

DAVID LAWRENCE, JR.

BIOGRAPHY

David Lawrence was born March 5, 1942, the second oldest of nine children. His father was a newspaperman working for *The New York Sun*. When his parents decided to move to a warmer climate in 1956, Florida was chosen in part because it was the winter broadcast home of a television show they liked to watch, Arthur Godfrey. In Florida, his father sold real estate, and later was employed on a Sarasota newspaper. He ending up working for *The Orlando Sentinel* for the last seventeen years of his life, was dean of the Florida Press Corps in Tallahassee and earned a spot in the Florida Journalism Hall of Fame. Lawrence admired his father and decided to go into journalism.

After graduation from the University of Florida, where he was editor of the *Alligator*, David Lawrence went to *The St. Petersburg Times*, where he had worked as a summer intern. After three and a half years at *The St. Petersburg Times*, he went to the news desk at *The Washington Post* and became news editor of *Style*. He next accepted the position of managing editor of *The Palm Beach Post* from 1969 - 1971. In 1971 he migrated to *The Philadelphia Daily News* as assistant to the editor and then became managing editor. In 1975 he became executive editor at *The Charlotte Observer* for three and a half years before moving on to Detroit as the executive editor for *The Detroit Free Press*. Promoted to the job of publisher of the *Free Press* in 1985, Lawrence left in 1989 to come to Miami, as Knight-Ridder Inc. wanted him to run *The Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*. After ten years at *The Miami Herald* and thirty years in the newspaper business, Lawrence decided to leave the profession as he felt that it

had become far more of a business than it should. He became interested and involved in early childhood development and education after Governor Lawton Chiles asked him to be on the governor's Commission on Education. His friends formed a foundation that allowed him to remain in Miami, and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation was born.

SUMMARY

Mr. Lawrence describes the newsrooms that he inhabited at a young age, and the feeling he got when he saw his first by-line in print. As editor of the *Alligator* at the University of Florida, he talks about conflicts with President J. Wayne Reitz about his views on student unrest, the Johns committee and the civil rights movement. He describes in detail, and with great feeling, his work as editor of the Style section of the *Washington Post*, and his experiences and co-workers at the *Charlotte Observer*, *Detroit Free Press*, *St. Petersburg Times*, *Palm Beach Post* and *Miami Herald*. He also discusses the role of women in journalism, the impact of ethnic minorities in Florida, and the need of newspapers to understand their audiences.

David Lawrence was interviewed by William McKeen on August 7, 1999, in Miami, Florida.

M: Were you from a large family?

L: A large family. One of nine children. I am the second oldest of nine. Eight are still living. All of us graduated from either the University of Florida or Florida State....

M: Could you tell us a little bit about your parents?

L ... My mother came from, really, a New York Social Register family, one of ten children. My father came from a Long Island real estate family, the youngest of eleven children. My mother's family came over in the *Mayflower*, originally. My father's family came over in the wake of the Irish potato famine in the 1840s. As a little boy, I was living in New York City and on Long Island. My father was a newspaperman at the then *New York Sun*, now defunct.... [O]n my sixth birthday, on March 5, 1948, our family, then five children and a mother and father, moved to a farm in upstate New York.... My father's vision was that he would work on the farm and have a vegetable garden and a cow and maybe a goat...and then work on the weekly newspaper.... Of course, farming did not work like that and ... my father never did go to work for the *Sandy Creek News*. But, for the next eight years, we lived on a farm in the least glamorous form of farming, which is chicken farming. So, if I know anything about hard work and doing it with other people, it is from growing up on a farm.... I literally drove the tractor when I was nine years old and sold vegetables to neighbors. It was a wonderful way to grow up.... Well, in 1956, when I was fourteen, this is eight years after this grand experiment, my parents decided that farming was none too profitable.... My parents decided. "Let us move to somewhere warm; we are tired of these frozen winters, and let us go somewhere else and make our fortune."

