Jacksonville wholesale market on Beaver Street and we bought \$50 worth of produce and that was it. We went over on a Friday night. See, the markets actually stayed open, at night. Farmers bring in their produce from all over South Georgia and North Florida and everything, and we bought \$50 worth of produce and we got back home at about 1:00 on a Friday night. The next morning at 8:00, we had built a little shed with just sawdust and no lights, no water, and we put our produce out. Daddy had converted this Model A Sedan that we had, into a little pickup truck and I went out near the University and

peddled off of that truck. Fortunately, it was the time of the year that we had a lot of peaches, cantaloupes and things, and I sold \$13 off of the little truck pedaling house to house that day, while my brother and daddy sold \$13. When we got through, we each had sold \$13, \$26, in all. I think about how difficult it was. I'd go door to door and I'd have a basket of beautiful Georgia peaches, cantaloupes. People would come up and I knew they wanted them, but they didn't have any money to buy them. This was Depression time.

P: \$26 was a lot of money, though.

B: My brother went back to the market with the \$26. My brother, who was in college, was working in the library at the time, part time. He had \$10 and he put \$10 in with the \$26, and Bill went back and bought some more produce and that's how we got started.

P: So, did you go back and forth every day?

B: Every day. Back then, see, people didn't have refrigerators; they had ice boxes. The thing that made it possible for us to make a go of it at that time, was because the icebox wasn't very effective, You didn't have enough room to put very much in it so, they, literally, had to buy a little bit, everyday.

P: Did you continue to pedal groceries?

B: I peddled to the fraternity houses.

P: You got to know the cooks?

B: I got to know all the cooks and within four or five weeks I had a great business because I had fresh produce and I would be there at 6:00, in the morning. See, they all cooked breakfast back, in those days. The cooks fed the boys because there wasn't any place to go eat. So, I would take beans, potatoes, and everything and within forty-five, sixty days, I had just wiped out the little, old stores that were delivering that old produce. It was becoming very controversial that this bunch of guys from Plant City had come up and were taking business away from the stores downtown, that would be delivering. There wasn't anything like we have now, as you well know.

P: Was Margaret Ann's, there?

B: They came in after we got started.

P: The Piggly Wiggly?

B: Yes, Piggly Wiggly. There were little stores around Thirteenth Street.

P: And Baerds and A&P were a little further up the street?

B: Yes, A&P. It wasn't Winn Dixie, then, but it was an off-shoot of what Winn Dixie would, later, be.

P: But it was a small little store, I remember.

B: And all the produce was put in the windows for the heat to burn it up. We didn't have any refrigeration and they didn't have any refrigeration. But, what made it work for us was that every night at 2:00, my brother would get up and drive to Jacksonville to the produce markets.

P: You went with him?

B: Not to begin with, but later, I started rotating with him because it was wearing him out, going there, every night. We didn't have refrigeration until after World War II was over, in 1946 or 1947, and I was able to build a new store, an add-on store. That is when we put in refrigeration.

P: This was an agricultural area. Were the farmers bringing things into Gainesville that you could buy?

B: Oh, yes. We were their friends. We became their friends because we would buy and also, we would take produce over to Jacksonville to sell during the war when a lot of trucks and a lot of people's cars were out. We kept our old truck together. It finally did wear out, that last part of the war, but we would take produce over and sell it.

P: This is you, your brother, and your dad.

B: Yes, and daddy was up in his years. Daddy was kind of a caretaker. He didn't have the business approach that Bill and I had because he had never worked in a grocery store as Bill and I had.

P: Where were your other brothers, in the meantime?

B: The other one had married and he, still, lived in Plant City. Of course, brother Bob was still going to school. He finally graduated in 1941, but he never worked in the store. He was in school.

P: What was he studying?

B: He was in agriculture and he taught school. His first job was in Ft. Myers, when he got out. He taught school for a year or two.

P: So, that still leaves two brothers.

B: Just me and Bill. The older brother never came, he stayed in Cross City. He never moved.

P: You and Bill were the two who really operated the business, here.

B: Yes, we were the ones. The thing that we had that the other stores didn't have was fresh vegetables. We had our own little truck. We'd go and get it, and this is what really made it work. We would have never been able to make it work completely if I had not been hauling and selling to the fraternity houses and the boarding houses. And it was a Godsend to them because they had nobody that was bringing them fresh produce like we were.

P: Of course, during the war years there were no students here and many of those boarding houses closed up.

B: They were, but by that time our produce market had grown until we gradually phased that out during the war. Then, we finally put in a little meat market and grocery store, too.

P: Did you have a problem getting enough gas to travel to Jacksonville?

B: No. We got our ration coupons because we were a business, but what happened in the latter part of the war was that the tires began to wear out and we were having problems getting tires. Our truck, finally, wore out. But I had a neighbor that was in business right next to me, Mr. Donovan. He had the Dad Syrup Company and the Great Big Bottling Company, and he had a couple of trucks and he, literally, loaned me one for the last year. He only had an allotment and people would come to him, instead of him having to deliver. They'd come to his warehouse and buy his products, there.

P: The grocery store is on the original property that you had started with, from Miss Edwards and you expanded, from there?

B: Yes, we just kept leasing more land from her. We were right up next to her home.

P: Is this where Walker's Furniture is, now?

B: We were on Fourth Street and there's a little carwash, there, now.

P: I can remember when you were there, but I'd forgotten the exact location. You say, there's a little carwash there, now?

B: Yes, it's on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Fourth Street.

P: And you called it Butler Brothers, the grocery store?

B: No, not Butler Brothers. We called it Butler Supermarket. Well, just Market to begin with, and then, as I built it bigger, we changed the name. When it burned down, it was the biggest store in Gainesville and it was called Butler Supermarket.

P: You started out with fruits and vegetables, and then added on to that. Did you say, you put in a little meat market?

B: We put in meats and groceries in 1941. We were only into produce for about a year, until I got up enough nerve to ask Mr. Fifer to loan me \$1,000. Daddy was a pretty good carpenter. We got out there and built a building in the back of our produce market.

P: You didn't have to worry that much about permits as you have to, today?

B: We didn't have to have a permit. We just went out there and built. We didn't have enough money to buy a license at the time, either, and when we started doing pretty well, I finally went down to the courthouse. I said, well, you know I don't have a license, but I haven't had enough money to buy one. But, if we can continue, I will be able to. The gentleman was named Arnold and he said, son, you go on back and run your little store.

P: A sympathetic supporter.

B: Yes.

P: You said you dealt with Fifer's State Bank?

B: Yes, Mr. Fifer loaned me the first \$1,000 and that's when we built our little building and we got McCoy Lumber Company to trade with us. They sold us some lumber on credit. We got a little eight foot meat case. The guy sold it to me on credit and I paid him off over a year. The public appreciated what we were doing because we stayed open seven days a week, if you can remember.

P: No Sunday operation, of course.

B: Oh, yes, that was our biggest day.

P: Sunday?

B: Oh, yes, Sunday was our biggest day. See people got paid every week on Saturday. So, Saturday night, we'd stay open until ten, eleven, twelve o'clock according to the market. Then, the next morning . . .

P: I didn't think the church people would let you stay open on Sunday.

B: Well, after we got so successful, the chief of police paid us a visit. A fellow by the name of Clemens. He was a first cousin of daddy's. When we started off, we looked like poor white trash so, he never did recognize us or even come by to say, hello. We got to doing so much business that Margaret Ann and the others began to complain because we were staying open on Sunday. It was the time of the so-called Blue Law. So, the city manager, Mr. Mobly and Mr. Clemens came out one Sunday after we'd been in business for six, seven years. They came in and told one of the three cashiers we had at the time, we'd like to see Mr. Butler. They pointed me out. They said, Mr. Butler, we've got a problem. I was only about twenty-five or twenty-six at that time. There is a law called the Blue Law that states you're not supposed to operate business on Sunday. I said, well, we've been operating here for years and others such as service stations, drug stores, and movie theaters are open. If you close me down, you will have to close them down. I was just a kid, but I had enough sense to realize that they couldn't be preferential. I said, are you going to close the service stations down? There's a little mom and pop grocery store that's much smaller than ours. Are you going to close them down? They didn't answer me. Finally, after awhile he said, let us think about it. We'll come back and discuss it with you. So, in about two or three weeks, they came back and said, would you consider closing part of the day on Sunday? Well, we were working very long hours. I talked to daddy and my brother about it. I said, our Sunday morning is great until about 1:00 and then, it drops off. Then our big business starts again, late in the afternoon. I said, maybe we'll close from 1:00 until 5:00. So, we made that proposition and they said, that's fine. So, that's what we did.

P: So, that's how you handled it. When people came to the grocery store, where'd they park? Right on the street?

B: When we started, we only had parking backed up enough on each side. I finally bought the acre of land to the west, there, and made a parking lot.

P: I remember how Margaret Ann had parking on the side, but I had forgotten about your parking.

B: Yes. See, there was a triangle between us and the railroad and we ended up paving that. Then, as a result of that, we added on to where we were, up to about 14,000 square feet when the store finally burned.

P: From the beginning it sounds like you had a prosperous business, though.

B: We had something the people needed. Nobody had fresh vegetables and we worked seven days a week, which most people wouldn't do. I'd get up every morning (as I said), to begin with and I'd be at the fraternity houses and boarding houses. I'd finish up around 11:00 and then I'd come back to work in the store in the afternoon.

P: Was there any credit business at all? Did you put people down on the charge?

B: No. I remember the first thing Mr. Fifer told me, when my brother and I went in to borrow money. (I don't know whether you remember him or not, but his eyes were kind of spread out, instead of crossed). He looked at me and said, now son, I'm going to loan you this money, but if I hear you trying to do credit I'm not going to loan you any more money. You can't do credit in a grocery store and stay in business. I said, the only people that I took credit from, was the **McCoy** Lumber Company, when I bought lumber. Also, the electrician that did my electrical beam. He did some work and took it out in trade. In fact, the reason we got some electricity to begin with, was that they were trying to buy one night and said, you all need some lights, in here. Daddy said, well, we don't have enough money to do it. He said, I'm an electrician, I'll just put in some lights and trade it out, and that's the way we got lights to begin with.

P: But nobody was on the charge book? When they came to your store and bought, they paid for it.

B: Yes, but we didn't get into that. We had seen other people try that.

P: Well, that was traditional in the South--people putting it on the book.

B: Well, it was, but that was an error that finally put the little grocer-man out of business. When the chain stores came in, they couldn't compete. When we told the person we had worked for in Tampa, we were leaving, he tried to discourage us because he wanted us to stay and work with him.

P: When you were buying the inventory for the store, did you have to pay for it, too?

B: Yes, we would have to pay for it. But what really made it possible for us to compete with Margaret Ann and the others, was that Sepsers Warehouse in Jacksonville had a group of stores over there and a distribution center. As a result of buying produce in Jacksonville and carrying produce over to sell on the wholesale market, we met the Sepsers, who were also buying produce for their grocery store. We made a deal to buy our groceries from them on a special price and we'd pay them cash.

P: Did you do much advertising?

B: Oh, yes. As we got into the grocery business, we'd have a full page ad.

P: Was that kind of a new thing to do, at the time?

B: Yes. That was the thing that really put us on the block. Then, I did all kinds of promotions.

P: In a way, you were the wave of the future, as far as grocery operations in Gainesville?

B: Yes. Nobody had anything like we had. Our market got to be 100, 125 feet long.

P: How did you close up, at night?

B: Daddy made some barbed-wire screens in panels of about ten by ten, and we'd take them around back of the store and at night. We'd bring them back and lock the chains. The barbed wire was about six inches all the way around. People said, well, aren't you afraid somebody's going to break in? So, daddy said, well, we've thought about that. We built a room in the back and daddy slept in that back room for years until we got big enough and the store [was] completely closed in.

P: And you had a roof now, over the thing, so, that if it was raining . . .

B: Yes. When we got in the grocery business, everything was roofed in. But then, we still had an open air market in the front.

P: And there was no air conditioning or anything there?

B: No, we had attic fans. That's all we had, at the time.

P: What about the fire? When did that occur?

B: April 23, 1953.

P: How did it happen? Was it at night?

B: They called me. I was Mayor pro-tem by that time, but we need to back up a little bit. Back in 1950, a group came into the store one morning. About eight or ten business people came into my store one morning. By that time, it had grown to be the most successful grocery store of produce in town. They said, Clark, could we talk to you a minute? I said, what in the world are you gentlemen doing here, in my grocery store. You're not buying groceries today, at 10:00 in the morning?

They said, no, we want to talk to you. Can we? So, I had the little office built up where I could overlook the grocery store but I couldn't get them all, up there. I said, well, let's go back in the store room. They asked me if I would consider running for city commissioner. I said, well, why me? I've never been to a city commission meeting. They said, you have proven to be a successful business person, your reputation is good and we need somebody that will help straighten things out down in City Hall. I said, what do you mean 'straighten?' They said, things are just not like they should be, down there. As I pinned them down a little more, the city was operating on a buddy system. Everything was handed out on friendship and to buddies, not on a competitive basis. I said, I have to talk to daddy about that.

So, after they left, daddy and I got together. I said, daddy, they've asked me to run for city commissioner and I've never been to a meeting. He said, that's an honor, son. I said, yes, but I don't have a whole lot of time. He said, I served eight years as a county commissioner when I was about your age, and it took me two days from my home in a buggy to get to Mayo. So, you're not going to have the problem I had. You are right downtown. I said, two days, what did you do from the time you left? He said, I would stay with friends along the way.

P: Who else was on the commission with you?

B: Doc Chamberlain came on, a couple of years, after I went on and, of course, Al Colhmes, C. B. Bohanen, and then, later on, Meryl Hanes the architect came on.

P: Were you the group really running Gainesville or were some old-timers like Senator Shands [Florida state senator, 1940-1958] still calling the shots?

B: No, we ran the city; we ran the thing. What got me in trouble was that I was doing it. When I say, got me in trouble, I mean, when the store burned that night, they called me and of course, when I got out there, it was all over with. It was a wooden building and some concrete block. The roof was metal with wood trusses and it was crimped tin where you put it on. It's one solid sheet, but there were ridges and it was crimped. So, when the thing burned and fell in, there was an area in the back of a hole about twice as big as this table where that tin had been split open, but all the rest of the tin just fell down.

P: What caused the fire?

B: As we walked back there, the chief said, Clark, do you have any idea why that tin is split like that, up there? I said, no sir, I don't know have any idea. He said, there's a ladder on the back of your store right on the concrete block wall. He said, that's where the fire started. When we got here, that's where it was. I said, well, I don't have any idea. He said, well, that looks suspicious. I said, well, I

had a big safe and I didn't know whether it was fireproof or not up in the office. But I said, you know, I asked one of your fireman to keep water on my safe and maybe my safe will open. I've got my insurance policy in the safe. So, we went up and I finally got it to open. I had a policy for \$54,000 and I needed \$400,000 or \$500,000. The funny thing about it, Howard Hall had been working for M. M. Parish who had my insurance. Howard had left M. M. and was setting up his own office. The afternoon before my store burned, he and his supervisor from the insurance company spent about two hours trying to convince me that I ought to have more insurance. That was the afternoon that my store burned. The next morning, Howard and the insurance guy came up to me and said, well, I'm so sorry this happened to you. I said, Howard, I know you all were pressing me to buy insurance, but if I had said yesterday, that I wanted insurance it wouldn't have been worth anything would it? His insurance supervisor from the company said, if you had told us how much you wanted and they had written it up, even though it had not been received by the insurance company, you'd have been covered. I said, well, that sounds good, but I didn't do it. Anyhow, when I got the insurance policy and handed it to the fire chief, he looked at it and said, it's obvious you didn't have anything to do with it. So, nothing was ever done, but there was no question in his mind or in mine. They didn't have any way of proving who, if anybody, did it. There wasn't any way I could borrow enough money to go back in business.

P: Were you still dealing with Fifer?

B: By that time, he'd passed away and Florida National had bought the bank. A \$20,000 loan was a big loan in Gainesville at that time, and I needed \$400,000 because I had expanded the store.

P: Back to the grocery store, did you have both a white and black trade?

B: Oh, yes.

P: Because you're right there on the edge of the neighborhoods.

