

FNP 43

Interviewee: John H. Perry [Pe]

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants [P]

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P: This is December 9, 1999. I am in Jupiter, Florida, talking with Mr. John H. Perry, Jr. Mr. Perry, tell me when and where you were born?

Pe: I was born on January 2, 1917, in Seattle, Washington. My mother was the last white woman born in the Northwest Territory.

P: Did you live in Seattle [during] your early years?

Pe: No. I was, I think, about two years old when my father and mother took me east. We ended up in Cleveland, and then a place called Hastings-on-the-Hudson, outside of New York.

P: Talk about your early schooling. I know you went to prep school at Hotchkiss...

Pe: Right.

P: . . . and then you went to undergraduate at Yale.

Pe: Right.

P: Talk about those experiences.

Pe: Talk about what?

P: Going to Hotchkiss. How did you happen to decide to go to Hotchkiss?

Pe: Well, I went to a school called Recton in Tarrytown, New York, and I guess some of the parents of some of my classmates told my father about Hotchkiss, which was in Lakeville, Connecticut. So, I went there for four years, and then I went on to Yale for four years.

P: And what years were you at Yale?

Pe: Well, I graduated in 1939, so I went in 1935.

P: So, you would have been in school with Gerald [R.] Ford [U.S. President, 1974-1979]?

Pe: He was my boxing instructor.

P: What did you think of Ford who was also, I guess, a football coach at the same?

Pe: No, he was my boxing instructor. I do not know about the other, but he taught me boxing.

P: What was your impression of Gerald Ford at the time?

Pe: Oh, I liked him. He was trying to earn some money to put himself through school. I was a boxer, and he taught me. I got to like him quite a bit. Then, later on, I met him when he was president.

P: Who else did you meet while you were at Yale who would have been a significant public figure?

Pe: Bill Scranton.

P: Governor of Pennsylvania?

Pe: Yes, and his family. We had an awful good class there. Ted Beal. I cannot recall them offhand at the moment, but a nice group. It was a nice group there. I belonged to Zeta Psi, and that was a good little fraternity. I met a lot of people there. I cannot, offhand, remember them now. I was going to go to the London School of Economics when I graduated from Yale. So, I got myself over to Europe, and then the war began and they said, sorry, we cannot take you because we have been taken off and put on the Board of Economic Warfare. So, I then had to get back but, while I was there, I had a real exciting time because the damn war had started in Poland. Anyway, I met the Head of the AP (Associated Press news syndicate) there, and I went to see him. He had just had a talk with Lindberg [Charles Lindberg, pioneer aviator]. Lindberg had just been over to see Hitler. He was a great admirer of Hitler. Anyway, while I was there, I went to the Bowater Paper Company, and they asked me if I would make a little talk to their group. I said I would love to, so I got up and told them all about what I had learned about Hitler and how he built this army up and everything and that these guys were all British businessmen. They kept thinking, what is this smartass boy doing telling us about it. So, they found out later! Anyway, I got myself over to Ireland, and an amazing thing happened when I got to Ireland. It was incredible. I went over on the little packet boat, this twenty-four ton thing. Just as we got into the harbor there in Ireland, I looked over and saw two goddamn German submarines tied up at the dock. I thought, I cannot believe this; the damn war had started, see? Anyway, I got to the Shannon River, and I got on the *Dixie Clipper* [Pan American Airways' amphibious passenger transport]. Who should be my traveling companion but Jack Kennedy (John F. Kennedy, later President of the United States). I had a date with his sister while I was in London.

P: Which sister was that?

Pe: Kathleen. Anyway, I got back, and then my father got me enrolled in the Harvard Business School. I took one year there.

P: Let me go back. At that time, obviously, Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, father of John (Jack) Kennedy] was the American ambassador to England, and he was very much in the same framework as Lindberg. Both of them were sort of isolationists.

Pe: Right. But, as soon as the war started, he shut up. He damn well better shut up, or Roosevelt [Franklin D., President of the U. S., 1933-1945] would have fired him.

P: Well, Roosevelt tried to fire him once, but it was difficult to do.

Pe: That is right.

P: What about Jack Kennedy? Is that the first time you met him?

Pe: Let me see. No, I will tell you where I met him. We belonged to a club called the Bath and Tennis Club. Most of the members and directors of the club were very anti-Kennedy because old Joe was the head of the SEC [Federal Securities and Exchange Commission] or something . . .

P: He was, yes.