So, we literally used the 1952 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia* and looked up Arizona, New Mexico, and Florida, none of which any of us had ever been to... We looked them up, and I think the final telling thing was that my parents were great

watchers of Arthur Godfrey on Sundays. Arthur Godfrey, in the winters, brought the show to Miami Beach, and that is how Florida came to be selected. So, toward the end of the winter in 1956, we moved to Florida.... So, my father ended up selling real estate, subsequently going to a paper now dead, a daily newspaper in Sarasota, Florida [*Sarasota News*].... [M]y father worked there for several years... [and] then ended up the last seventeen-plus years of his life working for the *Orlando Sentinel*, ... most of the time in Tallahassee, where he became the dean of the press corps. The House press gallery is named for him today, and he is in the Florida Journalism Hall of Fame. So, I ended up going into journalism, purely and simply, because I admired my father and I wanted to be in the same business that he was. When I was fifteen years old, I started working in the composing room during the summers, at the *Sarasota News*.... Then I was sort of off to the races from there. I was editor of the high school newspaper. I worked summers during college at *The St. Petersburg Times*.

M: Describe what the *Sarasota News* was like.

L: Well, it is almost certainly idealized in my mind.... at... age fifteen, I would go into the newsroom and I would beg to rewrite press releases. So, I rewrote those while I was waiting for my father to go home. He was then the managing editor and the general manager of the newspaper. The back-shop... was a hot lead operation in which there are terms like "bank" and "turtle" and so forth. We have a whole generation of journalists now who have never heard any of these terms. The printing craft was a very peripatetic kind of profession. These folks had worked at lots of different places....

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They were sort of crude and loud and tellers of dirty jokes, but they were warm people at the same time....

M: You were able to go from the back-shop to the newsroom and do some rewriting. Do you think that technology has changed so much that there are none of those early types working in the business?

L: These days, it would be unusual for a newsroom to hire a person who did not graduate from college. That was not true back then. Of course, pay was slightly less than mediocre, but the cliché was sort of true, that you were not doing this for the money, anyway.... You just paid your dues and when somebody gave you a chance to write something or report something, that was a huge deal. I can still remember as an intern for *The St. Petersburg Times* the first byline I ever got. I was in the Bradenton bureau of *The St. Petersburg Times* that first summer. It had a two-column headline, and it was about the tomato crop in Palmetto, Florida. Why should I remember that all of these years? It was that big a thrill.... To this day, I think it is a thrill to have your byline in the paper or your column to go in the paper.... It is still very personal.

M: Since we have you in a reflective mood, do you want to make any other observations about the changing nature of the species *journalist*? Are they too elitist?

L: It has some tendency toward that.... Too many [newspaper people] are out of touch with most people.... I always thought one of the big perils in the newsroom was that too many had all their friends in the newsroom. You do not learn an awful lot from people like you. You have to learn from people with different ideas and different ways of working.... For all the good I still see in newspapers, there is real peril in being out of touch with most people around you.

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M: Something else that you have probably noticed in your career is that all of a sudden, a journalism degree became something like a union card, as the entree to the business.

L: As much as I love, which I truly do, the University of Florida, if I could do it over again, I wish I had majored in history.... I actually was in political science. Because I was expending so much of my energy on the *Florida Alligator*, night and day, I said, "well, let me go over to journalism, which will be easier than political science." And that is how I came to graduate in journalism....

M: Prior to your matriculation at the University of Florida, you worked on the high school paper in Vincennes, Indiana, did you not?

L: ... I had a remarkable journalism advisor, a woman named Jo Berta Bullock, a legendary figure. A tiny woman, badly crippled. A beloved figure, not a softie. A person of great intensity. The paper was printed offset.... A young woman classmate of mine worked in the newspaper, and did something really dumb.... In those days, it was not unusual for even "good kids" to pen swastikas on their hands.... It was not that many years after World War II, and, clearly, the swastika stands for the ugliest form of racism and hatred. I can remember kids who did that, and other kids would not say, "Ah, they are anti-Semitic or haters" or whatever else.... Anyhow, this young woman ends up doodling a swastika on the flat, which therefore, because this is photographic process, ends up appearing as an ad. I remember Jo Berta Bullock, who was 4 feet-8 or something like that, a very small person, taking her crutch..., swinging it up over her head atop our worktables and saying, "My god, do you know what you have done? Do you know how many people died because of this symbol?" It was an extraordinary

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moment. And so, the power of symbols, and the power of the press, your enormous power to damage--has been a lesson that has always stayed with me....