B: Yes, it was great for us because whites would buy the better things and then, Saturday afternoon or Saturday night, when blacks got paid, and Sunday morning, they would just be \_\_\_\_\_.

P: You don't think the fire was arson, do you?

B: Yes.

P: The fire chief thought so, too?

B: Yes.

P: But they never came up with the arsonist, did they?

B: No. Back then they didn't have the sophistication. There wasn't anybody to push it.

P: Did the fire department answer the emergency pretty quickly?

B: Remember, we had the train going along there? The train was going by, down Main Street, when they saw the fire. We had people in there. This was on a Thursday night and every Thursday night I'd have three people come in to clean. We had tile floors and a washing machine and they would wash and clean everything--the floor, etc., every Thursday night. They didn't get through until about 9:30. At 11:30, when the fire chief called me, or the chief of police, (I forget which one it was), but when I got down there, it was a solid blaze.

P: The fire department, as I remember, was down on East Main Street about where the Hippodrome is, now.

B: Yes, it was just a block from the Hippodrome.

P: But it wasn't very far away from your operation, at all?

B: No, they got down there.

P: Did anything get saved?

B: We ended up with our shelving and we had merchandise, like our canned goods. See, this was on a Thursday night before the weekend and we had a big full-page ad of business. All the meats in the meat coolers were destroyed. We had the meat coolers full, but we did get about \$600, \$700 worth of canned goods, a little dab of stuff, that we were able to save.

P: So, you were out of the grocery business, now, because you can't get enough money to re-build?

B: That's right. I tried, I went everywhere. I went to Atlanta to the Small Business Administration and nobody would help.

P: You had been a successful businessman. Why were they turning you down?

B: The problem with the grocery business is that it has a very, very low margin and I needed \$400,000 to \$500,000.

P: . . . which was a lot of money.

B: Yes. And I didn't have any, I had probably \$2,000 or \$3,000 in the bank and I had all the merchandise I had bought for the one weekend that I still owed. When I got my insurance, instead of giving me \$54,000 I only got \$30,000-some-odd because they said, I was a co-insurer. I don't know if you understand that or not, but if you're not 100 percent insured, then, you get less of the insurance than what you're paying for.

P: This really was a major disaster for you. It ended your business career.

B: Completely.

P: It wiped you out, overnight.

B: Yes, and daddy had just had a heart attack and he didn't know it. Back then, the doctors didn't know it. He was basically an invalid. He was eighty-seven at the time, and mother was about seventy-seven. She was about ten years younger than he.

P: And both of them were dependent on you?

B: Yes. And Deborah was born three months after the fire. I had two children. Deborah was born in August, after the fire.

P: The fire was in June, right?

B: No, April. April 23, and Deborah was born in August. I had no income and one of the saddest parts about it was that my older brother (who had been like a daddy to me), became an alcoholic. I don't know even where I should put this in, but he was so good, I just continued to take care of him.

P: Sounds to me like you had a lot on your shoulders.

B: Oh boy, I sure did.

P: But you left the grocery business because there's no way for you to get back into it. All the financial doors are closed.

B: Finally, Justice Williams, who was president of Florida National Bank, called me one day and said, Clark, come down and let's talk. So, I went down and he said, I can loan you \$20,000. You can get out and get you a couple of lots. You won't have any trouble selling them, I don't think. Just build a couple of VA [Veteran's Administration] houses. And that's the way I got started.

P: \$20,000 put you into the contracting business?

B: And I got a couple of lots.

P: Where?

B: In East Gainesville. In the meantime, my brother Bill had bought a little piece of land over on NE 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue from a colored friend of ours, to help him out. In the meantime, having being mayor, I had worked with Mrs. Mable Voyle and a group of us got her to donate a piece of land on Waldo Road for the Boys Club. That's where we organized, got a group together, and built the first Boys Club, over there on Waldo Road. She had traded with me some in the store and she had an abstract company downtown. I don't know whether you remember her or not.

P: I remember Miss Voyle.

B: She gave the land for the Boys Club. This was a result of working with her earlier. We had a couple of acres there, with this piece of land that my brother Bill had purchased. We really didn't need it, and it joined Mrs. Voyle's property. This was back before the fire. So, she asked me, one day, what I was going to do with the property. I said, I don't know, but I guess, some time, we'll build a couple of houses on it. She said, you know I've got property right next to it. If you would build some nice little houses there, I might let you have some of my property. I said, Mrs. Voyle, if I do anything, it will be nice. I don't know just where I'm going or what I'm going to be able to do. She said, let me think about it. She and I met again as a result of some of her ladies that were driving around one day. She had a nice, big car and they came by. I was out there mowing the grass on the two acres. She stopped and I went over to the car. She said, come by to see me, tomorrow. And, I did. She said, now, will you promise me you'll buy and build some nice, little houses? I said, Mrs. Voyle, they'll be nice. Kirkpatrick represented her, yet, I didn't know that at the time. But anyhow, she agreed to let me have the land--about seven, eight, or ten acres, at some very reasonable price. So, I entered into a contract with her. In the meantime, Walter Stubbs had been trading with me. Walter was building a couple or three little houses.

P: He built the house next door to us.

B: I took Walter fishing a couple of times with me and I said, Walter, I need you to help me. I need to meet the people in the FHA [Federal Housing Authority] office and the VA office in Jacksonville. He said, well, sure, I'll take you over there. So, we went over and he introduced me to them. I got a hold of Sam Wall and said, I need to get some paving done. I have about ten or eleven acres, here. Could I get you to pave these lots and let me pay you as I sell them? At that

time, Sam had married Dorothy Crapp who had inherited a lot of money. Sam said, well, I think I can do that. So, he paved them. Back then, you didn't have to do much to get a permit. I had a survey, went down, and got my survey.

P: The roads out there were not yet paved, you say?

B: No, they weren't, but the city was paving 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They were going right along, at that time. Before I got in, they had already set that up. Anyhow, to make a long story, short, we put those lots in and I got some FHA commitments. Walter, also, took me to a guy over there who drew plans. He sold the plans to me. He could sell them all over to any other developer under FHA. I could buy those plans for \$25 a piece so, I got ten sets of plans. It was amazing because I didn't have any money.

P: You could build ten different kinds of houses?

B: I tried to get some money from First Federal.

P: Who was running that, Jennings?

B: Jenkins and Hershhal Haynes. Hershhal Haynes was financing Hugh Edwards out of First Federal. Jenkins was financing another guy, and so, they only let me have two loans. The head of FHA at the time, was a guy by the name of Hubert Hurst who had taught at the University of Florida. He and Hershhal Haynes were big Republicans. When Eisenhower got in, he got the appointment, as director, for the FHA office in Jacksonville. I don't know whether you remember Hubert Hurst or not.

P: I remember Hubert Hurst.

B: So, when I went over to give or apply for some commitments, he said, Clark, you have to get you somebody to do financing. You can't depend on First Federal. I said, well, who in the world would I get? He said, well, Stockton, Wyle, and Dalan [accounting firm?] is the biggest in the state. He picks up the phone and calls the guy over at Stockton and said, I've got a young guy here from Gainesville that would like to come over and see you. He's got some property he wants to develop. So, I went over, met him, and they sent a guy down to look at my little project. They gave me commitments for, I think, six houses. So, when I started building, instead of just building on a plain, cutting my trees down, or taking the bulldozer, we saved the trees, and I put a little extra touch that wasn't on the plans to give them a little detail around the front. And they started selling.

P: Are these white houses or black houses?

B: No, these were white. These were on NE 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

P: What is the name of the company, now. Did you have a name?

B: We just called it Butler Brothers Builders instead of Butler Brothers Shopping Center. So, that's the way we got started.

P: Same crew, different scene. You had a lot of confidence in yourself being able to move from the grocery business into the contracting business and start building houses because really, you didn't know that much about it.

B: No, I didn't. But I knew how to hire people. I didn't know how to build anything. I wasn't a carpenter, but I knew how to hire people.

P: But you needed carpenters, electricians, and plumbers.

B: Yes, and I got a supervisor. But I had negotiated. See, if you're successful in a grocery business with a small markup, you have to negotiate everything.

P: You seem to be a people person, able to bring people together.

B: Well, yes, I was very fortunate. I didn't give up. I only weighed 150 pounds. I weigh 180 now, and I weighed 175 then. When I lost the store, I dropped from 175 down to about 150 pounds, worrying, because I didn't know what was going to happen. Anyhow, to make a long story short, I had friends that helped me and I've had an awful lot of luck, too.

P: What did you build, six houses?

B: I had thirty-one lots in the first subdivision and I built four houses. I got two commitments from First Federal, but they had strings attached to them. I won't go into details here, but they had strings attached. Hubert Hurst told me that I wasn't going to be able to get financing from First Federal, successfully. That's when he sent me over to Stockton, Wyle, and Dalan. Of course, Stockton was anxious about me to begin with because they knew I didn't have any experience. But the houses kept selling and selling, and finally, we built that out. In the meantime, one day at Rotary Club, I was walking out at the same time after lunch as Carl Bryce, and he said, Clark, I noticed you're building a nice little project over there in Northeast Gainesville. He said, I've got an opportunity to buy two pieces of land and I can only afford to buy one. Would you mind going with me to look at those, one day, and see which one you think I ought to buy for future development? I said, sure, Carl. Carl had traded with me in the grocery store. One thing about it, almost everybody in Gainesville came through that grocery store because we'd be open on Saturdays, Sundays, and at night. So, I got to

know a lot of people. Carl had Westmoreland Estates area, over there on Millhopper Road where a fellow had cut some roads in there and named it Westmoreland Estates. But, he didn't do any paving, and that was one of the pieces of property. The other one was where he ended up building his home, on NW 16<sup>th</sup>. That was about on NW 24<sup>th</sup>, and, of course, that was nice, high land and Westmoreland Estates-

P: You developed Westmoreland?

B: The guy that owned the land and was trying to sell it to Carl was there. The funny thing was, he was my next door neighbor, at the time. Carl didn't buy it and he bought the one over on NW 16<sup>th</sup>. My next door neighbor came to me and said, well, Clark, why don't you buy it? I said, I don't have money to buy ninety acres; I don't have that kind of money. He said, I don't need any down payment. Well, maybe give me \$2500 down and I'll sell it to you, on time. So, I went to Mr. Williams, my banker. He said, well, Clark, that's too far out. I can't do anything for you there, and besides, Mr. Mall, the guy that owned the Florida Bank, won't let me loan on anything that's not revenue-producing. So, I went to Stockton, Wyle, and Dalan and got them to come out and look at it. I said, I can buy the land on time, but I need some money to pave the roads. They came out and they said, well, it's just too far out. We're not going to be able to loan you the money, but if you can get the roads built, we can loan under FHA because they're guaranteed. So I went and found a guy that would put the roads in for me on time, and we started building.

P: You had to worry about the sewage lines too, didn't you?

B: No, we ended up with septic tanks. Back in those days there were septic tanks. Everything had a septic tank. So, we got started. From the time I started building houses in 1954 to three years later, I was the biggest speculative house builder in Gainesville.

P: What were those first houses that you built out in Northeast Gainesville selling for?

B: From \$9,000 to \$11,000.

P: Did you get involved in the GI mortgages?

B: Yes. We did GI or VA, either one. We did both of them. They never would give us enough appraisal. See, they set the value, so, I could never make the money I should have been able to make on them because . . .

P: How much were you making off these houses?

B: We were lucky if we ended with somewhere \$500 to \$700. They were very, very difficult. And I was always building.

P: The plight of the narrow edge, there.

B: I always built a better house than the value established because my ego wouldn't let me build something that wasn't attractive. Of course, it was easier to sell.

P: We're getting big time from those little houses out there in Northeast Gainesville.

B: We bought Westmoreland Estates, on time. Then, we started to build larger houses and we were the first to start building project houses with central heating and air conditioning. In 1955, I talked C. B. Bohanan, who was on the city commission with me, into getting into commercial air conditioning and heating. As a result of that, we were able to start producing semi-custom homes on central heating and air conditioning. Our sales began to really increase, considerably. We had fifteen to twenty houses under construction, at a time. That went along pretty good until 1961 or 1962 and then, the bottom fell out of the market.

P: What caused that?

B: I don't know, exactly.

P: I know that wasn't a Gainesville event; it was all over.

B: Eisenhower was in office at that time and the economy, as a whole, slowed down, considerably. There were a lot of foreclosures in the marketplace. In fact, many cities had 2,000 and 3,000 houses foreclosed where people had bought them under VA and FHA and couldn't make the payments—places like Orlando, Tampa, St. Pete, Jacksonville. Fortunately Gainesville, as a result of being a university town, had few foreclosures. But, there was a period there, from about 1961 to 1963, that it was very, very difficult, financially, for me. Then, I got into building the thing that helped to turn around the cash flow. I got into building apartments, and that gave me some continuity or continued cash flow. My first one was the Butler Apartments, fifty-two units there on SW 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

P: That's your first apartment?

B: Yes. SW 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

P: Before you get to that, tell me about some of the other areas besides Westmoreland Estates that you developed.

B: I developed Pine View.

P: Where's that?

B: That was on NE 16<sup>th</sup> Street. And then, I developed some in Snow Creek Hills. For Dr. Snow, I planted that tract in there which was known as Snow Creek Hills, right off of NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup>. That area was the beginning of my building some custom homes.

P: I read that you built about 500 to 600 homes during that period?

B: Yes. When I finally got out of the house building business, in 1967. I think that was the last residential house I built.

P: When you built a custom home, was that for speculation or were you under contract with somebody?

B: I did some custom homes for people that would come to me. We'd design a plan for them. Most of mine were speculative, but I got into the larger, speculative homes, up in the 2,000 to 2,500 square feet, and Westmoreland Estates is still a model. And we had no controls on us, at that time. We laid out the roads, we saved the trees, and we built customized homes for people on economy prices. I guess I was able to do it as a result of my experience in negotiations and controlling cost. The marketplace at that time, was controlled, price wise, by FHA and VA. People were not financially able to put large down payments on homes, at the time, so, I finally recognized that I needed to get in another type of business. I was not able to make a return on my investment in building speculative houses because I was putting too much in them based on the price that we were allowed under the FHA and VA financing.

P: When you started with the apartments, were they successful right from the beginning?

B: Yes. We were building, just at the time when students could afford to rent apartments. For many years, as you well know, the economy was not such that the students could afford to rent apartments. They had to rent rooms or stack them in rooms. My second apartment projects after the Butler Apartments was Williamsburg Apartments, directly behind the VA Hospital off of 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

P: Is that where the murders took place? Williamsburg?

B: Yes. That's where the first two murders took place. Again, that was very fortunate that I was able to get that location. I happened to be at home on a Sunday afternoon when a realtor called me and told me that piece of land was going to be available. The location was great.

- P: Sure, it was close to the university and the medical school.
- B: I built 128 units there.
- P: That's a nice complex. I've never been in it, but I've driven by it.
- B: The one that really challenged me was Lakeshore Towers. The FHA people from Washington came down to visit with me because I was building a lot of FHA houses at the time and there was a program that was set up to serve elderly people who needed a special type of program. They talked me into it. And, as a result of my ego, I wouldn't turn it loose, even though I recognized that, as I got into designing it, the cost was going to be prohibitive for people in Gainesville to be able to pay the rent. It was going to take [too much] money to make it work.
- P: Wasn't that the operation that Dr. Reitz became involved in? Lakeshore Towers for the retired Didn't the Presbyterian Church....
- B: I built a unit under the FHA program and, as a result of the unit being so attractive, the Presbyterian Church came to me and contracted to buy it from me. Unfortunately, they did not have the resources to manage it because one of the persons that was involved, passed away. It was a real loss for me because they never made any payments to FHA on the mortgage. FHA started foreclosing on them so, I had to go in, buy back their contract from them, take over, and pay FHA a large sum of money to get the building back.
- P: What's the building used for now?
- B: It's about 80 percent residential and 20 percent....
- P: It's not a senior facility?
- B: We have a lot of seniors there, but you can rent to anybody. It's not under FHA, anymore. We paid FHA off.
- P: But you own that building outright and that's where your offices are located?
- B: Yes. I lost a lot of money in it to begin with, but fortunately, I was financially able to carry it for a number of years. Now, it makes a reasonable return.
- P: What banks, by this time, are you dealing with? Any ones that'll loan you the money?
- B: We did a lot of searching in those days, but fortunately, I always paid my bills.
- P: Is this before you organized your own bank?