Pe: . . . and giving the members a hard time, see? My father did not care about that so he invited him to the club, and I got to know the Kennedy kids at the time. So, when I got to London, I naturally looked him up. But, first of all, I went to France to meet some people I had agreed to meet. A classmate of mine's mother had hired at Versailles, not a cottage, but luxurious accommodations. I was in France when the damn thing started. I had bicycled all over France, and I went to see these various places where the French had put up what they considered impregnable fortifications. I had rented a bike and went all over and I thought to myself, well, from what I have heard from other sources, I do not think this is going to work. I did not open my mouth at that point but, when I got over to England, the Bowater Paper Company asked me to make a talk to the business elite there. So, I got up and started telling them about what I had seen and what I had heard from the Associated Press, that this guy [Hitler] is going to whip the hell out of you. I did not express it quite that way, but that is what it sounded like to them so they thought, what is this smartass kid doing? He does not know what he is talking about. Anyway, they found out pretty soon that I was right. When the war started and they invaded Poland, my father got me on the Pan

American Clipper. I had to get over to Shannon though to get on it because it was a flying boat. So, I got over there, and I had a date with [Kathleen] Kick Kennedy while I was still in London. Anyway, I got onto the Dixie Clipper and who should be there but Jack Kennedy. His father was still the ambassador. We got along pretty well. Horace Dodge was on it. I forget all the other people there. They were all pretty prominent because this was, getting the hell out of the war zone. Anyway, I got back and got into the Harvard Business School and took one year there. Then, the war became more and more serious. I forget the timing here, but I got into a thing called the Civil Air Patrol which, incidentally, I got an air medal for from Truman [Harry S., President of the U. S., 1945-1953] later on. But, what is was is, people owned their own aircraft and they carried a bomb, and they patrolled certain sections of the east coast. So, I was stationed in Atlantic City, and I did drop a bomb on a German sub but it did not go off.

P: This was in the Atlantic, then?

Pe: Atlantic City, yes. That is where I was stationed. They had these little bases, maybe five bases up the coast there to ward off these...the Germans were beating the hell out of our coastal areas. They were sending spies in, even, and that was an amazing thing. These goddamn Germans were even in Atlantic City gaming areas and things like that. Anyway, I served in that for about a year, and then they took me into the regular Army, AUS, Army of the United States. I got my basic training somewhere out in the Midwest there, and then I was assigned to the base down in Los Angeles, I forget the name of the place, where I got into the Air Transport Command and started delivering planes. I delivered planes from Guadalcanal to Bari, Italy. It was exciting as hell. I went to Guadalcanal and delivered a plane there, and then I got on as a copilot on a C-54 and we flew the dead and wounded out, back to San Francisco. Anyway, the way I envisioned it, I figured that the more I was qualified to do, the more I could write my own ticket, see, which proved to be very smart. So, then, let us see. This is a funny one. I think it is funny, anyway. I was stationed in Long Beach, and there was a colonel there who wanted me to fly him to Palm Springs. This is in the book, incidentally. I looked at the weather. I had flown to Palm Springs, and I knew the weather and the terrain. I said, Colonel, I am not going to do that. He said, listen, if you do not do that, I will court martial you! I said, so court martial me. So, he got in it and did it and flew into a mountain. I did not have to worry about that court martial anymore.

P: That took care of that.

Pe: Anyway, that is getting off the track here a little bit.

P: What kind of planes were you [in]?

Pe: It is all in the book. Do you have the book?

P: Yes.

Pe: Every one of them is in the book. I flew in, it must have been, fifteen different kinds of planes: bombers, transports, fighters, everything.

P: So, you were flying Mustangs and things like that?

Pe: No, I never flew a Mustang. I flew the equivalent of a Mustang, which is an A-26.

P: Any Lockheeds?

Pe: No. That is another story. I am coming to that. No, it was built by...I will think of it; it is in the book. Anyway, I delivered all these things all the way from Guadalcanal to Bari, Italy. When I delivered one to Italy, they gave me a B-17 that had been shot up, to deliver it back to Wright Field, which is what I did. When I got to Wright Field, I ran into an old classmate and friend of mine named Fred Borsoti. He said that he was taking a P-80—that is what it was called, a P-80—to demonstrate it to the Queen of England. He took it there and when he was demonstrating it to the Queen of England, it blew up. Anyway, I delivered, and I had a feeling that before I checked into the home base, I would get myself assigned to another one. So, when my name came up, I was already on the way to deliver the other plane. That worked pretty well. So, I got to fly...well, it is all the book there. You have the book, you say?