M: What was the University of Florida campus like when you got there, in terms of racial make-up?

L: ...Very white. The university was not desegregated in its undergraduate divisions until the fall of 1962 and, in my recollection, the university's student body was sort of divided between pro- and anti-civil rights.... I remember vividly the university being segregated. I remember being active in the *Alligator* and covering it. I remember taking pictures. I remember writing about it. I remember asking the state NAACP to write a column, which got me into significant trouble with the university at that time because J. Wayne Reitz [University of Florida president, 1955-1967], whom I came to respect a great deal, was not particularly fond of the student newspaper telling him what to do. Remember, again, this was the time when some people thought the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] might be a Communist organization, however ludicrous it looks now. So, this was a very divided campus on that subject. You know, I did not tell you an enormous strength in my parents, which was in imparting a sense of fairness. So, I have always instinctively pushed civil rights, and lot of other rights, because this seems to me a fundamental matter of fairness.

M: Did you not feel odd coming from a fairly liberal family and going to a segregated institution?

L: Remember, everything was segregated. We would go into major grocery stores, and there would be "Colored" and "White" drinking... fountains. My high school was... totally white.... So, while the University of Florida was essentially an all-white institution,

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it was also an institution trying to, sort of, come to grips with itself. This is in the immediate wake, you recall, of the Johns Committee, the sickness of Charley [E.] Johns, senator [Florida state legislature, 1934-1966] and governor [of Florida, 1953-1955] for a while, trying to figure out who the homosexuals were at the University of Florida....

M: When you arrived in the fall of 1960, you saw yourself as a political science major who would work on the *Alligator*. Would that be your pathway to a career?

L: I did not actually even contemplate working on the *Alligator*.... In the second semester, I sort of wandered over to the *Alligator* and wandered in. I was quite sure that something as important as the *Alligator* would not accept second-semester freshman. It turns out, of course, they were looking for anybody they could get....

M: How long did it take for you to assert your authority and declare yourself editor?
(Laughter).

L: Well, I... started in my freshman year, and the paper moved from twice a week to five times a week in my time. By the second semester of my junior year, I was editor of the paper.

M: Did you serve one or two terms as editor?

L: I served two terms, the second one cut short. I was editor the second half of my junior year and then all my senior year, except for the last month. I was frequently in trouble. Part of it had to do with civil rights, and the university administration seeing me as being intemperate and radical. Part of it was I had run a letter to the editor that really pissed off the university president. A student had written advocating free love. It all sounds relatively stupid now, or at least that part does. So the university was not particularly pleased with me. And the Board of Student Publications was controlled by

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the administration and faculty. Anyhow,... I had written a front-page editorial that feels appallingly stupid now, an editorial that criticized the choice of my successor as “political.” The person chosen is now the first-rate editor of a Knight-Ridder paper in St. Paul. The editorial appeared on the same day [President John F.] Kennedy was shot [November 22, 1963], so we put out an extra on the assassination. The Board of Student Publications calls a meeting for the following Monday, which would have been the 25th, to consider this action on my part. I almost certainly knew that my goose was cooked. I refused to come to the meeting on the basis that, I would not dignify their proceeding by being there on a day that the president of the United States was being buried. The assassination was the one extraordinary event in my lifetime that everybody remembers where he or she was. So they simply fired my ass. I... spent the next month getting married, going off on a honeymoon, and then December 30 that year, I went to work for *The St. Petersburg Times*....

M: Did you leave the newsroom much the weekend that Kennedy was shot? Did you have a television in the newsroom that you were watching?

L: ... I do remember being absolutely glued to the television, watching Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald. It was extraordinary. I remember Howard K. Smith [ABC newscaster] and all these folks with mournful intonations. I have a fairly good size less respect for many of the people on television now than I did then. These were very somber journalists who knew that something terribly tragic had happened to the whole country. I do not remember a more serious time.