B: Yes. Florida National was my lead bank for so many years and then, when First Union bought out Florida National, they bought my account with it. Then, because of my growth, I ended up doing business with a number of other banks. One is the Wachovia Bank and I'd been doing business with Compass Bank for years, before.

P: Were you on any of the boards before Compass Bank?

B: No. Unfortunately, nobody ever asked me to serve on any of the boards. I had borrowed so much money and realized that there was a marketplace in Gainesville for an independent bank. Most of the banks had been bought out by the big banks, so I organized the Gainesville State Bank that opened in 1977. It took me about two and a half years to go through, get it organized, and get investors to go with me.

P: How did you get the investors in it?

B: I called up different people who....

P: Said, I want your money?

B: That I knew. That if they didn't have the money, they could borrow the money to invest in it.

P: You must have known everybody in Gainesville who fit in that category.

B: But you know, back even then, when we started organizing in 1975 until the time we got it open, there were a lot of people that had to borrow the money that we invested in it, including me. Most of the wealth, the income, and the livelihood that so many people are enjoying in Gainesville, has happened in the last fifteen to twenty years, and most of it in the last ten to fifteen years. Getting back to organizing the Gainesville Bank, Bill Andrews was a friend and also was an attorney. So, Bill assisted me in filing for the application and that was quite an experience. We ended up qualified, but we never could get an answer from Tallahassee. We had a very able group, but the head of the banking authority in Tallahassee was not issuing charters without certain benefits, so, we ended up waiting for about a year. Finally, the last day that he was in office he issued thirty or thirty-one charters and ours was one of them. As quick as the new commissioner of banking came in, he cancelled them all, including ours. Obviously, we all had to start over. It took us about six or eight months, but we got our charter with the new insurance commissioner. We opened it in the mini-mall in Gainesville.

P: What kind of a building did you have that you opened?

- B: In the first phase of our Butler Plaza Shopping Center, we had . . .
- P: I know, but it's not the present building?
- B: Oh no. It was back in, what we call a little mini-mall, in the shopping center that had five or six stores in it. We took about 1700 feet and opened up our bank in the little mini-mall. We operated it there for about a year and a half or two years.
- P: This building dates to 1979 and the first one, September 1, 1977, was the Gainesville State Bank.
- B: Yes, that's the day we opened in September 1977. And we operated in the Butler Plaza, mini-mall.
- P: Were all of the investors local citizens?
- B: One was from Ocala.
- P: L. K. Edwards?
- B: Yes, L. K. was from Ocala. L. K. was a real help in it because he, also, was a board member in a bank in Ocala and had friends in Tallahassee that helped.
- P: You had eleven directors?
- B: Yes. I also had one from Jacksonville, Ralph Burnham. Ralph was an officer with Stockton, Wyle, and Davan.
- P: How did Don Halprin get on that board?
- B: We invited Don to come in.
- P: . . . because I know he had been in the building operation.
- B: Wasn't he dean of . . .
- P: Well, he was with the College of Architecture.
- B: Since you brought his name up, there is some history there that Don has regretted, probably 10,000 times. Whenever we started to grow, we were up to \$11 million, (which wasn't very much for a bank), but we were beginning to grow and we all knew that. For us to grow as a bank, we had to have a freestanding bank. Since I owned all of the airport property, I had the first phase of the Windmeadows apartments, the mobile park, and the first phase of the shopping center, I let our bank have a tract of land. It was \$3 a square foot, which was just

a giveaway, at that time. I got a very capable architect from Jacksonville and took him down to Central Florida where I had seen a design of a bank that I particularly liked. It took three or four times of him drawing to get what I wanted, but I finally came up with a plan which is now the Compass Bank. Then, of course, as we started developing, we only had \$11 million in deposits, at that time. I went to FDIC [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation] in Atlanta to plead with them to let me build this building even though we were a very small bank. The representative at FDIC said, Mr. Butler, this looks like \$100 million bank deal and you've only got \$11 million in deposits. I said, ma'am, the reason that I want to build this is because I want to have a \$100 million bank and if I don't have a building that represents strength, I won't get it. She said, you're pretty determined. And I said, no, I'm just here to plead with you. She said, well suppose the bank doesn't grow as you think it will, what would you do? I said, I'll sell some more stock. She said, will you put that in writing? And I said, sure. She said, you go back and send me a letter telling me all of these things and I'll give it consideration. I did and she gave me a permit. I built the building with my crew. She said I built it for approximately half of what other bankers were paying per square foot. This was a period in the late 1970s, 1981, 1982, along there, that interest rates were so high, there wasn't much building going on. So, we were able to get extremely good prices.

P: It's the handsomest bank building in Gainesville, I think. I'm not so sure I like that corner, but it really looks good. It needs more land surrounding it.

B: I let the bank have the land way below the market price because I was the daddy of the thing, was the chairman and had the most investment in it.

P: What was the philosophy of setting up the bank? What were you trying to do?

B: I wanted to loan the little people money because I had been turned down so many times when I had an idea to do something. Also, the thing that irritated me, was that when I was successful, no bank had ever invited me to serve on the board. They would invite other people that were not as knowledgeable or had my experience. So, I wanted to prove to myself and to the town, that being a developer, you could still be a banker and be successful.

P: Do you think you were successful in achieving that as the bank achieved the goal of becoming the bank for the little man?

B: Yes. The reason we grew so fast with our bank is because we did help the little people. I sat as chairman of the loan committee and I had two or three other people that I selected out of the board who were also, experienced in borrowing money and running successful businesses. We outgrew all the other banks combined, for a number of years, in deposits. We outgrew First Union; we

outgrew SunTrust; we outgrew Barnett, and one other little bank for two years in a row before we sold the bank. We outgrew all of them put together in deposits.

P: Were you the largest investor in the bank?

B: Yes.

P: And you were chairman of the board?

B: Yes. I was the one that started it.

P: You were the father of it.

B: Yes. And talking about Mr. Halprin, I don't remember who got him to come aboard on the bank to begin with. Anyhow, he put in a fairly, sizeable amount of stock. When I came up with the plan for this, it looked like a \$100 million bank building, and I brought it out on the table to sketch. He said, (not to me but before we finally approved the plan), well, this looks like a Clark Butler monument building.

P: Well, anything wrong with that?

B: He said, Clark's very ambitious and has a big ego. He said, I don't think I want to continue investing; I'd like you all to buy my stock.

P: So, you did.

B: We had a board meeting and we bought it. Some of them couldn't, but there were two or three of us who wanted to buy, but we didn't have the money. We borrowed it from some other bank and bought his stock. If he had kept that \$50,000 worth of stock when we sold the bank, he would've been a millionaire on that investment.

P: A foolish man, then. George Singleton is on the board, I notice.

B: Yes, George and I had become friends many years ago and I invited him to be on the board. T. J. Hawes and I started in business almost the same year. Then there was Tom Williams out in Archer. Of course, Justice Williams sat on the board. I have not said much about Justice, but none of this would've ever happened . . .

P: He really was the one that got you started, wasn't he?

B: Yes. If it hadn't been for Justice Williams being my banker and my friend, Clark Butler would've been broke, probably half a dozen times. I was so aggressive in trying to grow faster than my capital would let me. If he couldn't loan me the

money, he would actually get a depositor in the bank that had surplus money, to loan me money. A fellow by the name of E. E. Donavon was another friend who, during the war [World War II], when my trucks were out, loaned me one of his trucks for almost a year and wouldn't let me pay him a dime for it. After the war was over, his business began to shrink. I was able to get new trucks and I was able to loan him a truck. That was really unreal that things would happen like they did. I was able to loan him a semi many times to send merchandise when one of his trucks was out. Back then, I think we had a relationship between people that trusted each other. There was a friendship and a small community that existed. Maybe, it exists now, but I'm not sure. We've all become more secure, I think. Not all, but many of us have, and we probably don't have the same stop-and-care attitude that we had back in those days.

P: Is Mike Warren on the board?

B: Yes. I invited Mike to come aboard, I guess, about three years before we sold the bank.

P: I was just wondering because he's a contractor, too. I would consider him a competitor.

B: Well, he was a customer of the bank, but I never worried about anybody being a competitor. Mike Warren had apartments and I had apartments. He was a hard worker, a very shrewd guy, and we handled a lot of his business for him. The fact is, I watched him and got to know him and I invited him to come aboard and he's made a very good board member.

P: I hope he hasn't gotten an albatross with that Royal Park thing, over there.

B: I hope not, too.

P: Maybe, it will work if they can find parking. About the Compass Bank?

B: Well, when I was ill--I'm assuming you knew that in 1996, I found out I had prostate cancer. When I was so ill, I think some of the board members, including Dr. Singleton, thought I wasn't going to live. They were afraid that, since I wasn't going to be around or able to run the bank while the bank was still in high gear, that they could maximize the value. We had a number of banks that wanted us. We were outperforming all the other banks in town from a gross standpoint, our good location, and we had five other branches. So, Compass came to me. I knew that I had prostate cancer at the time, but they came to me and wanted to negotiate. I said, no, we're not ready, yet, but I didn't know how sick I was going to be, either. When I started taking radiation and all those damn pills that they were giving me, it just annihilated me. It took from May to February, before I could go back to the office. I couldn't even work part time when they were taking

me back into the hospital. I got so weak, I'd have to go in and out in a wheelchair. So, they got Dr. Singleton and Ernie Higby to deal with Compass. Of course, Compass was anxious to get it, and fortunately, I got to where I could go back and work a little bit as we were getting into negotiations. I had turned the negotiations over to Mike Warren because Mike, being in the construction business had experience negotiating. If you're not a negotiator, you're not going to survive, too long. So, Mike had some experience in negotiating. I was too ill, but fortunately, I got back at the time they started making offers. The first meeting that we went to, they had an offer and four of the board of directors accepted it. There were nine of us, in all. Two of the people immediately made the motion to take the first offer, Fortunately, I was able to block it with five votes and we went back with a counteroffer. The next time, Compass Bank came back with a higher offer. The same four tried to sell it, again, I blocked it, and we countered back. We did that about three times. Finally, they were afraid I was going to kill it so, they brought one of my good friends in from Vero Beach, Roy Lambert. Roy got up and talked that night and said, we ought to take the thing. We had a good sale; it was more than we ever expected. Roy had to leave to go back, (he had guests), and so, he got up and left. Fred Henderson's family was a big depositor and a big owner of stock. I said, Fred, we can still get more money. Mike was sitting over to the left of me and I said, Mike, don't you believe we can get some more money? He said, yes, I think we can get another 30,000 shares. T. J. was on this side, and I whispered to him. Fred had said that he was going to vote to take the deal, and I pleaded with him. I said, Fred, we've all been in this thing and I want us still to be friends, but let's go back for one more offer. He said, if you do, I'm going to have to tell you that if I'm going to go with them. Then, you won't try to get another offer. So, we made them a counter offer that night and two days later, they took it.

P: Where is Compass Bank out of?

B: They're out of Birmingham, Alabama. We ended up making a lot of people millionaires. The day we closed with them, the stock was at \$47 a share and we ended up getting close to \$50 million.

P: Were you still the big investor in the bank?

B: Oh, yes.

P: So, you came out smelling like a rose?

B: Yes. I put money in it when nobody else would put any more in and we were really struggling. I put more in it, and when somebody wanted out, I would borrow the money and buy their shares.

P: Where were the branches?

B: We had one in Millhopper Shopping Center, which I developed years ago. Then, we have one over on North Main Street in the shopping center, there. Then, we bought the little bank over in Keystone and we had one at Melrose.

P: Did you have an operation in Micanopy?

B: Our banker wanted to put one, there, and he did.

P: I've never seen a bank in Micanopy.

B: They had a little one in a service station there. It was kind of a little thing, and it's not profitable. But, it was something that he wanted. Anyhow, when Compass bought the bank, they closed that one, there.

P: Do you have much involvement in it, now?

B: I'm still chairman of the board, of the local bank.

P: Then, you have a lot of involvement in it?

B: Yes. I'm probably one of the fifteen largest stockholders. According to the chairman of the board, I'm probably around the fifteenth largest stockholder in the Compass chain. It's grown now; we stretch all the way to Phoenix, Arizona. We have banks scattered from Phoenix and back to here. St. Augustine, I think, is the bank that's the furthest South and we have two in Hernando County, too. So, our bank is rated, not that this is necessary to put in there, but it's the number two bank in the United States as far as all around rating. It's been in the top ten for many years, but it has twelve years of continuous profit growth.

P: I want to go back to the construction period, now. We were talking about the student apartments you built between 1963 and 1972. The five largest apartment complexes are about 800 units. Does that sound about right to you?

B: Let me brief you. In 1965, we opened up Lakeshore Towers. In 1967, we opened up Williamsburg. In 1969, we built Mount Vernon. Then, in 1971, I started building Windmeadows Apartments. I built 254 units and then, I built the mobile home park right along with that with 250 some odd pads in the mobile home park. Then, about three or four years later, I built another seventy-eight apartments in Windmeadows. About the same time, I built another addition to the mobile home park of about seventy some-odd units.

P: Have you built apartment complexes anywhere, outside of Gainesville?

B: No. I started to and maybe, in some places, I would have liked to, but when I got in and found out that I was going to have to pay an attorney to get me permits, I couldn't stomach that.

P: When did you get into shopping centers?

B: Let's back up, there. I built my second shopping center back in 1969 in Orlando. I bought a tract of land down there in the late 1960s and developed the first phase of it in 1971.

P: Where is this again, now?

B: On Route 436 and Hal Branch Road. Then, I built a second addition to that in 1972 or 1973. Gainesville continued to grow and we built the first phase of Butler Plaza, which had Publix and the bank in it, in 1975.

P: Was Butler Plaza your first shopping area, here?

B: No, my first one was over here on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street and 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

P: Yes, tell me, where is that?

B: That's right down here, on the corner.

P: What part of it? It's such a big complex.

B: That was part of the Wells property that I bought and I need to deviate back-

P: Is it where the Publix is?

B: Let me deviate back. My first phase of the old Wells property was ninety acres. That was Westmoreland, Westwood and Fernwood. Then, in the next phase of the development, I bought the rest of the Wells property which came all the way down Millhopper Road to 16<sup>th</sup> [Ave.] and all the way back 16<sup>th</sup> [Avenue] to 38<sup>th</sup> Street. I ended up developing that whole project, in there, from 1955 and finished up in the 1970s. I bought 250 acres of the Wells family property, which was part of the old Westmoreland Estate that I developed. I built Sunnybrook, Fernwood, Westwood, Palm View, and Westmoreland Estates. Then, I built the shopping center and sold it to Publix.

P: Where Publix is now, was that your original shopping center?

B: Yes, and I sold that to Publix. Then I had a little boutique center up on the corner that I sold to a group out of Pennsylvania.

P: So, the extra little thing that fronts 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, you built that, too?

B: Yes, I built that. I built that just before we did the Publix and I ended up selling that stuff, too.

P: I think Eileen's had a dress shop.

B: Yes, Eileen Pearlman.

P: I knew you had the shopping center, but I wasn't able to locate it, myself.

B: That was the miracle that happened as a result of Carl Bryce being in Rotary with me. He saw what I was doing over there in Northeast Gainesville. You remember he wanted me to go look at a piece of property with him on 16<sup>th</sup> and Millhopper? Well, he could only buy one piece and the guy who was trying to sell the other piece to him happened to be my next door neighbor by the name of Earl Ranken. So, when Carl bought the other piece, Earl came to me and said, why don't you buy it? And I said, well, I don't have enough money. I bought it on credit like I had to do with lot of things.

P: But it worked.

B: It worked, yes.

P: Where else did you build shopping centers?

B: I didn't.

P: But didn't you build one down in Sarasota?

B: Oh, I built a big condominium project down there. I forgot about that. Yes, I built a 254-unit condominium and yacht basin between 1973 and 1976.

P: What about Orlando?

B: That was the one, big, shopping center, there.