P: Yes. How long did you serve? When did you muster out of the military?

Pe: I mustered out about a month later after the war ended [which was August, 1945].

P: Let me go back while I am on the subject and ask you a couple of questions. Later on in Palm Beach, I guess, you are going to have some more social interaction with the Kennedys. What was your view of Joe Kennedy, the father?

Pe: I liked him, and I will tell you why. When the owner of the *Post*, which was called the *Post-Times*, I think, at the time...

P: This was Palm Beach?

Pe: Yes. When he died and left it to his widow, the widow said, look, I do not know how to run a newspaper; who should I sell it to? And Joe Kennedy said, sell it to John Perry. We had been very friendly to them, and I knew them and had taken Kathleen out and so forth. So, my father had owned, I forget how many but quite

a few, newspapers, the *Jacksonville Journal*, and he had taken a long shot at Florida years before. When Joe Kennedy sold it to my father, my father sent me up to the Mass Mutual Company to get the money to pay for it because it \$1,000,000. So, I got it, and we got the paper. Then, we built others after the way. I was my father's gopher. You know, go for this and go for that. It was terrific experience, of course.

P: Let me go back a little bit. Tell me what your father did for a living. Was he always in the newspaper business?

Pe: When he graduated from the University of Virginia, he went out West and met my mother. My mother was the daughter of a very wealthy...the name is Lilly, and they had a seed company. So, dad went out there and became the district attorney for Seattle. That is when I was born, in January of 1917. So, he became the lawyer for Scripps [Scripps-Howard newspaper publishing chain] [and] he got to know Hearst [William Randolph Hearst, newspaper publisher], all the big shots in the business. So, I had sort of an entre to them, you might say, and that is how I got started in it.

P: So, when did he buy the Florida newspapers? During the Depression, I believe?

Pe: Yes, it was. I am trying to think of the date. Somewhere in the late 1930s. I will give you a little side thing here. To me, it was very important. After the war was over, this is, when I got involved with the papers. Dad got a hold of a company called the Western Newspaper Union. It was bust, and he rescued it. But, he sent me around to the branches, and I learned to fly then, a ____ plane. To make a long story short, when Joe Kennedy suggested to this owner, who was the woman whose husband had the paper and died, he said, sell it to John Perry. Dad sent me off to the Mass Mutual to get the money to pay for it, so I went up there and made the deal and came back. That is how we got the paper.

P: Now, my understanding was that he owned twenty-five Florida papers.

Pe: That is right. He sent me around to buy them all, so I knew them all by heart.

P: And then two papers in Kentucky?

Pe: Yes.

P: Which two papers?

Pe: *Owenton News Journal* and the *Carrollton* paper.

P: Then, in addition to that, there were some radio stations in Florida, right?

Pe: Yes, I got those. I did that on my own.

P: That was after you took over?

Pe: Yes.

P: Now, your father died in 1952. Is that when you took over Perry Enterprises, or whatever it was called then?

Pe: Yes. Well, my brother and I split up. My brother got the Western Newspaper Union, and I got the newspapers, to manage that is.

P: Okay. The Western Newspaper Union was a weekly news service?

Pe: They printed the inside pages of all the weeklies in the country. Then, the other side of the page, they would fold them up and send them to them, and then they would put the local news on the pages one, three, five, and seven, or whatever it is. But, they kept all the advertising for the ones they printed, the side they printed.

P: So, he took that, and then you took the newspapers?

Pe: Right.

P: But, there was quite a bit of debt when you took over the papers. Is that correct?

Pe: I do not remember exactly, but I do not think there was too much debt, no. The debt was in the Western Newspaper Union. It had the debt. Anyway, I think it is all in the book there.

P: Okay. Now, you in, say, 1953, are now running Perry Publications. Is that correct?

Pe: Yes.

P: Tell me a little bit about the mix of papers you had. You owned twenty-five. Were they both daily and weekly papers?

Pe: No. I think there were six dailies, and the rest were weeklies. That is a guess.

P: Okay. How did you organize the running of the dailies as opposed to the weekly papers.

Pe: Well, I was a pilot, and I had my own plane. As a matter of fact, I used to carry a

bicycle in it so, when I got to the airport, I could bicycle into town. Actually, it was a little motorcycle, a little tiny thing. So, I would go around, get on my little bicycle and go into town and interview the manager, publisher, or whatever it was. Then, I would go back out and get on the thing and go to the next town, so it worked out pretty nicely.