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M: Let us backtrack a little bit to your relations with university administrators during your time as editor. You said that J. Wayne Reitz was not a big fan of yours. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

L: Well, remember that the university was sort of under siege then. Desegregation was coming about. And what is a university president's job? To some degree, keep... a lid on it. Then, you have the student newspaper which, remember, was a creature of the university so, at least in theory, Dr. Reitz is the publisher of the paper. In subsequent years, the university resolved this by saying, in effect, "let us get this paper off the campus, and they can have their own independent structure".... Anyhow, 1963 on campus was a contentious time and a tough time for him and the university. I say with sweetness in my voice now that Dr. Reitz was not looking for help from me, and he certainly did not want the kind of help I was giving him in what the university ought to do. A big word used then in Florida was "agitator." What many even good-hearted people wanted was that people not talk about this. Maybe then the problem will just go away. There is probably a lesson for us in all of this, because if we did not have people speaking up, society simply would not make the kind of progress it should. It was just a very tough time and Dr. Reitz was not looking for troublemakers, and I was perceived as a troublemaker, an agitator.

M: You had some journalism courses which, when you talked about them earlier, sounded like a necessary evil to get out of college?

L: Oh no, and I do not want to give you that impression. I came to have, incidentally, an enormous affection for Rae [O.] Weimer [dean emeritus and professor of journalism and communications, UF, 1949-1973]. I never had him as a teacher, but I came to

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believe that he was one of God's decent people.... I had two exceptional teachers. By legend, they disliked each intensely and competed with each other--Hugh [W.] Cunningham [professor of journalism and communications and director of university information, UF, 1955-1990] and Buddy Davis [Horance Gibbs Davis, Jr., distinguished service professor of journalism and communications, 1954-1986]. They were both extraordinary teachers in my opinion....

M: Buddy Davis was legendarily punitive. Did you ever suffer any of his wrath in class?

L: If I did, I do not remember it. He was in charge, so he was not going to take any smart lip from anybody. Also, in my view, he was somewhat of an actor playing a game. Part of it was exerting control. Part of it was to teach. If he thought you gave a damn and worked hard, you were just fine. He could spot a shirker, though. He could spot who did not care that much about journalism, and you were in deep doo-doo then....

M: What was the newsroom at *St. Petersburg Times* like when you entered it as a full-time employee?

L: *The St. Petersburg Times* was a fabulous place for a young person to work as a reporter. Making \$95 a week, I was taking home something considerably less than that.... Our dream was, if we make \$10,000 a year by the time we are thirty, we are going to be just fine. The *Times* was a place where you could have all kinds of responsibility at a very young age, and it was a place that, while it had a pretty sizable newsroom staff, you certainly knew everybody there....

M: Comment on Nelson Poynter's [president, Times Publishing Co., 1953-1969, and chairman of the board, 1969-1978] impact on the paper.

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L: I do remember Nelson Poynter vividly, and his then wife, Henrietta, as well. At one point, I succeeded Bob Haiman as telegraph editor. Telegraph editor now sounds beyond antiquated. Ultimately, they changed the title to news editor. But the A section of *The St. Petersburg Times* was not for local news. It was for national and international news, which deeply reflected Nelson Poynter's feelings about what was news and what was not, and what was most important and what was not.... I remember Henrietta Poynter who was an interesting, intimidating, and somewhat fabulous figure in her... own right.... I can remember her going down the bank of wire machines; the *New York Herald Tribune* wire, the *New York Times* wire, the AP wire, the UPI wire, the state wire.... She would look at each of them, rolling up the wire stories in her hands. It was pretty intimidating, because here is one of the owners, making up her own mind about what is news.... Meanwhile, Nelson Poynter used to call every night, about 8:30 or so, to ask, "what is going on?" And you better know what was going on. If you said, "not much, Mr. Poynter," it would not have been smart. He would start a conversation, "do you know about such and such; have you heard about such and such;" have you thought about such and such? This was a man who breathed for his company, a visionary man. He was a man of total integrity, a man who had the newspaper foremost at heart, a man who had taken a lot of crap himself. People referred to him, which he was not, as a communist in conservative St. Petersburg. He was a man who I thought had all the right values and cared deeply about the newspaper. He was ... a man of the world, not just St. Petersburg, not just Pinellas County, not just the State of Florida, not just the United States of America but of the world. A great man of business, too. He was the man who

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set up the process that keeps the paper in its rare and independent status. He is the man who had profit sharing before people were talking about profit sharing....