P: Did you build a shopping center in Gainesville and Orlando?

B: Yes. Orlando is where I really made a lot of money in a shopping center that I started.

P: Was it easier to borrow money to do a shopping center than it was to do an apartment complex?

B: No, it was easier to borrow money to do apartment complexes. I would get an option on a piece of land and if one bank wouldn't do it or one company wouldn't do it, I'd go to another until I'd find somebody that would do it. That leads me to the way I ended up getting the Stengel Airport--the most important project in my life. We haven't dwelled much on that. That is the one that is almost a miracle. I was doing a shopping center in Orlando. I had the plans. I was negotiating with

a department store in New York City trying to get them to consider going in to Gainesville over on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

P: Millhopper?

B: Millhopper, and in Orlando. Britz department store, (they're out of business, now), but they were a pretty strong, medium-sized, department store, at the time. I was up in New York, meeting with a guy that represented Florida. I had the maps of Orlando; I had the maps of Gainesville. I was showing him the place on the map, over on Millhopper and 16<sup>th</sup>. I said, we're building a Publix here and we're going to do this, this, and this, and Britz department store would fit in because this is a growing neighborhood. I had the Gainesville map laid out on his desk and he said, Mr. Butler, this is I-75 over here and the University of Florida is here. Look at all these roads coming in. What's over here between the University and I-75? I said, well, that's an old airport called Stengel Field. It's just an old dilapidated airport. There's nothing out there. He said, well, yes, but look at the road pattern. You have one road coming in here; you have another one coming here; you have another one here, and the University of Florida and I-75. I finally, woke up.

P: The light turned on.

B: I finally woke up. I said, sir, I realize that you're not interested in my two locations so, I'm going to have to go on back to Gainesville and see what I can do. Well, I got back to the hotel as quick as I could and I called Mr. Justice Williams.

P: Get that land.

B: And I said, Mr. Williams, does one of your board members own the Stengel Field Airport? He said, yes, Gene Orana. He and his wife and Mr. Hamlin owned it.

P: Who owned it?

B: Hamlin.

P: Oh, they owned the College Inn and the Varsity Restaurant.

B: They made so much money over there, they went over here and bought land.

P: I didn't know they owned Stengel Field. I knew the Hamlins.

B: The Hamlins and Orana. They ran the College Inn. I used to peddle produce to them.

P: I remember them, and I remember her stern face.

B: And Mr. Williams said on the phone, Clark, (this was about 11:00 in the morning), why do you want to know about that? There's nothing out there. Nobody lives out there. I said, well, this fellow up here in New York has kind of opened my eyes. He said, Clark, I know you don't drink, but are you alright?

Yes, Mr. Williams, I'm okay. When I get in, I'll come in and talk to you. I went in and he said, Clark, nobody lives on that side of town; everyone is on the northwest side of town. I said, well, I know, but, you know, one day, there'll be an interchange here. If I may deviate here, Earl Powers was the road board chairman, at that time.

P: I knew Earl.

B: He had a say on where the interchanges went, and the interchanges went down Williston Road and Newberry Road. Newberry Road was logical, the other logical interchange, in my opinion, would have been Archer Road with the VA Hospital and the medical center. But at that time, the right people didn't own any land on Archer Road, so the interchange went in a different location. By that time, I had a chance to work with a lot of the politicians and I just said, well, someday, maybe I'll be able to get an interchange, there. Anyhow, Mr. Williams said, I can't loan you any money to buy that land because it's not revenue-producing. I said, maybe you could help me find somebody. I could make a down payment until I can find some manner to go-

P: Were the Hamlins interested in selling?

B: Yes. Mr. Hamlin had passed away.

P: Why did they buy it, in the first place?

B: They had foresight and they bought a lot of it on tax deeds back there, and Afro-Americans owned a lot of it and they needed to sell. They bought it because it was between the University of Florida and I-75.

P: They believed that everything would expand in that direction?

Did Earl Powers come through with the exit off of I-75?

B: Earl was the one that helped locate . . .

P: Because that opened it up, too.

B: Well, I-75 came through as a result of the federal government. The guy that helped, (and I'm deviating a little here), was the granddaddy of the expressways. He was a guy over here at Williston that owned Dixie Lilly Milling Company. They came up with the idea of expressways and finally, got in with Eisenhower.

He explained to Eisenhower how this country should have expressways and how they're designed. That's the way the expressways came in.

P: Who was Stengel?

B: Stengel was a little, old, bush pilot.

P: Wasn't his name Carl Stengel?

B: Yes, he was a pilot and he got this little airport opened up in the 1930s. It just continued to exist as a private field.

P: You could take flying lessons out there, I remember.

B: Yes, the military opened it up and used it during World War II. They made a military airport out of it.

P: Did you remember it when you first came to Gainesville? Were you ever out there?

B: I would go out there and watch the airplanes come in every once in awhile.

P: Sometimes, they had little exhibitions out there.

B: Yes, they did.

P: You never knew Stengel, though?

B: Oh, Yes. He had already sold it to the Hamlins, but he used to trade with me some, in the grocery store. He was a little short, stubby guy.

P: I remember Stengel Field, but I don't remember him, at all.

B: Yes, he was a nice, friendly guy.

P: I remember the Hamlins, very well, and Orana.

B: Well, Mr. Orana finally sold it. I got \$50,000 and made a down payment on it.

P: You bought it from the Hamlins, right?

B: Yes. I couldn't get any financing here, but I was doing business for Stockton, Wyle, and Dalan in Jacksonville on my housing. As a result, one of the guys that worked for Stockton, Wyle, and Dalan was familiar with me. He was hired to open up a new bank for the Winn-Dixie people, called a REIT [Real Estate Investment Trust] bank. These weren't banks that you go in and cash checks like the regular banks, but they were lending companies on real estate. When he

was made president of this bank, he called me, one day, and said, Clark, I want to come down to see you. I'm going to be president of American Century Bank. I said, who is that? He said, this is the insurance company over here that the Davis family [founding family of Winn-Dixie grocery stores] helped organize years ago. They're going to organize a bank. I said, well, that's great, come on down and I got a down payment on this piece of property, at that time. So, I said, I bought this property here and I plan to put apartments, a mobile home park, and someday a shopping center.

P: Is that what you envisioned there on that property? Apartments?

B: Yes. Apartments, a mobile home park, and I still had land left, and shopping. So, it was 232 acres.

P: Did you buy 232 acres, at once?

B: Yes. That was the one I bought from Orana and Hamlin.

P: How much did that cost you?

B: \$850,000, at that time.

P: That was a good buy?

B: It was \$3,700 an acre. A lot of people laughed at me, at the time, and said, what in the world are you going to do with that much? You can't build a shopping center on it.

P: And it was already level for you.

B: Well, it was pretty level, yes.

P: Did that include everything north of Archer Road, or did it include property on the other side?

B: I didn't own any on the other side.

P: Because the railroad track was there and there were some houses there that the army had built.

B: Yes, they built some back there, behind the little air strip.

P: I remember after the war, when the university was suddenly expanding. New faculty was coming in. The university leased those houses and then rented them out to faculty families.

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- B: Yes, there were some duplexes. Are you talking about the duplexes that were along there?
- P: I remember we went down there and had to cross the railroad tracks to get down to the property.
- B: Yes, there were some duplexes, in there.
- P: Okay, I'd forgotten what was down in there.
- B: That was on the south side of Archer Road.
- P: But that was not your property?
- B: No, I couldn't get enough money. I would have bought it, but I couldn't get the finances.
- P: Did the Hamlins own that, also?
- B: He owned a pretty good piece of it, yes. This is the piece of property. [Gesturing] Say, this is Archer Road, the airport was here and there was a family that owned ten acres here, and this is 34<sup>th</sup> Street.
- P: The ten acres that they owned, was that west?
- B: This is 34<sup>th</sup> Street, right here, Archer Road here, and the airport is over here. Then, the railroad is over here. There was a family that owned this and had a church here. They had three buildings on this and it had a little family church. Obviously, I needed to get this piece of property so, finally, I started negotiating with them. It took me a year, but I, finally, was able to buy it and buy the church. That was complicated. If I hadn't gotten this corner, it would have never been worth it. See, this is where the bank is and the Eckerds drugstore is there. Then, the 232 acres went all the way back.
- P: How far back did it go?
- B: Some of it went back almost to I-75.
- P: Because, as I remember, there was a house back in there if you went down Archer Road on the right hand side, there was a property down there. I don't know whether they had a small farm or what. About 1948, 1949, or 1950.
- B: Well, this was all farm land, at one time. I started building here, and then, in the dilapidated, old mobile home park, back here.
- P: Was that already there or did you built that?

B: That had been there for years and years.

P: ...long before you showed up?

B: Yes, it was a mess.

P: Was that part of the Hamlin property, also?

B: No, they didn't own that. That was owned by another group and they wouldn't sell. But then, down here, the Espositos owned another mobile home park near I-75 and I ended up buying that. Mr. Hamlin owned some land on the other side of them. It was peculiarly shaped land and it was a swampy area. So, he realized along the way that he had sold it to me, too cheap, but I needed that to go with the piece of property that I bought from Espositos. So, we couldn't get together, but he would come out to the project. My superintendent, Bob Bratcher, had talked to him quite often while we were building different things and Bob got to be pretty friendly with him. I called Bob in, one morning. I said, Bob, you know, you and Mr. Hamlin get along pretty good. I'm going to give a check for \$1 million and you get hold of Mr. Hamlin. Tell him you want to meet with him. This piece of property over here that he and I had been talking about . . .

P: And that's beyond the mobile home park?

B: It joined up right across from where my service station was, on the corner, there, even where the little bread place is located. So, I said, take this \$1 million check. I knew Covington Johnston was his attorney. So, I knew that he'd probably take that check to Covington. I said, tell him that I'll give him this \$1 million for that little piece of land, there. So, he's talking to Gene, and Gene said, is that a real check? Bob handed it to him and Gene said, well, this is \$1 million, isn't it? And Bob said, he'll pay you that for that piece of property. He said, well, let me go talk to Covington. Covington was his legal attorney, and about two days later, he said, I'm going to take it. That let me block the land up there. Then, there were three or four pieces in here, little ones, and it took me about two years to buy those up.

P: But you never bought anything south of Archer Road?

B: No. It was on the wrong side of the road, going home. Besides, I needed to concentrate.

P: But Shoney's and Sonny's restaurants, located on the south side of Archer Rd., and others, opened up.

B: Yes, I needed to keep it all in one package. If I had the money, I would've bought it, but I didn't. Anyhow, to make a long story short, that deal came through for me.

P: And that's important.

B: It was interesting that I had to get somebody else to go bond for me without the people knowing that I was involved.

P: You're just beginning to acquire the property that the guy from Britz department store told you about. What was your original purchase, 232 acres?

B: Yes, 232 acres for \$850,000. The church property and the private homes that were beside it was only ten acres, but it was on the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Archer Road. Obviously, that was a key piece of property that I needed to give exposure for potential future development of a shopping center that would be exposed to Archer Road and 34<sup>th</sup> Street. The family who owned the property, was divided to begin with. Two wanted to sell and one brother didn't want to sell. It was an emotional thing and I could understand it because they had their private little church there that the family had built. But, after considering the benefits--that the sale would give each one of them enough money to build them a beautiful new home in a more secluded area--they finally decided to sell. That enabled us to be able to master plan the shopping center to its highest and best use by being able to come in, off of 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

P: Did you already envision a shopping center? You bought the land with that in mind?

B: Yes. That was my plan and I re-zoned, roughly, seventy acres for a shopping center. In the re-zoning, there was forty acres for apartments, fifty acres for a mobile home park, and the rest was zoned industrial.

P: Industrial never happened, though, did it?

B: Yes. Basically, that was the way it was set up by the county and I just let them stay that way. I never intended to use it that way, even though I had the opportunity. At times, people would have liked to have come in and have bought some and put in some kind of a warehouse or something, but I didn't want to have that type of development that close to my apartments or the other businesses. It turned out to be the right decision, because if the county officials work with me, we will be able to develop the next phase, which we call Butler Plaza North. In addition to the present shopping center, which is approximately 120 acres, there are 139 acres left, and we plan to develop approximately 100 acres of that into a shopping center. It will be a unique development with a manmade lake that will be approximately 800 feet long, and maybe, 250 feet wide, with restaurants overlooking the lake on both sides and boutique stores. Then, in the back of that will be the bigger department stores which will bring in the traffic that will enable us to build a boutique center of smaller stores. Obviously, the high traffic in the larger departments stores brings in the traffic

that makes it possible for the restaurants and the smaller stores to survive. This will increase the size of the center to, approximately, two and a half million square feet. Presently, we have 3,500 people working in Butler Plaza as we know it, now, and we should be able to add another 4,000 people. The need should be there to employ another 4,000 people. If we are able to develop the Butler Plaza North, the indication is that the county is going to move ahead with the roads and we have the potential, if the economy holds, to develop it out. It will probably be a five to seven year project.

P: There is no question that Butler Plaza North will become a reality?

B: It will become a reality, but for two things. We have to have the road to be able to develop the quality development that the larger merchants and the traffic would need. The other phase of we're thinking of, is building an office complex and a medical complex on the northwest side of 43<sup>rd</sup> Street.

P: Are you optimistic about Wal-Mart coming in?

B: We're optimistic enough that they're supposed to be here Monday at 12:00.

P: To talk about it or to sign a contract?

B: No, not to sign a contract. They are here to meet with me and the chairman of the county commission.

P: When they, whether it's Wal-Mart or anybody else, signs a contract with you, do they work with you as far as the construction and what the building is going to look like?

B: Yes. Each company, if they are a large department store, will have a prototype plan that is constantly changing as their business develops, either good or bad. When I started with Wal-Mart fifteen years ago, their large store then, was about 80,000 square feet. Eight or nine years later, they came back and we added another 27,000 square feet. The total is, now, 107,000 square feet. Their new prototype stores, what they call the Super Stores, vary from 200,000 up to 235,000 square feet. This store, here, as it's presently being discussed, would be around 225,000.

P: You'd need a guide to find your way.

B: The thing that amazes me, is that the last one of the Super Stores I visited, they had thirty-one cash registers. You say, what is the need for that much business? Their stores are designed and laid out in a manner that they don't build Super Stores within two or three miles of each other like they do these smaller stores, but they do build them within five or six miles of each other. There's been a lot of comment about their potential to put the little merchants out of business. That

has not proven to be correct in a community like Gainesville. It probably does create a problem in a smaller area where the population is not as dense, but we have requests for stores to be as close as they can get, to Wal-Mart. The smaller stores want the location because of the tremendous traffic, the fall-off business from the big store gives them walk-in business.

P: Do you already have agents, out soliciting businesses?

B: We have a shopping center, deal-making set up. The ICC shopping center association \_\_\_\_\_ –

P: To put the place that wants to come in?

B: The merchants have feelers out reviewing each town to see if there's a need.

P: I knew it wasn't just happenstance that a bookstore would come in.

B: No, the merchants have people who work for them that don't do anything, but look for locations. I'm talking about the bigger merchants. They have them on a national basis; they have them on a statewide basis or maybe two in a state. They're working their locations to see if there is a need for their store.

P: By a need for it, do you mean they know what the market shows, how many potential shoppers there are, and their ages, and so on.

B: Yes. Their stores become obsolete. One of the reasons that Wal-Mart is one of the largest merchants in the world is because of their astuteness in watching the marketplace. They try to build stores to meet the market demand, but their secret is that they're so efficient in management. They are efficient in merchandising and they have eliminated a great deal of the inefficiency of many of the large merchants in management. K-Mart, the discount retailer that declared bankruptcy in 2002, is a good example. K-Mart was the number one department store for many years when Wal-Mart came along and literally, destroyed them. K-Mart got involved with too many buddy deals where you had to go through one of their buddies to develop or sell or whatever. They didn't have the total control of merchandising that Wal-Mart had.

P: What steps have you taken to encourage the clearance of the trailer park?