P: Where were your headquarters?

Pe: West Palm Beach, at the *Post-Times*.

P: And this was your major paper, the Palm Beach . . . ?

Pe: Yes. Well, the *Jacksonville Journal*, the first thing I did was to sell it to the *Times Union* because we were competing with them. Anyway, to answer your question here, this is what I think you should listen to because it is really the core of my success. We had this Western Newspaper Union, which dad took over in 1938 or something like that. After the war, they had a typographical union. Listen to this, now. This is significant. They had a thing called a bogus. They would make you set the type that was already set, see? This infuriated me, so I said, I am going to rid of that goddamn thing if it is the last thing I do. I got rid of it. I got rid of three unions all at once!

P: Did they go on strike?

Pe: Hell, yes.

P: How did you deal with that?

Pe: I will tell you how I dealt with it. The first thing I did was to figure out a way how to beat it. I had the first commercial success of computers so, with the computers and a piece of equipment I developed myself, the two of them, I eliminated the need for these three unions.

P: So, mainly, these were the old Linotype operators?

Pe: They went out the window. It was like getting rid of the buggy whip people when the car came along.

P: How did you decide to go into computers? What persuaded you that was the best way?

Pe: Oh, I worked on that one a long time because I was trying to think of some way to get rid of these assholes, see? So, I sent someone up to some place up in New England. I forget just where it was. And this guy came back with a big grin

on his face, and he said, with this piece of equipment, if you put that together with what you have done, you can get rid of those damn fools. That is what I did.

P: Really, what you are talking about is cold print, getting away from hot type?

Pe: Yes. You see, that got rid of the stereotypers, which is hot type, the engravers, which is not necessarily hot type but it is a form of a union, and the ITU, the International Typographical Union.

P: And how did you deal with the strike? How did that ultimately turn out?

Pe: Oh, that is all in the book. I can tell you we prepared for it a year ahead of time and, when it came off, I had a watts line. Do you know what that is?

P: Sure. That was pretty early for that, too, was it not?

Pe: Oh yes. I had a very close relationship with all of the publishers. They knew what I was going to do, and they worked like hell to help me make it. So, when the strike came, it did not affect us at all. It is all in the book, incidentally. We worked it out so that we did not miss a single day of publication.

P: Now, in this case, at some point, I guess they went to court and you ended up having to pay a settlement.

Pe: Yes, I will tell you all about that. We went to the Supreme Court, and Chief Justice Earl Warren, as distinguished from Warren Burger, decided in favor of the union. I had to pay them \$1,600,000 in back wages. To be honest with you, I earned it all back in two months. But, I had dinner later on down here at the Everglades Club with a friend of mine, and he had Warren Burger at the table. I told Warren Burger about my paying them \$1,600,000, and he said, that is the most unjust thing that ever happened; you should not have had to pay them a goddamn cent.

P: Was the court ruling decisive?

Pe: Well, it did not matter because I paid the fine, and then I just went on and did it.

P: Now, this was across the board? In other words, you eliminated unions in all of the newspapers?

Pe: Oh yes. They were all hellbent to put me out of business. That was the first thing. I knew that, but I had good support, as you can read in the book, from my various publishers who were just gung-ho to do what I wanted them to do because, Christ, we made a lot of money afterward.

- P: Well, now, talk to me a little bit about where most of your money came from. Was it pretty much from advertising?
- Pe: And circulation. Yes, I think it was a ratio of about two to one, or something like that. It varied during the years.
- P: According to local . . . some papers sold more than others, obviously.
- Pe: Yes, that is right.
- P: But, most of your revenue is advertising?
- Pe: Yes.
- P: Did you determine the advertising at each paper, what they would take, what they would not take?
- Pe: No, I let each one of them do it on their own. Each publisher was his own boss, but he had to comply with making money.
- P: The bottom line is always important, right?
- Pe: That is right. They know that.
- P: Now, did you publish, yourself, the *Palm Beach Post*?
- Pe: No, I had a publisher. His name was Charles Francis Cole.
- P: Did you, in any way, determine either advertising or editorial policy?
- Pe: No, as long as they made money . . .
- P: So, you did not concern yourself?
- Pe: No, I did not waste my time on that. Just do not do anything dishonest.
- P: Would you restrict advertising, say, from alcohol or cigarettes or anything like that? There were no restrictions?
- Pe: No. But, you know, I belonged to a thing called the ANPA, a committee that would sort of help you decide that sort of thing. I belonged to those things.
- P: Okay. What was ethical and what was not?