He was a man who was not provincial in any way. He understood the importance of local news but, he also understood the news in a global context, which is exceedingly rare. Look at how the paper did over the years which I think, in part, is because it had a larger view of its mission in the world. At the time I was there and, I think, always since, it was one of Florida's best newspapers.

Florida has been particularly blessed because of the economic underpinnings to the particularly good newspapers. If you go around the state and you look at newspapers today, then I think we have some pretty darn good newspapers. I could easily name ten good newspapers in this state and others that would not fall that far behind. What other state could do that? I am not sure there are any other states that could do that. Part of it was fueled by Florida [being] such a boom place, a relatively easy place to make money....

M: We have not really talked about the role of women in journalism. You have mentioned Henrietta Poynter, who was a very strong-willed person. Would you say *The St. Petersburg Times* was ahead of its time in treatment of or regard for women?

L: Well, I would say yes, but not so far ahead of the time that it was a world-beater. There were people there who were women who had substantive responsibilities but for many years their responsibilities were very much connected, most of them, to women's news, softer kinds of things.... A very smart woman named Anne Rowe, later Anne Rowe Goldman, was in charge of the women's and feature sections. She clearly could have been the editor of the paper.... The whole business was sort of shabby on the

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subject. Women made distinctly less, had lesser jobs, and did not have much of a path to get more responsibility and more money....

M: Aside from the nightly phone calls, what were your dealings with Nelson Poynter?

L: ... I always felt enormous warmth about him, particularly because when I left for Washington, which is where I went to from St. Petersburg, I was a member of the Newspaper Guild, and Washington was frightfully expensive.... We then had two children. There was a strike. Benefits were then something like \$30 a week. This was a big deal in our house. How long would the strike last...? I went over to see Nelson Poynter at CQ [*Congressional Quarterly*, a periodical owned by Poynter's Times Publishing Company] and he said, essentially, whatever you are making at the *Washington Post*, I will match that for the duration of the strike. Now, I actually never exercised this because the strike was over quickly, but that was a remarkably decent gesture....

M: Discuss some of the most important and interesting experiences in your career.

L: I would say that one of the interesting experiences that I had in my working life was being managing editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, the No. 3 newspaper facing the *Bulletin* and the *Inquirer*. Each of them had hundreds of newsroom people. At the *Daily News* we had fewer than 100 people. It tests every competitive part of you as to how use your resources wisely when somebody has three, four, five times more people. And who are your readers, really your readers, and how do you genuinely reach them?...

Another important moment for me was going to the advanced management program of the Harvard Business School, not because I learned a lot about finance, but

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because I was in a class with people from thirty-three countries, not counting the United States of America. That was in 1983. Ever since I have made it a practice every year to go somewhere else in the world to learn. Ours is a frequently isolated country because it is so big, so powerful, so self-sufficient in many ways, though much less than it used to be, of course. It is very easy to have your whole life in this old American prison....

M: How did you see your career developing? Did you eventually want to be a publisher?

L: Well, I never said to myself, I want to be publisher. I was twenty-seven years old when I was a managing editor of a newspaper. So, I... woke up when I was thirty and said, "well, I have done this; what do I do now?" So, I had a good deal of responsibility at a very young age. I left St. Petersburg when I was twenty-five, worked two years in Washington, first on the news desk and then, when *Style* was formed, I became the news editor of *Style*.... Then, I became managing editor of the *Palm Beach Post*, because I really wanted to run something. Cox [Enterprises, Inc.] had just bought it from Perry Publications.... I only worked there for a couple of years, from 1969-1971, and went to the *Philadelphia Daily News* for a couple of months as assistant to the editor and then became managing editor. I worked there until 1975. Then I went to Charlotte to succeed Jim Batten as executive editor [at the *Charlotte Observer*], and I was there for three and a half years. Then, to *The Detroit Free Press* as executive editor in 1979.... I then become publisher of the *Free Press* in 1985, leaving there in 1989 to come to Miami.

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M: So, you were there for the creation of *Style* at the *Post*. What do you want to say about that? That is considered such a defining moment.