B: When we recognized that Wal-Mart needed a Super Store, then we sent a letter to all of the people who live in the mobile home park stating there would be a possibility that we would close the trailer park because of its inefficiency. The trailer park was designed in 1971 and the typical mobile home, at that time, was about twelve by sixty feet. As the mobile homes became larger, our park became obsolete because we laid out the park to service the mobile home from a twelve by seventy or a twelve by fifty or whatever, but nothing larger than a

twelve by seventy. As the economy got better and people could afford bigger homes, our park became obsolete. We were literally, forced into closing it because the typical mobile home was designed to last ten or twelve years. Also, the mobile homes, that were in our park, were deteriorating. When people wanted a new mobile home, they wanted one bigger than our park could accept. The park was self-destructing because of the economic change in the mobile industry. After another eighteen months, Wal-Mart indicated that they definitely wanted to come to our location. In the meantime, we had given the county almost a mile of right of way, ninety feet wide on 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue, years and years ago. As they decided to develop that, we announced that we would be bringing in a Super Wal-Mart, a Super Sam's Club or Costco (membership warehouse retail club), and a Super Lowes (home improvement store). The current Lowes store was designed fifteen years ago and it has outgrown the size of the 112,000 foot store they've got in our shopping center, now. They need 165,000 to 175,000 feet. Either, we develop an addition to our shopping center so they can stay in the area, or it's not economically feasible for them to stay and to try to operate in a store that doesn't meet their niche.

P: How did you encourage the people in the trailers to move?

B: We brought them into the old vacant Publix store. We had coffee and doughnuts, and invited them in on a Saturday to meet with us to discuss what we were willing to do to help them move. So, we explained to them that we were going to be closing the mobile home park and it was self-destructing because the pads were too small.

P: Did you give them a time frame?

B: Yes, we told them that under the law, they were, I think, allowed nine months and that we would assist them, financially. We also said that our staff, including me, would invite the mobile home park owners in the area that had pads big enough to take their units. We did and we negotiated to get them special rates for three months, six months. We got them reductions in the rent. Obviously, it was to the other park owners advantage if they had vacancies. We then, brought in the mobile home park movers and negotiated with three or four of them to give special considerations because we were going to have a number of people moving. Plus, we would give them \$2,500 when the mobile home was hooked up to a mover and ready to move. We would issue a check which I personally signed, I don't know how many checks, but when they were ready to move, we contributed \$2,500.

P: How successful have you been with this effort?

B: It's been very successful. Even though some people were not happy, others said, well, Mr. Butler had no legal obligation to give us anything and he had a

legal right to close the mobile home park. So, we had people who were very pleased and thought we were great. Obviously, there were people who thought we were very cruel and unfair to close the mobile home park. But, as they had a chance to think about it more, they realized that the mobile home park was obsolete. In the last few months we've had no problems with anybody.

P: Did you have any kind of community response to this? Local newspaper coverage or protestors?

B: To begin with, the newspaper was very critical of us, but the newspaper didn't wait to find out what we were doing for the people. Finally, when they had a chance to see that, financially, we had no obligations, but were contributing up to \$2,500 plus a system, then the newspaper began to realize that we were pretty....

P: They began to change their tune a little bit?

B: Yes, but they never have written us any congratulations, though.

P: Maybe, they're waiting for the opening of Wal-Mart. Then they'll come back for coffee and doughnuts.

B: I have to say this, that this was one of the most difficult times. In my sixty-two years of being in business, I've had a number of emotional situations that I would have liked to have been able to change and make it better. But recognizing that if I were in these people's position, it, obviously, wouldn't be a pleasant situation. But, we had to do something because the economics of trying to run a mobile home park were so bad. Many people were moving out and leaving a vacant pad. We didn't have any choice except to close it because economically, we were beginning to lose money.

P: There has been discussion over the years about the road coming through.

B: Yes. We donated land for Southwest 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue approximately twelve years ago. We had offered to donate 50 percent of the right of way when we bought the property and we re-zoned it. We went before the county for re-zoning, but at that time we didn't realize that there was a group of people who lived on the other side of Southwest 34<sup>th</sup> Street. Their homes were built up, and the Afro-American church was very close to the section line. So, they could not donate land to help build the road and the right of way. The county told us they needed eighty feet. So, my daughter Deborah and I agreed to donate the eighty feet so that this would enable the county to come in and grade the road. They didn't have the money to pave it, but the county came in a crew and graded the road. The road that was there was an old road. According to the natives, it was a road that was developed during the Civil War.

P: Confederate troops.

B: Yes. The ruts were about two feet deep, and when they had hard rain, the cars couldn't get up and down because there were oak trees on each side. The Chestnuts who owned the funeral home, told me many times that their hearse would hang up on the roots in the road and would get stuck when they had heavy rain. So, this enabled the county to come in and grade the road. We didn't need the road at that time and had no intentions of building anything that faced that road. Since then, the county is going to take this and make a thoroughfare road out of it which will make it possible for us to utilize the road with our development. We've made the county a proposal that if they would build a road, we'd contribute \$2 million.

P: Is there a time goal for the completion of the road?

B: We made this offer fourteen months ago and the county has not accepted it. My offer was with a contract that they would build a road. I would give the \$2 million. They say they're going to build it and they have plans to build it.

P: Have you seen the plans?

B: No, but the first phase of it is going to be up for show in the next ten days, a public showing.

P: So, everybody will have the chance to see it, then.

B: Yes. This is a most unusual way to do that, but apparently the design of this road is different than anything they've built in Alachua County, before.

P: When Butler Plaza North is completed, will this mean that Butler Plaza will be the largest shopping area in North Florida? How will it stand by comparison?

B: We have the largest center in Gainesville, now. We have 1,200,000 square feet and the Oaks Mall has a little less than 1,000,000 square feet. But, there would be no center that I know of in the State of Florida, that would be 2.5 million square feet. Of course, the additional 1,200,000 square feet would probably take, as I said before, five to seven years to develop.

P: How did it happen that Oaks Mall got built where it did?

B: It was on an interchange and it was the only interchange.

P: You're talking about Alan Squitieri?

B: Yes. When I-75 came through, there was an interchange developed on Newberry Road and an interchange on Williston Road. Williston Road did not

have any basic activity. Of course, Newberry Road was a key road coming in from the West going to the University of Florida. As shopping centers are developed, they have to be on key interchanges and Archer Road, at the time, did not have an interchange.

P: So, that's why it lost out? Because it would seem, if you've gotten the land for a shopping mall, it would seem to me that would've been the logical place for it.

B: It didn't have an interchange at the time.

P: I see, now, you're telling me why.

B: Yes. The interchange came about, I guess five, six, or seven years after I bought the airport property.

P: But if there was a possibility to develop a closed mall like Oaks Mall, could you have used political pressure to get the interchange earlier?

B: I think the interchange really was brought about by Shands, the VA Hospital, and the University of Florida. When I brought it to the county commission, Sid Martin was chairman of the county commission. He came to me and said, Clark, with your development and the property you have near the interchange, it sure would be great if you would assist us with Lawton Chiles [Florida governor 1991-1998 (died in office); U.S. Senator from Florida, 1971-1989; Florida state senator 1967-1971; Florida state representative 1959-1967], a senator at the time, to get an interchange there. Lawton and I had been friends for years and I didn't know whether he would listen to me or not. But I called him and got him on the phone in Washington. I said, Lawton, the county chairman Sid Martin wonders if we could get an interchange here on Archer Road. His comment surprised me. He said, you know, nobody's ever asked me about it, but let me check into it. About ninety days later, he called back said, yes, the Department of Transportation thinks there ought to be an interchange there and we're going to get one approved. Little did I realize what it was going to take.

When I went to Tallahassee to find out, Tallahassee said, yes, we want to put a four lane road in. I said, well, that will be obsolete. By the way, Governor Reubin Askew [Florida governor 1971-1979] had appointed me to the advisory board for the Department of Transportation. The first meeting that I went to, Archer Road was on the agenda and was the first item on the agenda. They said they were going to build a four lane highway. Of course, I was very excited because I had the 230 some odd acres plus the ten. I got up and I said, gentlemen, it will be obsolete before you get it built. I'm going to build a shopping center, apartments, and a mobile home park. Also, the people on the other side of the road will probably be doing something. So he said, do you have any plans? I said, yes, back at the office. To make a long story short, I took the plans up and they

changed it from four lanes to six lanes. I said, that's wonderful. But, they said, there's a little catch to it, Mr. Butler. We're going to need right of way. Also, we've got a railroad over there that's been abandoned, but the people have got rights to the railroad. I said, what do you mean the people have rights? He said, these people have siding rights, where the train can park a car and unload merchandise or gas. Sonny Lee and three of them had these rights that went with the railroad even though it had been abandoned. So, I went to the president of the university, Stephen O'Connell [President, University of Florida, 1963-1973], and I said, Stephen. Well, I didn't say Stephen, I said, Mr. President, we have the chance of getting a six lane road that will come in front of Shands and VA Hospital and you, being president of the university, can help. He said, well, Clark, what can I do? I don't have any particular power on roads. I said, well, you probably don't realize it, but your chairman of the board, Jack Daniels, is also on the board of the Seaboard Airline Railroad. They've got a line that goes out almost half way to Archer that is being, basically, abandoned. He said, what would you want me to do? I said, if you'll give Mr. Daniels a call. I said, I know Mr. Daniels real well, but I don't have the power you have. But, he could get the railroad to give up the right of way and then, we could widen the road to six lanes. So, he got him involved in it and by golly, they cooperated and everything was going along great. But the three individual people who had the rights-of-way, wouldn't give them up. So, they came back to me. The Department of Transportation said, Mr. Butler, you need to get your friends that own land around there to get together and see if you can't raise some money to buy the rights to those sidings.

P: They weren't going to give them, but they would sell them.

B: Yes. So, I gathered about twenty property owners and had a breakfast for them down at the Hilton Hotel, down on South 13<sup>th</sup> Street. I said, gentlemen, if we're going to get a six lane road, we're going to have to get some money to help buy the rights. Sonny Lee was one of them and I forget the others. They said, how much money is it going to take? I said, I don't know, but I think probably a couple of hundred thousand. There was a doctor at the medical school who was a specialist, and he had bought some of the land across the street from Mr. Hamlin. He said, Clark, I think it's wonderful what you're doing. I will donate, whatever you donate.

P: A matching grant.

B: Yes. I asked the rest of them and nobody else would donate any. So, he and I had to put up the money. We got one to give it, and it ended up costing us \$75,000 a piece to buy the rights that they had already abandoned.

P: When did they take up those railroad tracks?

- B: When was Stephen O'Connell president? About fifteen years ago would you say?
- P: You know that's the first cross-state railroad in Florida. It came through in 1859. So, it had been there a long time.
- B: Yes, that was amazing. Then on top of that, all the water had been running in the ditches up until that time, down by 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Archer Road. Now, they were putting in curbs and gutters, no more ditches. They said, well, we need some land for holding basins. The way the water flows on your land, it can't run up hill back south and it can't run back up Archer Road East because that's a hill. We can't run it back 34<sup>th</sup> Street because that's a hill. Your property is the only place where it will run. So, I ended up taking all the water off of that road.
- P: It sounds to me like you were holding the bag in a lot of places, a lot of times.
- B: That's right. I have the water coming off of there going into a holding basin that's fifteen acres, and half of it takes water from the state road.
- P: Clark, I want you to start at the beginning and tell me about the development of Butler Plaza. You've already purchased the land, and it's sitting there waiting for you. You have the roads worked out, as nearly as you can. Tell me about the planning for the buildings, the landscaping, the roads, and so on.
- B: To start with, right after I got all these things organized, Sears and Roebuck had an agent come to Gainesville to look at putting in a big store.
- P: This is while they were on Main Street?
- B: Yes, they were still there. So, I said, this is great. The Kirkpatricks had a lease with Sears so, I went to Greer, me, being the good friend and a good guy. I said, Greer, Sears is going to leave the old store site down there and I have a chance of getting them. If you want to come in with me, maybe we can make a deal. Greer said, no, I'm a good friend. They're not going to leave there. I've got a good long contract with them. I said, well, Greer, they indicate that they will relocate. So, I went back and met with the Sears people again, and finally, talked them into coming down. They wanted to look at it from the air. I had a twin engine airplane at the time, but I had the pilot lease a small single engine plane. So, I had my pilot take the Sears district manager for the Southeast up for a flight and he saw the road pattern. He said, boy, this is the location. He put his arm around me, and, as we're walking off, he said, are you going to sell us the land? I said, no, I don't want to sell the land. Why don't we do a joint-venture? He said, what do you have in mind? I said, if I understand it, Burdine's Department store (based in Miami), said they would come if I got you to come.

He said, yes, we like Burdine's. I said, well, I'm sure you could get another store, if we do a joint venture. He said, May Cohen's might come.

P: May Cohen's from Jacksonville?

B: Yes, May Cohen's. They had a big chain. So, Jim Quincy and I negotiated with them. Jim and I went up to Chicago a number of times and we negotiated a 50/50 deal. They would do the leasing, I'd do the building, and we'd build a three-store mall. We got the contract. It took us three or four days to negotiate the contract in Atlanta. We were sitting in a hotel up there for three or four days, negotiating. We got it all ready and the attorney for Sears said, I have to take my wife to Bermuda for ten days, but when I get back, I'll type up what we've agreed on and send it to you. We'll get it signed as quick as possible. In the mean time, Squitieri was literally broke and had no money. He couldn't borrow any money because interest rates had gone up to seventeen or eighteen percent. But, being as smart as he was, he finally went to Prudential Insurance Company and gave Prudential half of the deal and they put up the money. They went to Sears and said, we will give you ten acres of land. Sears had accepted their offer at the same time, the Wholemart division of Sears had sent the contract down to Jim Quincy for us to sign. Jim Quincy was my attorney.

We had a board meeting of the bank, that afternoon. Frank Miles, who was one of my board members, was also a good friend of the manager of Sears, here. They were playing golf together, and Frank talked to me before we into the meeting. He said, Clark, there's something you need to know. Sears is not going to be coming with you on this shopping center. They're going to the Oaks Mall. I said, Frank, I don't know where you got that information, but our contract has been mailed out to me and we're supposed to get it, today or tomorrow. He said, well, I don't know whether you remember Frank Miles. He was CPA. He said, well, you better check into it. Instead of me going into the meeting as chairman of the board that day, I turned it over to the president of our bank and let him run it. I got on the phone with Wholemart in Chicago, which was a development division. I got the vice-president on the phone and I told him about what I heard was happening. By then, we were all on a first name basis. He said, Clark, I don't think there's anything to that. They own twenty-five or thirty shopping centers and they were a subsidiary division of Sears called Wholemart. I said, one of my board members played golf with the manager in the retail division yesterday and he told him. He said, the president is out in Houston on a deal out there and I'll get on the phone and call you back. He got him on the phone; he didn't know anything about it. He said, no, I don't think there's anything to that; I'd know something about it. To make a long story short, the next day, the president of the Wholemart development division calls me back and he was livid. He said, they have double-crossed me and I doubt if I will be here very much longer. He ended up resigning from the company.

P: Who was responsible for the double cross?

B: It was the main company president. When they got \$2 million in cash, a ten acre site, and see that they already had J. C. Penneys and Belks Department Store, over there.

P: Where would be the ten acre site?

B: Where Sears is now.

P: I know where Sears is now in the mall, but is that ten acres?

B: That was the ten acres they gave them with the \$2 million. That's the reason I would have had a mall out there and I would have been a partner with Sears, and very few people know about this now, since it has been so long ago.

P: Is this something that Squitieri was responsible for or something in Chicago?

B: Squitieri went to Prudential, and Prudential put up the money to go forward with the deal and they got fifty-one percent and Squitieri got forty-nine percent. But Squitieri did not have the power to go to Sears. Prudential went to Sears and made the deal.

P: Who got the \$2 million?

B: Sears did.

P: Sears in Gainesville or Sears in Chicago?

B: In Chicago.

P: And they got the thirteen acres which they presumably sold.

B: Ten acres, and they built their store on that.

P: Because the store doesn't take up ten acres.

B: Well, there's a big parking lot, too. Most people don't understand it, but the malls, in most cases, the company will own their own store and the people who run the mall make their money from the little stores in the middle.

P: That's what I thought was true of Oaks Mall.

B: That is the case of Oaks Mall.

P: Sears owns its own; Burdines owns its own?