- Pe: Yes. They put out a little book on it or something.
- P: When you took over this group of newspapers, what were your major problems in terms of circulation?
- Pe: Of course, if you have competitors, you have to work out the best way. Let me get your question again?
- P: Yes. Normally, one of the problems is getting your paper out on time, and I was wondering if you had unionized drivers for the delivery of the paper?
- Pe: I think after that strike, unions would not touch us.
- P: Completely?
- Pe: Yes.
- P: Okay. But, how did you manage to deal with it? Were most of your [papers] morning papers or afternoon papers?
- Pe: Well, we had an afternoon paper in Jacksonville which was losing its shirt, so I sold that to the *Times Union*, a morning paper.
- P: The rest of them . . . the *Palm Beach Post* was morning?
- Pe: Yes. Actually, it was morning and evening, and I just put it out one time a day. I am not sure, but I think that is what I did.
- P: Okay. Were there any other financial problems that you had when you took over the business, other than, say, the *Jacksonville Journal*? Were there other non-performing newspapers you had to either get rid of the editor...?
- Pe: No, the rest of them were all making money.
- P: So, you never had a problem with that, then, in terms of financial return?
- Pe: No, because I went up to the Mass Mutual and got all that money to buy the *Post*, and that started being a very profitable paper.
- P: What about, as a chain, did you use syndicated columnists for all of your papers?
- Pe: I let each one of the publishers make up his own mind about that because what may be good in one town might not be appealing in another.

P: Where did you get your paper?

Pe: Bowater.

P: And that was for all of your papers?

Pe: Yes.

P: So, you did that collectively because it was cheaper if you buy in bulk?

Pe: Absolutely. Now, some of them may have had a print shop that would buy specialty papers to do the job work.

P: Did you do much of that, a lot of printing?

Pe: No, not too much.

P: When you look back at your chain, what was the most important function of your newspaper chain?

Pe: To make money.

P: After making money?

Pe: To serve the public.

P: In what way?

Pe: It was a matter of competition. The *Miami Herald* was trying to get our market, and the *Post* had to do whatever it could to keep that out, to keep them out. For instance, the Fort Lauderdale paper was owned by the *Chicago Tribune*.

P: Which was a very conservative paper.

Pe: Yes, but it was damn powerful, too.

P: So, in the early years, how would you compare yourself to Gannett or Knight-Ridder, in terms of being a chain. All of your papers were in Florida, and I understand they were more national.

Pe: Well, we had one in Kentucky.

P: Yes. So, were they your competitors then, mainly Knight-Ridder?

Pe: Well, in Kentucky, we had the state paper and we had a lot of state printing, so there really was not any competition because it was that local. What is the question, now?

P: About Knight-Ridder, about that chain. They were your major competitors?

Pe: In Palm Beach? Definitely the *Miami Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

P: What about reporters? Have they changed much since the day you started the newspaper business? Do you think they are very different?

Pe: I do not think so. It has just gotten a lot more technical. I mean, they have things like . . . well, you know. You have one right in your hand there, that little thing you have in your hand.

P: Do you think the newspaper audience, the people who read the papers, is different today than they were?

Pe: Not particularly, no. I do not notice any difference, except that you now have television and you now have Hollywood, so to speak. That makes a lot of difference in what you have to offer.

P: When you were printing your papers, what was your major competition in terms of other media? Was it television even at that point?

Pe: No. Television did not really take off until the 1950s. This is another story. I was in radio then. We had four radio stations. I started a radio network and, oddly enough, it was a chain out in Texas owned by the Roosevelts. Incidentally, the grandson is on our board of directors now, Bill Roosevelt, a nice guy. Anyway, back to your question, let us see if I understand it, first of all.

P: Well, you were talking about your radio station.

Pe: Yes. So, I had a group of four radios, or something like that: WDLP in Panama City, JHP in Jacksonville Oh, I will tell you another event that came in here. I got into television because I wanted the VHF television in Jacksonville. And Katherine Graham . . .

P: From the *Washington Post*? The *Washington Post* bought a TV station in Jacksonville.

Pe: Katherine Graham had a brother, and he cheated me out of the channel I wanted in Jacksonville. By coincidence, a guy came to me who had the license for Channel 2 in Orlando. I think it is all in the book, but I will tell you about it right

now. He got so fed up with the people trying to buy his Channel 2 that he came to me and said, I will sell it to you for a very small amount of money, WESH. So, I grabbed it, put in high-powered, the most powerful element in the state, in Orlando. So, I got the license for WESH that had the best coverage in the state, actually. So, I got a hell of a deal there, and I made a lot of money on that.