L: Well, I had been asked in 1968 by Ben Bradlee [executive editor of *The Washington Post*] to go back and work as the night women's editor, because he had a lousy leadership struggle there, and give him a sense of what was going on and what he needed to do. So, I went back there and worked for six or so months. That was a time in this country when newspaper people were reconsidering women's pages. A lot of people were joking about the feminist movement, but there clearly was a serious feminist movement. Starting up *Style* was an extraordinarily intense time.... It had a collection of really bright people, people [like] Judith Martin ["Miss Manners," syndicated columnist] a writer for that section. I remember editing Sally Quinn, who was a brand new reporter there covering the embassy beat.... Later in 1969, Nick Von Hoffman, the columnist, was sent to Haight-Ashbury [the then-hippie district of San Francisco, California] to do a series. Haight-Ashbury was a big deal then. He did not like my editing, and he quit. I do remember Bradlee saying, "oh, do not worry about that; that is Nick, he will be back, no big deal," and that is exactly what happened. But, it was a very heavy time for me, as a young person working with a star columnist.

M: What did you do after that?

L: I left in the summer of 1969 to become managing editor in West Palm Beach.

M: What was the *Palm Beach Post* like when you joined it? Was that before its Pulitzer for the migrant workers?

L: It was a paper that would not have dreamed of winning a Pulitzer. It made a great deal of money, as a monopoly of sorts.... Here I was twenty-seven. The editor of the

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paper was, maybe, thirty-four, Gregory Favre. We practically hired the staff new, added an awful lot of people. We were so young that we did not know all the normal road-blocks to doing good things. We hired people like Dallas Kinney [Pulitzer Prize recipient, 1970, for "Migration to Misery"] and Kent Pollock that led to the Pulitzer with the migrants. But, there were lots of other awards and lots of other things done.... But for an extraordinary number of people, it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Enormous energy, enormous enthusiasm, a sense you can do anything and, again, the economic underpinnings to do a bunch of things....

M: At the *Palm Beach Post*, now that you were the managing editor, what policies did you institute that had not been in place before?

L: Remember, this was a newspaper owned by a man named John [Holliday] Perry [Jr., owner of Perry Publications], a legendary figure who was deeper into miniature submarines than he was into newspapers. There was not a good paper in the lot, and Perry newspapers were money machines all over the state. I had never been an editor or a managing editor for a newspaper before so... I had to learn on the job.... Remember that this was not your normal situation. You have a lot more money to spend, maybe not enough but a lot more money to spend, and you have a good market to do it. It is a place with plenty of good stories, most of which have not been touched for years and years and years. The paper had not been aggressive about anything.

M: For example?

L: The migrant labor movement was in the paper's backyard.

M: Palm Beach is such an odd county. Such wealth. Such poverty.

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L: And migrant laborer conditions that were the modern equivalent of slavery. The paper's new aggressiveness made a lot of people nervous. Nor had the paper traveled anywhere to do stories. We did some extraordinary projects. I remember one on drugs, a very sophisticated, tough piece of reporting on a vital subject. We did not hesitate to do things like sending Kent Pollock to Vietnam....

M: After a couple of years there, was there an irresistible offer from Philadelphia, or did you just want to get out?

L: ... The *Philadelphia Daily News* was just an awful paper at the time, a tabloid, principally street-sold. I ended up going there far more for reasons of the quality of Knight newspapers [Knight-Ridder, Inc] than I did because of the *Philadelphia Daily News*.... The paper had a wonderful sports section, but nothing much else that was self-respecting. The paper improved dramatically over the next several years. Its crucible came at a time when Frank Rizzo was the mayor [of Philadelphia, 1971-1979], a legendary figure in American mayoral politics, larger than life, former police chief. Rizzo was in a terrible feud with a guy named Pete Camiel, who was head of the Democratic Party, about who was lying about something. I have forgotten the issue. Rizzo, who was very charismatic, was headed toward potentially being governor of Pennsylvania. People either hated him or loved him, but he had a big "love him" backing. We convinced Frank Rizzo to take a lie detector test with Pete Camiel. Rizzo, a long-time and tough cop, was pretty sure he could beat it, but he clearly ends up failing it. The headline was, "Rizzo Lied," with a picture of Rizzo strapped to the lie detector machine with a quote alongside that says, "If this machine says a man lied, he lied"--Frank Rizzo." Of course, it blew him up. He never was a significant political figure subsequently. Over those few years, the

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paper became far more aggressive, far more into real coverage in the community, including people who frequently never got covered. It was a paper that stood up for people. It was known as the People Paper. It was a tabloid and willing to have outrageous headlines, but, it was a tough, aggressive, straightforward newspaper in everything it did.