B: Yes. J. C. Penney and Belk don't own their own, I don't think, but the other companies out there . . .

P: Dillards?

B: The Oaks Mall makes their money on those fifty, little stores in there, or sixty, or whatever it is.

P: Let's get back to Butler Plaza, now. The Sears Roebuck thing fell through and now, you're starting from scratch?

B: It took me ten years from that date, for the town to grow enough so that I could get another start on the center. I got a Publix store in the little strip. Then, it was about eight or nine years before I got Wal-Mart.

P: When you built the Publix, wasn't that in a big area of land and kind of isolated?

B: It was right in the middle. Our property ended right there.

P: Where the road is now?

B: The back of the old Publix shopping center was the back of where my property ended then. I didn't own beyond that until I finally bought the other tracts going all the way to I-75.

P: Publix was your largest store?

B: That was our first store.

P: Then, there are about seven other stores.

B: There's about ten or twelve.

P: McAllister's, a delicatessen restaurant?

B: McAllister's is on the one end and Publix is on the other.

P: But the stores that back it up were not there to begin with, right?

B: We built a strip center and we cut it up and leased it, accordingly.

P: I understand.

B: Then, it took about eight or nine years for the area to grow. K-Mart came to me (and K-Mart was pretty good), but they wanted me to give it to one of their buddies to build. They wouldn't let me build their store. So, I wouldn't take them. Then Wal-Mart came to me and they wanted me to sell and it took me a year-

and-a-half to convince them that I wasn't going to sell. So, we finally made a deal and I built for them. Once I built the store and it opened, there was a demand for little stores to come around them because of the traffic. A lot of people think Wal-Mart kills the little stores. It doesn't kill the little store if you're in a town like Gainesville. If you're in a town like Williston or Chiefland—yes, the little stores can't make it.

P: Who were your customers to begin with? Were they predominantly, students?

B: Oh no, it was families. Families, families, families.

P: The apartment complexes were not yet built.

B: Well, there were customers such as the people that buy from Publix. Then, you have families coming from all over. And, of course, Wal-Mart had better prices than any of the rest of them, so, it wasn't long until our Wal-Mart store was doing more business than Sears.

P: How do you attract all these little stores, Barnes and Noble bookstore, Old Navy clothing store? Do they come looking for you or do you go looking for them?

B: At the shopping center conventions, you put up booths and have your displays. Then, of course, you also will have brokers that will contact you to say that they may know that a store might want to come in. It's a combination of the stores having a supervisor that's concentrating in an area, or somebody tells them about it, and, of course, we're bird-dogging all the time. Like Deborah just got back from an ICC shopping center in Las Vegas. She went out strictly to keep the exposure of the Butler name out there. But, we don't have anything to rent until we get the new project approved.

P: But you're already looking?

B: Of course, a lot of people know about our project because we have the largest power center in the state, right now. There's no other power center. And when we talk about a power center, we're not talking about a mall. We're talking about a freestanding center that has sidewalks and everything.

P: Is there any other facility in Florida like Butler Plaza?

B: Not just like it. There are others, but not as big. It's the biggest one in Florida.

P: Who has developed the roadways that go between the strip malls?

B: We built them.

P: You had an engineer come in?

B: No, we do all this and we'll bid it out or bring in a road contractor.

P: Who's responsible for the beautiful landscaping?

B: We are.

P: You have landscapers and gardeners?

B: We have a head architect and six people that work full-time. He's obviously a professional and has a degree. Then, on top of that, I put my ideas in, which he incorporates in the planning. He and I get together and I pick out the type of flowers that I want to go in different locations.

P: You have so many beautiful flowers there. Do you have greenhouses, somewhere?

B: No, we contract a year ahead with three or four greenhouses and in a year's time we buy up to 60,000 plants. They come in little cups and then he prepares the beds with fertilizer and everything.

P: Who pays for the landscaping? Is that a responsibility of Butler or do the stores chip in?

B: Butler does it and as we got further into it, it was very difficult. Nobody would pay for the landscaping because they weren't used to it. But, as the economy, the publicity, and the strength of our center got stronger, they paid. Then, if they weren't paying to begin with, we put it in the leases when they renewed--that would pay their pro-rata share.

P: Who's responsible for utilities?

B: In some cases, like Wal-Mart, they've got their lights on a satellite and their lights for their pro-rata share of the parking lot is on their satellite operation. The same thing is true with Target. But all the rest of them are pro rated. The utilities and the garbage are pro-rated, what we call commandeering.

P: What about street lights?

B: Street lights are the same way. The city doesn't give us anything.

P: But they all have to pay something, don't they?

B: Yes, they're all on a pro-rata basis, now.

P: What do you mean by pro-rata basis? The size of the store?

- B: If they have 2,000 feet and that particular center has got 150,000 square feet in it, they will pay based on the 2,000 feet.
- P: Do they have to share their profits with Butler, at all?
- B: No. Some of the stores, we have been able to negotiate overages when the rent is so much and then, if the sales go beyond that, then we will get a small percentage.
- P: How long are the leases signed for?
- B: All are different. They may be five, ten, or fifteen years.
- P: But a store can't really come in, today and leave in six months, could it?
- B: No. If they go broke, they have to take Chapter 11.
- P: But, that's not likely for many of them, is it?
- B: There is more and more of it happening. We will have two to three stores a year that will take bankruptcy. What is happening is that they will be in centers where the company wants to get rid of a store. We haven't had any in our center vacate, even though they're in bankruptcy. This year, we've had two go into bankruptcy, but they might have fifteen or twenty stores that are obsolete and that gives them the opportunity to get out of those leases.
- P: Is Butler Plaza all full now, except for North?
- B: The old Publix store is vacant. The reason it's vacant is because, under my lease with the new Publix store, we have a limited type of storage that we could put there because we don't have enough parking. But in the rest of it, we've only got about [6,000], 7,000 feet vacant.
- P: But there's no room to build anymore strip malls or anything, is there?
- B: We've got two spaces that we can build, but we've been under concurrency on Archer Road. There are some strips available, now and we've got a little space there, by the theater that was plotted in, that we can build on the east side. And then, on the west side of Lowes, we have about 3,600 feet there, we can build on.
- P: You say there is room, but are there plans?
- B: Yes, but we've been blocked. Because of Archer Road's concurrency, they wouldn't let you build anything, else. But because of the bus traffic, the busses have been eliminating a lot of cars. Under the schedule, there are some strips

available, now, because the bus has been so successful, we are going to go back, now, and apply to build, on those.

P: What about parking?

B: We have plenty of parking.

P: But the traffic situation doesn't seem to be relieved very much on either 34<sup>th</sup> Street or Archer Road.

B: There's a ratio, a part of traffic based on some scheme that I've never understood, completely, that the Department of Transportation uses. They count the cars every two or three months and there is a drop in traffic because the busses are so efficient. So, we are going to be able to apply for these little stores. One of them is 3,600 and the other is, maybe, 2,000 feet. They won't be very big; they're going to be boutique-type things.

P: Who persuaded them to put in traffic lights on Archer Road?

B: The Department of Transportation with the Sheriff Department's recommendations. Lou Hendry, Alachua County sheriff, was very effective in helping to get the traffic light at the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Windmeadows Apartments, right by the bank. We get at least 12,000 cars a day on that road, coming in and out. A lot of people use it as a cut-through. They'll come down that back road that you and I came down, and they'll cut-through there to avoid 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

P: But it's still a highly congested road, not only leading to all the eating facilities, but beyond that to the VA Hospital and the Medical Center.

B: If you didn't have a traffic light there, there would be a lot of wrecks because of people trying to jockey for position.

P: Yes, maneuver in and out.

B: So, we got that one in there about twelve or fifteen years ago. Then, we got one recently, down in front of Hops Restaurant, on Southwest 37<sup>th</sup> Street that goes across Archer Road and on into the apartment complex on the south side of Archer Road.

P: Has there been a high incidence of automobile accidents in the Butler Plaza area?

B: No, very few. Once in awhile, there will be a little fender bender.

P: There are lots of stop signs.

B: Well, the traffic is pretty slow because we've got so much of it. People don't drive too fast and we've got signs up, everywhere. Actually, the inside road that parallels all those out parcels, there's about 12,000 cars a day that get off of Archer Road. They get in there, go up and down, and shop. I'm not a professional, but I figured that I had to have a through road when I started developing. When I started, I left that area open and put that road in the plans. It works great.

P: Butler Plaza has been a great success, hasn't it?

B: All the bankers would like to loan money, out there.

P: That's a sure sign of success, if they're there to loan you money. Please take our money.

B: I can assure you twenty-five or thirty years ago, they weren't lined up trying to loan me money. But now, because of success, every week I get banks or mortgage companies from out and out of state, calling me. They don't bother as much now, as they did, but I use to have two and three calls a week of them wanting to come to see me.

P: We don't want your money; we have enough of our own.

B: Being chairman of the board of the Compass Bank, I let the Compass Bank have some of the loans, but the rates are so important. When you borrow that amount of money and a bank gets out of line in a rate, then, we have another bank that will take them right out, like that.

P: Clark, how has the recession impacted Butler Plaza?

B: We haven't really had a recession in Butler Plaza. Last year, all of our big stores had from a ten to a fifteen percent increase, over the year, before. We don't get reports on all the smaller stores, but Wal-Mart was way up, Lowes was way up, Best Buy was way up, and Target was way up.

P: The restaurants are all reporting well?

B: All reporting good, yes.

P: You've got the right kinds of stores, there.

B: We're very selective. We don't let a restaurant come in, and haven't for years, unless Deborah goes, unbeknownst to them, to eat in their restaurant. I, too, will go [unbeknownst] to them and eat. If they come to us or we see one that we want and we have space, we go eat and then both of us have to agree that it's okay or we won't let them come in.

P: One is being finished up, now--a new restaurant there on Archer Road.

B: Zaxby's. Deborah didn't go to that one. I went and ate in that one.

P: Where are they from?

B: They're out of South Georgia and they have about seventy-five or eighty of them. The guy that's leasing that one and heading it up, of all people, is the old former Georgia football coach, Ray Goff. His brother and sister-in-law are going to run it. They have another one over here that they're building on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street.

P: They're going to have two operations in Gainesville?

B: Yes, they're going to have two.

P: Does this finish up this vacant space? The restaurants?

B: I don't have any more space, unless I could put a small restaurant by Lowes. I might put a little quick service type restaurant right by Lowes, there. I don't know yet, what I'm going to put there. I don't have any more out parcels, there.

P: It seems to me that you can sit back, now and rest awhile as far as Butler Plaza's concerned.

B: It has taken so much of my time on Butler North.

P: And that's just starting. Are you going to try to acquire any more new land?

B: No, I don't think so. We have 139 acres there that's undeveloped. Deborah is involved with the Florida Citizen's Bank which she's on the board there. They've been growing pretty fast for a small bank. At my age, I enjoy what I'm doing, but if my health is good enough and I can just get Butler North developed. That would be almost a miracle, because it isn't that the demand is not there, it's the frustration with the county and the regulation. The whole theory is no, you can't do that.

P: Instead of saying, let us help you?

B: Their theory is that the people who elect the people as county commissioners and city commissioners (until this last elections) had been no-growthers. As I jokingly tell it, which is the truth, the developers and the businessmen in Gainesville have had the best twelve years that they've ever had and most of them have made a lot of money. They bought a condominium, they bought a boat, they built a new home, and they travel. Instead of going and voting, they've let the no-growthers, about 10,000 people, control Alachua County and the City of Gainesville.

P: I'm going to leave Butler Plaza for a minute and ask you to talk about this title insurance law and your involvement in getting that modified through the courts. What was it?

B: What brought it about was that for many years we had abstracts and the attorney would examine the abstracts. Then, he would certify to the bank that the property was free and clear. But the attorneys didn't have any wealth, so they depended on their integrity and a little bit of insurance. A number of years ago, they passed a law that said you had to have title insurance if the bank was going to loan money on the real estate. As a result of that, it eliminated the risk factor for the banks because there were insurance companies out there to protect them, if you had a bad title. As a result, the title companies, along with the Florida Bar got organized and got the legislature to pass a law that eliminated negotiating title insurance. Anybody that knows anything about our Constitution and the United States should have known this was illegal. Obviously, they did know it, because the attorneys and title companies were not naive. But they didn't figure that anybody would try to fight the battle because of the strength of the eleven insurance companies that write title insurance in the State of Florida, plus the Florida Bar being politically strong. So, they passed the law in 1992 and set, what they call, a card rate. The title insurance company got 30 percent of the card rate that actually, insured for a bad title. I can give you an example. I think I've done it before. One of my projects, before the law was passed, had a \$6.5 million loan on it and I negotiated my title insurance with Jim Quincy and the title insurance was \$4,900. Jim got how much of it, I don't know, but I was insured. Two years later, I built another phase of the shopping center and that mortgage was \$1 million higher than the mortgage before it. The mortgage was \$6.5 million and the title insurance was \$4,900. The \$7.5 million title insurance, two years later, was \$25,000. You can write that down, there. Six and a half million was \$4,900 for \$7.5 million and two years later, was \$25,000. When it got to the closing, I said, Jim, what in the hell is going on here? He said, that's the new law.

P: You did not know about the law while it was being debated in Tallahassee?

B: He knew about it, but I knew nothing about it. It wasn't debated, it just kind of passed through simple. The way they do these thing is to pigtail it on another bill. So, it was pigtailed on another type of law and apparently, it went through. When I got Jim's bill at the end of the thing, he had \$5,000 down there for closing costs that he was charging me \$25,000 for the title insurance, on top of that. Jim wouldn't tell me what of the pro-rata share of that \$25,000 that he got, and how much the title company got. So, I called a friend of mine who is an attorney. I said, I just had a \$7.5 million mortgage and the title insurance was \$25,000. They called me back in a little while and said, the way this thing works, the insurance company gets 30 percent of the fee, and the law was passed that way. So, the insurance company got roughly \$7,500 of this \$25,000. Jim Quincy got

\$17,500 for the fee. Then, he charged another \$5,000 for closing. Well, Jim and I had been friends for a long time, but I really lit into him. I said, Jim, I just can't believe it. He said, Clark, it's not my fault, I didn't have anything to do with this; it's the law. I said, yes, but Jim, you've got almost \$18,000 and then you charge me another \$5,000 on top of that? I said, the bank that we made this mortgage with do all the damn papers. They make up these papers and you're there at the closing. So, he sent me the \$5,000 back.

I went to Tallahassee. It hadn't been eight or ten months before that, I had talked to Pat Thomas [Florida state senator] and W. D. Childers [Florida state senator, 1970-2000; president of Florida senate, 1981-1982] about this \$50,000 worth of contributions that I had come up with. So, I went to Pat who had spent the weekend with me at the football game. I said, Pat, I need some help. I showed him and he said, no, Clark, you must be wrong. I've been writing insurance for years. I don't write title insurance, but I write fire insurance and all the other types. You can negotiate on any insurance that I buy. Now, this is the president of the senate. I said Pat, you need to look into this, something needs to be done. He didn't call me back. After about two or three days, I called him back. Pat said, I haven't gotten around to it, but I will; I'll get back with you. In about two or three days, he called me and said, Clark, you're right. There is a law that you can't negotiate on title insurance. I said, Pat, I sure need some help. He said, you need to get with somebody. I'm president of the senate and I'm just tied down. You need to get with somebody that's not as busy as I am. Senator Williams had just been elected. Do you remember Senator Williams? He had come into a piece of Alachua. I'd helped him get elected so, I went to him. Before I went to him, I went to Childers. He was very cool. The first thing I did, I went to the comptroller--the guy that's the insurance commissioner. I tried to get him and he said, you know, Clark, this law was passed and I really didn't have anything to do with it. It was passed by the legislature. I said, yes, but you're the insurance commissioner. You could have said, this is unfair. Of course, he didn't.