P: How long did you keep that station? And when did you buy it?

Pe: I would have to think about it, but I made an awful lot of money on it, though. I can tell you that. WESH. I moved the headquarters and made it an Orlando station, and I covered the whole goddamn state. In fact, Channel 2 in Miami that is now in the non-profit group . . .

P: PBS?

Pe: Yes. I let them go on the air. So, when you see Channel 2, it is because I let them have it. Because I had the coverage so strong, and I let them indent into my territory, so to speak.

P: Let me go back to your radio stations. You had one in Panama City. Where were the others?

Pe: One in Pensacola. Jacksonville. And one other.

P: Let me ask you about the format. What kind of format was it? Was it music, talk?

Pe: A little of both.

P: Were they profitable?

Pe: Marginally profitable.

P: When and why did you sell those?

Pe: I do not know, except, probably, to get more liquid.

P: Okay. Let me ask you another question about one of your competitors, Al Neuharth [of Gannett newspapers, founder of *USA TODAY*]. What do you think of Al?

Pe: I think I sold him one of the newspapers?

P: *COCOA TODAY*?

Pe: Yes. I am not sure of this, but I remember Al quite well. He was a sharp guy.

P: What do you think about this national newspaper, *USA TODAY*?

Pe: Well, I think they are making something out of it. I have to admire them for that. I think they have dumped an awful lot of money in it. That is about all I know.

P: Does it bother you that some people refer to that as "McNews," that this is so limited in information and that it features color and short stories, not very involved in terms of details?

Pe: I do not even hear any comments on that.

P: Okay. Now, when you look at the newspaper business...

Pe: Incidentally, I own a couple of newspapers in the Bahamas.

P: Yes. I am going to get to that. When you look at your business, what do you think you achieved in terms of changing what happened in the state of Florida? Do you think you had any influence in either political decisions or economic decisions?

Pe: Oh, I think we definitely did, yes.

P: Any specific examples of that?

Pe: Well, we were conservative and, certainly, the union effort changed the union situation down here.

P: Let me ask you about the All Florida News Service? What was that?

Pe: I am not sure I know.

P: What about the All Florida Magazine? That was this Sunday supplement?

Pe: Yes, that was a TV insert.

P: Okay. And how did you start that? What prompted you to do that?

Pe: Well, people were interested in what to look for on the TV.

P: Was this pretty early?

Pe: Yes, very early.

P: Prior to that, newspapers did not publish...

Pe: I will tell you a little more about it. There is a paper in Washington, not the *Post* but the other one. They and I started that one together for, obviously, economy's sake. [Tape interruption.]

Pe: The newspaper in Washington. It was the *Times*. We did it together to save expenses.

P: And this went to your whole chain?

Pe: Yes.

P: Now, when you are publishing a paper, daily or weekly, what is usually the most difficult problems that come up on a daily basis?

Pe: You have to be kidding. You have all kinds. Everything that goes into the paper becomes a problem, labor, machinery, the source of your news, the source of everything. It has to be provided for.

P: When you were in your newspapers, do you remember the papers taking a very strong editorial stance on a particular issue like taxes or a gubernatorial race, that sort of thing?

Pe: No, I do not. I never got too far into that. I left that up to the editor as long as it did not interfere with making money. If you do not make money, you do not put the paper out.

P: Did you belong to civic clubs and/or local community activities? Were you involved in the community?

Pe: Well, of course, I could not become involved in them all over the state or in Kentucky, but I was involved, very much so, in the international SIP, Society International Prensa. I was the chairman of the Freedom of the Press Committee. I do not know if you want to hear this or not, but it was a very striking thing for me. We had our meetings in Latin America one year and then, in the next year, in the United States. In 1963, it was in Miami. The chairman was a fellow by the name of Lee Hills, and he asked me if I would like to have a short talk with the President--Kennedy. This will scare the hell out of you. And I said of course I would. So, during the meeting, he says, Mr. President, I am going to give you a few minutes with one of our representatives, John Perry. And he said, that is fine, so we are up there on the stand together and I said, Mr. President, aren't you afraid somebody is going to bump you off, the way you run around here and there and there. No, I have faith in the American people. This was on

a Monday. You know what happened on Friday? I might have gotten them _____. Anyway, that was gruesome, was it not?