M: Did you see that as a key moment in your career?

L: It was significant in my beginning to understand what newspapers needed to do to get close to readers and keep your own soul.

M: What drew you away to Charlotte?

L: Jim Batten, the executive editor in Charlotte, was going to headquarters in Miami. He was one of the sainted people in my whole life. If I had to pick the single best person I have known in this business, it would be Jim Batten. He was a man of instant integrity and the fullest decency and the greatest possible human and journalistic values. Jim was leaving to go to Miami because Knight-Ridder wanted him to play a larger role in the company. He eventually became chairman and CEO [of Knight-Ridder, Inc.]. They needed his success as executive editor.

M: At this time, did you think of yourself as still an independent, or did you see yourself as more of a Knight-Ridder man?

L: I have never felt [like] a company man in the way that some people do. While the attraction to go there was, then, Knight-Ridder and its quality....I never thought that I worked for Knight Newspapers or Knight-Ridder. I always thought I worked for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Detroit Free Press*....

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M: In Charlotte you went from managing editor to executive editor. What does an executive editor do?

L: The definition changes from place to place. Generally, the managing editor is the day-to-day operational boss of the newsroom. The executive editor might be the person who is the managing editor's boss and the person who is ultimately in charge of the newsroom, or it could be the person who is in charge of the newsroom and the editorial page. In Charlotte, as executive editor, I was ultimately in charge of the newsroom. Later, as editor, I was in charge of the newsroom and the editorial page.

M: What changes did you institute in Charlotte?

L: One of the things we did, in my estimation, was to try to get a far fuller picture of what existed in that part of the world. Most of the people who worked for the *Charlotte Observer* had never been in a textile mill, which was the principal industry in that part of the country. I dragged people all around the Piedmont of North and South Carolina, trying to understand the small towns surrounding Charlotte, from where an enormous number of readers had come. You have to get out of the office. You are not learning anything at the office. You better get out and see who is out there, who the readers are. You have to walk around a lot. You have to go see a bunch of different people in different settings....

M: What impact did you have on the *Detroit Free Press*?

L: The newspaper, when I came there, had a total of four minority professionals on the staff, one of whom insisted he was not a minority. I insisted that the paper move toward being representative of the community it served--not for a social engineering experiment but to be able to cover and reflect the community far better....

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M: What did you come up with to retain good workers?

L: Well, what you come up with is some monetary incentives but beyond that, people want to be where they trust you, where they think you care about them, where they think you care about their careers....

M: What persuaded you to move to Miami?

L: ... Knight-Ridder wanted me to do something else. They wanted me to run the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*. I was significantly skeptical about it, because why would I want to be in the headquarters city?

M: You felt they would be breathing down your neck?

L: Even good people would be breathing down your neck. Mine would be the paper they get at home.... It is their community. They have their ideas. I would always rather be 1,500 miles away, even with good people. I emphasize that these are good people, and I was never asked to do anything immoral.

M: The staff at the *Herald*, when you joined it, was a pretty amazing group of people. Would you talk a little bit about it?

L: The *Herald* had so many strengths. It was very aggressive in what it covered and did. It had wonderful writers. It had as good a set of columnists as exist in the country, and that only got stronger over the years. On the minus [side], it also had a reputation for being unfriendly to minorities and as a newspaper pretty significantly out of touch with a changing community. During the 1990s, the *Herald* won five Pulitzers, in as changing a community as there exists in the United States of America. This is a community here that is fifty-five per cent Hispanic, twenty-two per cent or so African-American and/or

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black, and the rest non-Hispanic-white. So folks like you and me are a pretty distinct minority. It is also a community with enormous promise to people in the Americas. It is also significantly under-educated and under-skilled and, in many ways, growing poorer. It has had a significant problem of corruption, some of it petty and some of it big. The *Herald* won a Pulitzer in the past year for coverage of exactly that.