They said, let's talk about it. Maybe, we could get some help for anything above a \$1 million policy. If the project is a \$1 million loan, we can get you some reduction above that. I said, that's unfair to all the home owners and all the little people. I said, I don't think that's fair. He said, I don't think I can do anything. Maybe, we could get that changed. What they were trying to do, is to get me to agree to that, so that they could put something out in the paper that Butler advocated and he's a big developer. Fortunately, I had written a letter to Childers' department, saying that I thought this was ridiculous that they would even offer to reduce the big one and not take care of the little people. That was the thing that saved me. If I hadn't had that letter, they were going to blackmail me. So, I got it out in the press. In fact, Rowan Cunningham happened to be there the day, they threw me out. Then I filed a suit. Bill Andrews took me up to

Tallahassee and got an attorney up there that didn't write title insurance because any attorney that writes title insurance wouldn't touch me with a ten foot pole. Bill was going to handle it, but he said, I'm going to be retiring in a couple of years. It's wrong and I don't mind helping you. But, he said, we have to have an expert witness when we get before the judge, and if an attorney doesn't understand it, he won't be worth a dime as an expert witness. Anyhow, they got me with an attorney up there. He knew nothing about it and he fumbled around.

We went before a judge or two and they threw us out because they were former attorneys, writing title insurance. Finally, after the third judge, we got Judge Terry Lewis and he didn't throw us out. It took me six years and \$140,000--the different hearings that we would have and depositions and everything. When they'd go to testify, they'd say to the judge, Mr. Butler is that rich developer down there and he doesn't want to pay his fair share. Of course, everyone was arguing against it. Finally, I got the homebuilders association when I realized that I needed to get a state organization. Since I was a member of the homebuilders association, I went back to Gainesville and got Barry Ruttenberg together with two or three others. I said, you guys need this as much as I do. As much as you're building, you're being raped. To make a long story short, they came in with me and they give me some credibility statewide. They, also, paid for their portion of it. I think the homebuilders association put in something like \$90,000 in fees and my part was \$140,000 over the six years. We won the case on the fifth year, but they appealed it.

P: Is that when the title insurance people came to you?

B: No, the title insurance people came to me when I first filed the suit and tried to get me to back away.

P: I thought after you were appealing it . . . ?

B: No. Every meeting, every time we'd be before the judge, it'd be ten title insurance attorneys sitting over here and me and my attorney sitting over here. Bill Nelson [U.S. Senator from Florida, 2001-present; U.S. Representative from Florida, 1971-1999; Florida state representative, 1972-1978; Florida State Fire Marshall; Florida State Insurance Commissioner; Florida State Treasurer] was the insurance commissioner at the time and he had an attorney over there that was just a joke. He never ever said anything, but he sat with those ten attorneys that belonged to the insurance companies. So, I got onto Bill pretty rough about it because I had helped Bill when he ran for governor against Chiles. Back then, you could use your plane and you just charged expenses. So, I let him use my plane and he and his family spent the weekend with me watching football and everything. When he ran for the insurance commission, he stayed completely clear of me. He wouldn't accept any money from me, after I had helped him run and raised \$50,000 when he ran for governor. So, now that he's out of it, he

wants to make amends and we're back on better terms. When we finally won the first case, I brought in a lady that had managed portfolios for four different banks in her lifetime, Barnett, SunTrust, First Union, and Compass. When she went up to testify before the judge they said, ma'am, how long have you been working in processing and managing the mortgages for banks? She said, twenty-two years. How many millions have you been involved in? She said, I don't remember exactly, but it's around \$2.5 billion. And you've been doing this now for twenty-two years? Yes. How many loans have you had to go bad in those twenty-two years at the banks? She said, one case a few years ago. It took us about three months to get it straightened out, but we didn't lose any money on it. The attorney that represented me said, now, you mean for twenty-two years, all this money had been paid in and no losses, is that right? I thought, well, if this is an honest judge, I'm going to win this case.

So, then they got Bill Andrews up to testify. My attorney asked Bill Andrews, how long have you been representing Mr. Butler in this? He said, for twenty-five to thirty years. Do you handle title insurance? Yes. The way the title insurance policy is set up, it's thirty percent for the title company and seventy percent for the attorneys, is that right? Bill said, yes. He said, how much an hour to you normally charge when you're working for somebody on a fee basis? He said, from \$150 to \$200 according to the complication. He said, how much time does it normally take you to do a title policy? He said, I hire the insurance company to do the title policy for me, the search, because for \$125 they take all the risks and I don't have any risks. This is all before the judge. He said, give us an example of a loan that you just closed for Clark Butler. What kind of time did it involve for the bank for \$18 million on a shopping center and the title policy for \$18 million would have been \$48,000? He said, out of that \$48,000, how much would your fee have been? He said, my fee would have been 70 percent of that \$48,000. In other words you would have received thirty some-odd-thousand dollars? That's right. He said, how many hours did you spend on this? He said, we had one little complication, but I spent, probably, five or six hours on it. He asked, what did you end up charging Clark for? He said, Clark said he'd pay me \$10,000 for the title insurance and everything if I'd do it. And he said, I made over \$1,000 an hour. He said, my wife and I took a cruise afterwards. The judge was sitting there and I thought, damn, if this judge is honest, I'm going to win this thing. Instead of getting the \$48,000, I always negotiated with Bill according to the mortgage price. I said, I'll give you this if you stick with me because all the rest of the attorneys are going to charge me full deal. So, about two weeks later, the judge ruled that the law was unconstitutional.

P: So, you won.

B: We won the deal. Then, immediately they appealed it and held it up for another eleven months.

P: That's when it went to the state Supreme Court?

B: Yes.

P: But they ruled it unconstitutional. It took a long a time, but you finally, won. You triumphed.

B: You think about the money that these people got out of the State of Florida in the eleven months that the law existed. They got billions of dollars. Let me make this one statement. I've been building and mortgaging, I guess, \$200 million or more in the sixty-two years, that I've been building. I have never had a title policy even questioned. It's the biggest farce, today. It's the biggest ripoff even though they can negotiate. The people are still not getting the benefit because they don't know how to negotiate. The attorneys say, I'm not going to charge you a fee, I'll just get mine out of the title. The other day, Deborah had a mortgage for \$850,000 on a deal she was doing. I negotiated with the attorney, myself. If he would have taken his regular fee out of that, he would have ended up with about a \$5,000 fee on the title policy. I got him to take it for \$1,000 and he made \$200 an hour.

P: He did pretty good, anyway.

B: Yes. Deborah wouldn't have known how to do it.

P: That's right, you saved her \$4,000.

B: Yes, I saved her \$4,000.

P: You became involved in local politics early on, here in Gainesville. You served on the city commission and as mayor. Were you happy with that, in those six years?

B: Yes. Let me step back. I got out of high school and I was supposed to go to college and be an attorney when we were financially able for me to go. I rather quickly realized that I had more talent and ability in running the little business than my brother or my daddy. So, each year, daddy said, now, next year I want you to go on and go to college. By the next year, the business was bigger and bigger and I never went. One of the real benefits of sitting as a commissioner and reviewing so many different issues, was to learn from S. T. Dell, who was the city attorney at the time. We had many issues that came before the board and the exposure I had to so many different types of people (probably wasn't equal to a college education), but it exposed me and gave me so much experience. As my business grew, I had more experience as a result of being a commissioner. So, it was satisfying.

P: A learning experience?

B: A learning experience. And when I was able to get things on a business basis and a bid basis at the city, it gave me a satisfaction and a knowledge that helped me, so much, in business. Even though there's no question that my store was burned, I can't prove it.

P: While on the commission, was your philosophy, 'grow Gainesville, grow?'

B: Oh, yes. Back when I was mayor pro-tem, we brought in a Sperry plant out at the airport. S. T. Dell was Senator Shands' son-in-law and he was the attorney for First National Bank and also, the attorney for Baird Hardware. The exposure I had, as a result of those experiences, was great. Although, being in that position created some animosity because I wasn't a yes-man. S. T. and I would get into some pretty heated discussions and I would say, Mr. Dell, do you represent the City of Gainesville or do you represent Baird Hardware? Boy, he'd explode. But, I backed him into a corner. We were sitting at a commission meeting and he said, I represent Gainesville. I said, if you represent Gainesville then, what should we do legally to represent the City of Gainesville? He was in a jeopardy position, legally, as he'd have to root against Mr. Pound, sometimes.

P: As a growth person, did you favor builders?

B: We didn't have an issue, back then. There was no issue at all about growth or no growth.

P: And nobody concerned themselves with the environment?

B: Yes. On the environment, I advocated that we put in sewer lines.

P: But, I mean, it wasn't a big deal, then, was it?

B: No, there weren't any discussions then, about no growth or growth. Everybody needed every bit of growth we could get, to help make the economy better.

Very difficult, yes. One of the things that I was very pleased that I was able to do, is have the city pay half of the cost of a sewer line, if the developers paid the other half, to get it out to wherever they were going to put in the sewer rather than have septic tanks. The economy was so poor at the time and there was just no way, at the time, that a developer could pay a big sum of money to run a sewer line and a water line. Of course, the city was so anxious to grow, to get the utility, because that's where our money was, in Gainesville Regional Utilities and selling electricity. This is when I pointed out to John Kelly, that the best thing that ever happened to the Gainesville utility company, back in those days was that we moved John up to utility director. He ran sewer lines and water lines. That may have saved this county and city, probably, \$1 billion. Now, we're turning over profits, \$25 million to \$30 million a year into the city. There is

another thing that I'm really proud of. Right about the time that my store got burned, Florida Power-St. Petersburg was trying to buy the utility plant from the City of Gainesville. They had bought one, in Ocala. I was mayor pro-tem at the beginning and as we got into more and more discussion, we, finally, got it to a vote. By that time, I was mayor. One of these Florida Power guys would be in my store or wherever I was, whether it was in the back room putting up food or getting groceries, here he'd come around. Wherever I'd show up, he'd be there. Of course, they were working the other commissioners, too. When it finally came to a vote, it was a 3-2 vote. I was mayor and I voted no. I think of the benefit it has been to the city, to the employees, and the profits that we're making. I think what it's done for the community. As a result, of the profits in electric, we were able to run sewer lines, all out. Now, it's my understanding, and I haven't verified it, that the city has got a tremendous reserve in the utilities surplus funds in case there's ever a period when the utility companies bid against each other and sell power like they did in California and messed it up. I don't think that will ever happen, but back when they started building this fund up, they were afraid of it.

P: When you finished your six years on the commission, one year as mayor, you had enjoyed yourself and felt that you had played an effective role. Did you think about staying in politics? Was there any encouragement for you to run for the legislature, for instance?

B: No, I didn't have that ambition. By that time, I had lost my store and I was struggling. I was just beginning to keep my head above water again, in building the development. The Westmoreland Estates were so popular with such demand, I worked seven days a week. See, when I was in the grocery business, we worked seven days a week. When I got out of the grocery business and got into the building business, it was still seven days a week. Saturday and Sundays, I had to sell whatever I had built, and there wasn't enough profit to pay a realtor. So, every Saturday and Sunday, I would end up selling two to three houses, in either Westmoreland or wherever. The girl that was working in the office and I, did the selling. That was a way that I accumulated enough to be able to continue to pay for the big purchase of the Wells property.

P: Clark, what is your philosophy of government, then and now?

B: The only purpose for government is to serve the public. Obviously, an individual cannot own a power plant, an individual cannot run a sewer plant and a police force. It's to serve the people. The government should remember that it's the responsibility of the people in power to serve the people and not make it difficult. Just because they don't want growth, it doesn't mean that they should try to stop growth because that's not the wishes of ninety percent of the people or sixty percent of the people. We all know that the public is not against good growth, but we got the commission here that took advantage of the situation. I don't really believe that they're 100 percent for it. I think that they use this as a means

to get reelected and to stay in office so that they can have a salary that they've never had before.

P: Is government too big? Too intrusive?

B: I don't think it's too big. I think our problem is that we, the voters, have become complacent. We've enjoyed the good life. We've had a good economy for fifteen years; we've had freedom; we've become complacent. I think one of the things that we parents are guilty of is that we have not stressed upon our children, the responsibility of voting. During the Depression, I remember how difficult things were and how little bit of money that we were living off of. The one thing that daddy did when it was time, he voted, and I used to go with him. He stressed to me, when you get old enough to vote, you vote. When we moved to Gainesville, I was nineteen. I will tell you real experience that showed me how important it was to vote. Mr. Jim Butler, do you remember him? He was a city commissioner. His family and my family came from the Carolinas. They were blue-eyed and they were light-complected people. There's no doubt that we're probably related. We were adding on to our store. Every year we'd make it a little bigger, and my brother Bill, daddy, and I were adding on and he came by early in the afternoon and said, Ed, be sure you and the boys go vote. Daddy said, we're going to, Jim. Don't worry, we're going to go vote. Just before dark we were still trying to finish up and he stopped by. He said, have you all voted? We said, no. He said, please, go because this is going to be a close election. We stopped everything, got down to the polls and we got in line down at the old City Hall by Margaret Ann. There was a police station, there. We got in line and, just about dusk, we got to vote. He won by one vote.

P: You can take credit for that.

B: Mr. Tench. Do you remember Benmont, who had the little shoe store? Very controversial.

P: Oh yes, I remember Benmont Tench, very well.

B: He beat Benmont Tench by one vote. The three of us voted.

P: You've had some appointments from several governors in Florida, haven't you?

B: Yes.

P: Governor Askew appointed you to something?

B: To the advisory, to the State Road Board. Department of Transportation-

P: Advisory board. What did you do?

- B: We would meet once a month around the state and we would review different projects that were coming up for discussion, and it wasn't that we had any great deal of authority, but we were able to be a part of the discussion and encourage or discourage whatever the situation was. The first meeting I went to, I've already told you about, but I need to say it, again. In the first meeting I went to, the first item on the agenda was Archer Road. It was going to be four lanes and they just thought that we'd be so excited. I jumped up and said, it needs to be six lanes, or it will be obsolete. They stopped it and two years later, we finally got all the things that made it possible to be six lanes and I gave the right of way. I gave the place for the holding basin. We worked together and we got it six lanes. Can you imagine what it would be today, if it weren't six lanes?
- P: What about the appointment by Senator Bob Graham?
- B: He appointed me to the Marine Fish Commission. I feel like that's probably one of the really important public issues that I was able to have a big influence upon. There were seven members of the board: two of them were commercial fisherman, one of them was a scientist-professor, another one was a professor from the University of Florida and then, George Barley, myself and one other. I think that was it. Anyhow, I had knowledge about sport fishing, snook and red fish. We were able to put restrictions on snook for three months of the year. During spawning season, we put a restriction so they couldn't be kept. We increased the size of the fish that you could keep. We got the catch limit for red fish reduced to one fish per person. Then, we put restrictions on many other species. It had to be a constitutional deal, but we advocated for the net ban. As a result of our advocacy, the Florida Sportsman Association with the *Florida Magazine* owner gave us a lot of publicity on that. We got enough numbers to put a ban on net fishing, which has really helped to bring back the red fish, the snook, the mullet, and many other species. I had a lot of unhappy cousins that were in the commercial fishing business and I had a lot of sport fisherman that didn't think we were being fair by cutting the numbers of fish that we could catch. Most of what we've done has been, I think, very beneficial. When I go fishing today, I think red fish should be increased to two or three per person, now, as opposed to fifteen years ago. I just came back from New Orleans fishing in the bayous and they allow five fish per person there, but they have a whole lot more fish there than we do, here. I think two would be good, here. So, my involvement with Governor Graham, helping him get elected the first time and re-elected, have been very beneficial. He and I are still good friends. In fact, he was in here and spent the afternoon with me a few months ago. He calls me quite often, but very seldom, unless he needs something.
- P: What appointment did you get from Governor Martinez [Florida governor, 1987-1991]?

B: I was appointed to the Financial Pension Board. That was quite an experience for me. I found out that there were some mistakes made, up there. I don't know that I did anything to improve it. Before I got there, a group of big shopping center companies had sold the pension fund about \$750 million worth of loans and interest in some real estate up in the New England area. It was a disaster. They weren't giving us the truth on it and I don't know that it did any good by forcing their hand. I think I really irritated the supervisor, but they were showing that they were getting a sixty percent return on the \$750 million. I said, well, I don't see where you're getting a 60 percent return when it showed the figures based on the cash. I said, are you talking about cash or are you talking about appraisal? His face turned red and he asked, we had to have an appraisal? And I said, yes, but you haven't got a sixty percent cash return. You're talking about a sixty percent return based on appraisal and that's not the way this should be reported. He and I weren't very close after that, but I had the opportunity to see that they did have a pretty good system up to a point on stockbrokers and if they didn't make a certain return in a certain length of time, then, they would be moved out. I don't know whether that's the way it is now or not.