P: Very much so, yes, particularly because he was so young.

Pe: See, well, we had been good friends and, also, our fathers were close. I was in London, and we came back on the damn plane together. [End of Side 1.]

P: Talk a little bit about your social relationship with the Kennedys. Did you and Jack go out much?

Pe: No, it was usually strictly business.

P: Okay. Now, when you are involved locally in Palm Beach, were you a member of community organizations?

Pe: We belonged to all of the clubs there.

P: Did you get involved in politics?

Pe: No, I have never been involved in politics, although one of my ambitions in life is to put over a political program I have, called the National Dividend Plan.

P: Yes, I am going to ask you about that a little later. Now, you have known almost all of the governors of Florida.

Pe: Yes.

P: Give me, at least, a thumbnail impression of some of these. Farris Bryant [Florida governor, 1961-1965]?

Pe: Very nice. We got along real well.

P: What did you think of him as a governor?

Pe: He was a moderate. I would put him halfway.

P: How about Claude Kirk [Jr., Florida governor, 1967-1971]?

Pe: I discovered *him*. [Laughter.] I take full credit for that mistake.

P: What did you think of him as a governor?

Pe: I thought he was pretty good.

P: As a person?

Pe: Yes, I liked him.

P: He is at least very colorful, is he not?

Pe: Yes. We got along very well.

P: Reubin Askew [Florida governor, 1971-1979]?

Pe: We did not get along so well.

P: Why?

Pe: I do not really remember why. We were not enemies or anything. I cannot remember the reason that we were not getting along, but . . .

P: It could have been the corporate income tax.

Pe: That could be, yes.

P: Bob Graham [Robert, Florida governor, 1987-1981]?

Pe: Bob and I got along very well. I have a thing in the office praising me that he wrote.

P: Lawton Chiles [Florida governor, 1991-1998]?

Pe: No, Lawton and I did not get along at all for some reason. I do not know why.

P: Did you do much coverage, since it is Palm Beach County, of Big Sugar, the Fanjul brothers [Alfonso and Jose, owners of Flo-Sun, Inc.]?

Pe: I knew them very well.

P: What is your view of them?

Pe: They were good entrepreneurs, and that is all I can say about them.

P: They are pretty powerful in the state.

Pe: Yes, they have a lot of money.

P: That always is what makes a difference.

Pe: Yes.

P: Did you ever have any dealing with Ed Ball?

Pe: Are you kidding? He is my second father. Yes, Ed Ball and I were very close. My father was particularly close with him, but I got along with him very well. He and I were good friends.

P: And he, according to many people, was as powerful as anybody in the state of Florida. Would you agree with that?

Pe: Yes, I agree with that.

P: How so?

Pe: Well, because he had the St. Joe Paper Company, and he had his finger in all kinds of things.

P: All the Dupont money.

Pe: Yes.

P: And apparently had a great deal of influence on Florida politics.

Pe: Yes, because he had the money.

P: You also knew, almost, all of the presidents, I believe.

Pe: That is correct.

P: What about Harry Truman [U. S. President, 1945-1953]?

Pe: Very good. He gave me an air medal.

P: And you thought he was a good president?

Pe: Oh yes, very good.

P: Eisenhower [Dwight D., U. S. President, 1953-1961]?

Pe: I only knew him slightly, but I knew him through a girl who had gotten him that job, really. Her family was named Steinman, and they had the newspapers in Harrisburg, I guess it was.

P: So, did you think Eisenhower was a good president?

Pe: Very good, excellent.

P: Lyndon Johnson [U. S. President, 1963-1969]?

Pe: He appointed me to the Marine Science Commission. If you look in the book, there is a picture of him. It is in there about his having a heart attack and when he came down to Florida one time. It is all in the story in the book there.

P: Okay. What did you do on the Marine Science Commission?

Pe: I was chairman of the technology phase of it, that was up my alley.

P: Technology and research, I think.

Pe: Yes, it is in the book.

P: Did you think he was a good president?

Pe: Yes, very good. Lyndon, I thought was great.

P: I guess you know George Bush and the Bush family better than...

Pe: He is a cousin.

P: And what do you think of George W. Bush, the son, as president?

Pe: I think he would make a good president because he is imbued with the sense of responsibility.

P: How did George Bush, Sr. do as president [of the U. S., 1989-1993]?