Change is very threatening to people, so change over the years has been very threatening to people at the *Herald*. For years the *Herald* was, to some degree, inattentive to its own community and quite attentive to, oh, 'people like us,' who are up in the Treasure Coast, who are in Palm Beach County and Broward and wherever else. Meanwhile, the community continued to change, and the *Herald* was relatively ill-positioned for this. Today, for instance, there are a half-million people in Miami-Dade County who either can only deal in Spanish or much prefer to deal only in Spanish. The *Herald* comes in the English language, the last I looked, and that is a significant problem.... Remember, as well, that the exile population that came here from Cuba in the early 1960s is significantly different from the refugee immigrant community coming here now. The people who came here in the 1960s from Cuba were generally educated people who once had money even if they did not have it now. They were often educated people, prepared for success. And, they had a newspaper reading habit. Havana had a half-dozen daily newspapers, in the 1950s. Today there are no real daily newspapers in Cuba.... The *Herald* made its... first foray into Spanish language journalism in the early 1960s in translating a couple of columns one day a week. Not until 1976 did *El Miami Herald* come about, and that was, more or less, the translated version of *The Miami*

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Herald. To use the vernacular, we 'just did not get it.' These people wanted "my own newspaper." Anyhow , it was not until 1987 that *El Nuevo Herald* came to be. My point is that it was not until 1987, when we began to say, these folks need their own newspaper with their own set of editors and reporters, thinking their own way.... To this day, people are struggling with, what is the smart way to do this and what are we willing to do?

M: After nearly ten years at *The Herald*, you chose to leave the paper, but you stayed in Miami.

L: It is interesting. Increasingly, after more than three decades in newspapering, I came to want to do something in public service. But, I never could figure out what to do.... About three years ago, I got involved in early childhood education and development, and started to understand it. Governor [Lawton] Chiles asked me to be on the governor's Commission on Education, and then I was asked to chair its readiness committee. That is how I came to be involved in this issue.... And I wondered whether I could psychologically survive not being a big shot and not making a whole bunch of money. And there are other things involved in this [decision to leave the paper] including that the [newspaper] business became far more of a business--inexorably over the years and, thus, a lot less fun to me. I never missed a day of work, so I would always be up for the next day. I just needed to do something else. So, I resolved, the only way to do it was to leave. Now, because I had no other "job," I simply announced on August 4 of 1998 that I would leave at the beginning of the following year, which I did, and that gave me some time to look....

The following Saturday, a man named Jerry Katcher calls. Jerry Katcher is a man in his seventies. He owned a bank in town with a number of branches and therefore had

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a lot of money. I have known Jerry over the years... and he called up from Aspen, Colorado, and said, "some of us have been talking, and we do not want you to leave town; if you want to work full-time on children and readiness, in which I know you are interested, we are willing to set up a foundation [The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation] so you can do it." This was, and is, terribly humbling to me, so I have sort of committed myself that I will work hard on this for at least the next couple of years, and see what comes to pass and what difference we can make.

M: Do you miss the newspaper business?

L: I never look back. I love newspapers, always will, and think they are important, but it was time for me to do something else. How many years do we have in this world? My father was sixty-four, and he gets cancer. He ends up retiring early and dies at sixty-six. He had all sorts of plans, and he got to do none of those.... I do not know how much time I have, or how many years, and I do not know what I will end up doing. Maybe I will do this for years. Maybe I will do this for a while. Maybe I will do something else. I do not know....

M: Do you think that your work in this area is going to send you into politics, as a lot of people thought you might?

L: There was a moment there where it was sort of heady to be asked by a bunch of people, including the attorney general of the state of Florida and other people, to please consider this and so forth.

M: You are speaking of running for governor?

L: Right. But, it never really seemed real to me. I raised a lot of money for other causes, but I do not really want to raise money for myself if I can avoid it. Part of me

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says, this is a job you could do; you care a lot about the issues; you know how to get people together; you are an inclusive person; you would be fair. But, the timing made no sense. I do not say 'never' to anything, but I do not focus an ounce of my energy on that subject. What I do know is, that if we could ever get children started off better in this world, we would have a profound impact on society. I am excited about all of this. I love my new life....

[End of Interview.]