P: I'm waiting to hear about the appointment from Governor Jeb Bush [ Florida governor, 1999-present].

B: Jeb looked me up when he came to Gainesville the first time. Jeb came to the bank and was about as friendly and nice looking guy as you ever saw. We sat down in the board room.

P: He was running for governor, then, right?

B: Yes, this was his first time running. So, I explained to him that I supported his father and I met his father and mother up in Tallahassee at Jim Smith's home, the ranch. I said, your mama is as sharp as they come and your father was very congenial. I said, I think, maybe, I can support you.

P: Did you give him a check?

B: Not at that time, but I gave him a check. Yes.

P: You did, eventually.

B: Yes, I did. I didn't at that time. I was really more active then than I am now, but then, the second time that he came back for more money, he got me. He grabbed me up and said, where is that lovely daughter or yours? And I said, she's over here. So, I get Jeb by the hand and I said, let me take you over there. We're going through the crowd and they said, Butler, you've already got the governor under control, huh? I said, well I'm taking him to meet my daughter. Anyhow, he met Deborah and we thought we were all good friends. I just knew

that with this title insurance thing that I could go up as a developer and explain the thing to him because he had worked with a big developing company down in Miami. It was a completely different type than my little operation, but he never would meet with me. I even got the head of the Republican Party as you probably know, in the last years. I've always given the Republican Party a store to work out of at the shopping center, as well as the Democratic Party. I put one on one side and one on the other. I had the Republican Party chairman in here, (the guy down in Miami. I forget, now, what his name is.), but I said, I'd like to talk to you a few minutes. He said, I was told to come by and see you. So, I said, Jeb has refused to see me. He hasn't sent me word he refused, they just won't give me an appointment. In the letter I wrote him, I asked him to veto the bill that they tried to overcome the thing and he didn't. He did write me about two months, three months later. He said, I signed it so that the title insurance couldn't go up for three years.

P: He was protecting . . .

B: So, I wrote him back and I said, what you did was to sign, thinking that it couldn't be reduced.

P: But, he didn't respond to that letter, did he?

B: No, I guess I should've left it alone.

P: So, you have not received any appointments from Governor Jeb Bush to add to your list.

B: No compensations, no.

P: You did get two appointments from two Democrats and one Republican, though.

B: I helped Martinez on things because of course William (Bill) Gunter [U.S. Representative, 1973-1975; Florida state senator, 1966-1972] and I were good friends. He was insurance commissioner for years before that and Bill and I were good friends. I don't know whether you remember Bill or not?

P: Of course, I remember Bill Gunter. Half the world was once in my class.

B: That's what I was thinking, as long as you were there. That's one of the things that is creating a real problem for us, you know, Sam. We are not getting people elected from the University of Florida to the legislature.

P: And that's not happening too much, now. Let me ask you some personal questions so, we'll have it in the document. When you were married, what was your wife's name?

B: Mary Catherine Butler.

P: What was her maiden name?

B: Beatch.

P: Where was she from?

B: Gainesville.

P: And you were divorced?

B: No, we're not divorced.

P: You had three children. One son was killed in an accident?

B: A hunting accident in 1967.

P: What happened there?

B: He and two young school friends went over to Dixie County in a hunting area that he loved to hunt and I liked to fish. So, I would go hunting with him and he'd go fishing with me. But, this was on a Saturday afternoon and we were building Williamsburg Apartments and this was just about the finishing of the project. We were working Saturday morning and he said, daddy, I've got a couple of my buddies that we'd like to go wild hog hunting and stay at the lodge. I had a little fishing lodge over there. I said, I think that would be great. Just be careful. They went back into a very wooded area and as they were driving along some wild hogs ran across the road. He had Jim Davis' son with him. Jim was a builder, at the time, and a county commissioner. Jim's son was a little slender, frail kind of a guy and my son was a big strong 215 or 220 pound guy. The other guys, I guess, kind of picked on Jim Junior so, Clark took a liking to him and took him along with him. But, he didn't know a thing about hunting. My son had grown up hunting with me and my father, who liked to deer hunt. Anyhow, to make a long story short, they stopped the car and were getting out. My son had given Jim one of his automatic rifles. He was getting out, which they should have never done, because the gun was loaded. He hit the hammer, or hit something, and the bullet hit my son right back there and killed him, instantly.

P: What was your son's name?

B: Clark Junior.

P: You have two daughters. What is your oldest daughter's name?

B: Catherine Anne.

P: Is she married?

B: No.

P: Where is she living?

B: She's living in Los Angeles.

P: And you have a daughter that's in business with you, don't you? What's her name?

B: Deborah Jean Butler.

P: Is she married?

B: She's not married, either.

P: What is her relationship to the business?

B: She'd been helping me for years. When I became ill, I was not even strong enough to sign checks or anything or talk on the telephone for about three months. In fact, I questioned, and I guess a lot of people questioned, whether I was going to make or not. Anyhow, Deborah had to take over and fortunately, she had worked closely with me and she did a fantastic job.

P: She's a good business woman?

B: Yes.

P: You've trained her really, then.

B: You can train a person so much and then, they've got to have a natural ability. She has the natural ability. In my opinion, you might have intelligence and you might learn, but you, also, have to inherit a certain ability to be a good business person.

P: What are her strong areas in business?

B: She's very perceptive. She's a little bit distrustful. She questions, as I do, whoever we're dealing with. You first see if they have integrity; you don't accept everything without questioning it. She has a natural ability.

P: So, it sounds like the business will pass into her hands and it will be run, capably.

- B: She is much more capable than many people would be that have grown up in a business. She only got into the business very little before she went out and got a couple or three degrees. Maybe, it was better that way. When she did come back and get into the business, after she got her Master's degree, she had worked part time in the office and part time, in one of the apartment projects. Then, we had a manager resign right at the change-over at the university. So, she had to get in and clean bathrooms, paint, and do whatever had to be done. As a result of the growth of the company, I've given her more and more responsibility and what I didn't give her she took, she's aggressive.
- P: That's good. That shows a very positive point of view. Clark, you've enjoyed the good life as a result of your wealth. You have this beautiful home, a yacht, a plane and all the other things that you enjoy. What are you doing with your money in terms of philanthropy? Are you supporting projects, programs in Gainesville, the state? I want to ask you about the University of Florida, separately.
- B: We donate to a lot of different organizations and I've helped a lot of \_\_\_\_ –
- P: But is there one special one that is your chief support, your money support, your time, goes to?
- B: In our business, our first responsibility is to see that we have ample capital to develop and if we have a crisis or a recession that the business is still strong. There are so many businesses that are just going great. Then, the development of competition will catch them with an advanced deal or you might have this happen or that happen. While one is in the shopping center business, you have to be always be prepared for another deal down the street that might overtake you. You might have a store go into bankruptcy, or you might have a store that just leaves you and goes to another location. You have to be financially prepared. If I gave away all the money that people are after me for, then Butler Enterprise would be in a very volatile position. I've got to keep liquidity. We make lots of donations. I've given the university over \$1.5 million.
- P: What has been your association with the university?
- B: I've been giving the university money over the years, but I've never given a big amount.
- P: But you've done a lot for the medical school, haven't you?
- B: In the last few years, I've given them about \$600,000.
- P: Have you done anything for the College of Business?

B: No.

P: Has medicine been your chief support area?

B: It has. I gave the university my airplane a couple of years ago which they used for everybody until they finally wore it down, pretty well and sold it. The university is in my will so, the university will probably do okay.

P: You count, as some of your good personal friends, people at the university, don't you? One of those, obviously, is Dr. Charles Young [president, University of Florida, 2000-2003].

B: He came into the presidency as a result of Dr. Lombardi [president, University of Florida, 1990-1999] leaving and, I guess that I felt like he didn't pursue me and I didn't pursue him. But he invited us over for dinner to the president's house and the football games and when his wife passed away I invited him out. I said, Chuck, would you like to go to dinner with me some night instead of sitting here or having to call somebody? I said, besides, I can get you into Outback [Steakhouse in Butler Plaza] real easy, jokingly. He said, that would be great. I called him and picked him and we'd go to Outback for dinner.

P: And you enjoyed each other's company?

B: Yes. His wife was ill for so many years, and I could relate to it. He knew that I was single and he'd call me. If he didn't, Sandy would, and say, well, Chuck would like to go to dinner with you, tonight. So, we're not chasing each other, but we just both have some things in common. I think it had me frightened that the university was out there like a ship without a paddle and nobody steering it. So, I was glad to see him come in with the credibility that he had, at least, to help stabilize the comments in the press.

P: What do you do for fun? I know fishing is a passion of yours.

B: I enjoy the football season, but I am not an avid football fan to the point that I like to wear all of the garb.

P: Do you go to football games?

B: Yes, I have had fifty-yard line tickets now, for I guess twenty-five, thirty years.

P: And you put on an orange shirt.

B: And I've been giving parties for many years. For years, I was doing one every homecoming, especially when there was an election for the governor or something going on. In fact, I put on one for Governor Graham. We had 1,000

people I fed that night at the Windmeadows clubhouse when he was running for governor. Steve O'Connell used to come out to my homecoming parties after they'd get through over there. I was never invited to the university president's box until Bob got appointed interim president.

P: Until Bob Bryan arrived?

B: Yes. I built Bob's first decent home that he had.

P: I have been in that house, many times.

B: Bob, his wife, Pat, and I have been good friends.

P: We have been good friends. She and my wife are good friends.

B: They started inviting me, but none of the other presidents did.

P: Steve O'Connell did not?

B: I never got an invitation from him, I never got one from Robert Marston. I gave him an airplane to fly in and not one time, did they ever invite me.

P: How about Marshall Criser [University of Florida president 1984-1989]?

B: No. Criser and I didn't hit it off. He invited a bunch of us out there one time and he told us that he was going to build enough apartments that all the students would be living on campus.

P: That made you happy.

B: So, I said, this guy and I are not going to get along, at all. The thing that is so funny is that when Bob Graham's daughter was getting married and Criser had never....

P: Did you go to that wedding in Washington? We were invited, but we didn't go.

B: It was in June. Criser had somebody call me and wanted to know if they could fly up with me in my plane to the wedding. He had never hardly spoke to me before. Anyhow, he and his wife flew up with a friend with me. Since then, he's been a little more friendly. I think it's great that he is in a position that he is, up there, now, on the Trustees because we need some strength up there.

P: Are you a golfer?

B: I was a golfer for years. I didn't start playing golf until I was about thirty-three years old because I wasn't financially able to. I played golf until I got so busy and

was building in Orlando. Then, I was in Sarasota and I had to give up my foursome, or my foursome gave me up.

P: But you do go to the football games?

B: Oh, yes.

P: Basketball?

B: No, I'm not a basketball fan.

P: You watch football and basketball on T.V.?

B: Not basketball. There's something about basketball that I never really enjoyed, too much. You run down here and you run back.

P: Did you play sports when you were in high school?

B: I was in high school during the Depression period and we had very little sports. We played a little baseball. Then, I got osteomyelitis in my right leg when I was thirteen years old and I almost lost it before penicillin came along and helped to cure it. I don't know whether you're familiar with osteomyelitis, but it's an infection of the inside of the bone.

P: I see you have a swimming pool out there. Do you use it?

B: Very little. I come in the afternoon and I walk, do my exercises, and at my age I'm afraid to get in the pool, by myself. If something were to happen . . . But, we have a beautiful pool, there.

P: I saw it; it is a gorgeous pool. Are you a religious man?

B: No, I am not. I have my theories, but I am not religious.

P: Are you a churchgoing person?

B: I don't go to church very much.

P: Which religion were you raised in?

B: I went to BYPU and Sunday school, Baptist. But when I worked, when I got into business, I worked every Sunday. I went in business when I was nineteen and the first time that I was able to be free on a Sunday, was in 1962. I started in 1939, and I finally, got financially able to hire people to sell homes for me on a Sunday. From 1939 until 1962, I worked Saturdays and Sundays. I've worked three life times, already.

- P: So, you're not an irreligious person, you're just not a church-going person?
- B: No, I do my own charity. You'd be surprised at what I do, but I do it directly. I give to the Heart Association, I give to the Boy Scouts, I give to the Boys Club. There's a lot of money that I give, but there are no institutions involved, just somebody that I know that needs help. I have helped pay for a funeral or two.
- P: Are you a reader?
- B: I read the newspaper; I don't read a lot of books. I read newspapers, religiously and try to keep informed, but I don't have time to do a lot of book reading.
- P: How about T.V. and movies, that sort of thing?
- B: I have a movie pass like I told you, and I haven't been to the movies.
- P: You told me about that movie pass. I just wanted to get it on the table.
- B: I don't have time. People say, if I was in your financial position, I would do this and this.
- P: But you might not keep that financial position, if you didn't keep doing it.
- B: In my typical day, as I'm headed to the office of the project, I drive through the project, if I have time every morning, and it takes a few minutes. Then, I meet with the managers and the supervisors in the office. Then Bob Rella, who is a head of development for me, he and I will get together on the political situation. Me and you, both at eighty-three, my typical day, I'm going in the office. The different members of the office are there, people trying to get to me for this and this. Like my assistant, yesterday, she said, we have to get this done, now. Tomorrow's going to be the only day you're not going to be able to be in here, helping. We don't have a whole lot of executives for a \$200 million company.
- P: Do you do much traveling? Do you go to Europe?
- B: No, not really. I intend to, but I never seem to get around to it.
- P: And you're eighty-three.
- B: I did go to Europe. By the way, I found out a few years ago how we became Butlers. I knew this before I went, but I got it pretty well verified, when I went to London. Our bank gives away trips to us every year according to how well each one of us produces, and I have won a trip every year since we merged with Compass. That is, except this year. I'm glad I didn't this year because where they went was no good. But, when I went to London, I got to do some research.

The Butlers got the name by taking care of the king's winery and the service. We were head of the service for the king. To one group of the Butlers, the king gave a big tract of land over in Ireland, and another one of the group got a big tract in England. As I read more history about it and the way the service worked, I said, well, I know, now, how the Butlers got to be so prominent. They got the king drunk on that wine. They got a big tract of land in Ireland; they got a big tract of land in Britain, and got to be head of the (like the FBI, here) up until a few years ago. There was a Butler that was head of that.

P: It sounds to me like you spent all your time in London looking up the Butler family.

B: It got interesting after I got over there and began finding things. A few weeks ago, a lady from California met my daughter at a charitable deal there where they worked her pretty good and she was from Ireland. When Cathy was telling her about her daddy, by golly, she sends me a letter and then calls me on the phone. She said, your daughter has told me about some of the things that you're involved in. She said, my sister lives in Ireland and my husband and I have been over here for many years. But, she said, there is a Butler castle in Ireland. It's just a shame the Butlers gave it to the state. The county, or whoever was maintaining it, sold off a bunch of the art pieces awhile back. They sold our area, where this castle was, and all of those art pieces and things. She said, I just wish I had known you earlier, so, maybe you could've gone over and saved the art pieces.

P: Clark, what have we not talked about that should be on the tape?

B: When you get it recorded, I'd like to listen or read the manuscript. There are probably a number of things that need to be brought forward, but we've covered a lot.

P: We've covered a lot of territory, but I just didn't want to leave anything out that should be documented. We're going to transcribe it and send you the manuscript. At your leisure, you'll have a chance to read it, reflect on it. I don't think we've said anything in here that shouldn't have been said, so, I doubt you're going to have to edit anything out.

B: I doubt it. I've had so many great friends that have helped me along the way, and I don't know whether I got enough in there about Justice Williams.

P: Well, you'll see and you can always add something, as I told you. But, mainly this is an interview with you about your life and your experiences, not about Justice Williams.

B: I just want to be sure.

P: His influence on you, you've made that point.

*University of Florida*  
*Samuel Proctor Oral History Program*

***Florida Business Leaders***

*Interviewee: Clark Butler*

*Interviewer: Samuel Proctor*

*Date of Interview: May 31, 2002*