Pe: Well, he did alright, but he had a guy that I hated. I should not say hated [because] I do not hate anybody. But, there was a guy, and I cannot even think of his name right now, who was his advisor. I do not hate anybody, but he would not listen to my plea for the National Dividend Plan. That was about my feeling toward him.

P: What about Jeb Bush as governor [of Florida, 1998-present]? Have you had much contact with him?

Pe: No, I have not. We send him some money. That is all.

P: Now, you knew George Bush's mother, is that right?

Pe: Right, and she said we were cousins.

P: So, did you see much of her as well?

Pe: Not very much, no. I have a picture of her down at the office, of the three of us together. I think she was a nice lady.

P: And, finally, Ronald Reagan [U. S. President, 1981-1989]? Your view of him?

Pe: Very close. We were good buddies, and he endorsed the National Dividend Plan. You could not have a better president.

P: What did you think of him in terms of his leadership qualities as far as the public presentation of the executive branch?

Pe: Oh, I thought he did great.

P: Bringing American people together, restoring confidence?

Pe: Well, I think his greatest thing is, we must bring down the wall!

P: Hm-mm [yes], and it came down. Let me talk a little bit about your publishing career. When you look back on it, did you accomplish what you wanted to do?

Pe: I certainly did.

P: And what was your major goal?

Pe: Freeing the American press from union domination.

P: Were freedom of information issues important as well?

Pe: Oh yes. Well, I was serving on that committee.

P: Yes. Did you ever have anything to do with journalism courses or journalism schools, any of the academic . . . ?

Pe: No. I made speeches to them, if that is anything.

P: Do you think that, at some point, we will no longer have the newspaper as we have it today, that everything will be electronic? You will be on your Internet...

Pe: Well, I want to tell you. You are getting out of my line, now. I could not predict that. In fact, all of this business is getting to be a little over my head, to be honest with you.

P: What was your reaction when you were chosen to be in the Florida Newspaper Hall of Fame.

Pe: I thought that was very nice of them.

P: Did you have much relationship with the Florida Press Association?

Pe: Not very much, no. Well, now, let us see. I cannot say that unequivocally. I just do not remember. But, it was always very friendly.

P: Florida Society of Newspaper Editors? Were you involved with them very much?

Pe: No, but I never had anything against them. You know, they did their job, and I figured I did mine.

P: Now, you still own, I guess, the Guardian Group Newspapers?

Pe: Yes. I do not own it all. I own controlling interest.

P: So, in 1969, I think, you sold your newspaper chain.

Pe: Right.

P: Why did you do that?

Pe: So I could concentrate on what I am doing now.

P: So, your interest in energy and marine research took precedence to the newspaper business?

Pe: That is right. Absolutely, yes.

P: Do you regret getting out of the newspapers?

Pe: Not a damn bit. The thing I am in now is so much more exciting and beneficial to society.

P: For a while, I think you were in cable television.

Pe: Very much so. That is a very sad story, and it is in the book.

P: What happened with that?

Pe: I had six offspring. Three of them are beautiful, wonderful people. The other three are lousy criminals. They stole it from me.

P: Your own children?

Pe: Yes.

P: Now, you started that right after you sold the newspapers?

Pe: I believe it was about that time, yes. Actually, I got into in 1966. I know I bought *Time* and *Life* out. They owned a unit here and did not think there was any future in it, and I bought it.

P: But, this is at the beginning of cable, right?

Pe: That is right.

P: So, you saw that was going to be a profitable enterprise?

Pe: Yes.

P: So, you developed how many cable . . . ?

Pe: It is more the number of subscribers.

P: Yes. I have 87,000 subscribers. Is that about right?

Pe: That is about right, yes.

P: Then, eventually, you sold it to your children, is that right?

Pe: Yes, and then they turned around and sold it for two and a half times that much.

P: But, you did end up making a profit yourself, is that right?

Pe: I do not remember.

P: Okay. How do you feel about cable today? I guess you sold it to Cox, did you?

Pe: The cable?

P: The newspapers, you sold to Cox.

Pe: Yes, the newspapers.

P: Okay. Who finally bought the cable?

Pe: Well, I sold it to my sons.

P: I know, but from them?

Pe: I do not know.

P: Okay. Now, let us go ahead and talk a little bit about your change of interest but, before I do that, I want to talk about your newspapers, the *Nassau Guardian* and the *Freeport News*. Why have you kept those newspapers? Why have you not sold your interests there?

Pe: That is a long story, and I would rather not tell you.

P: Alright.

Pe: No, I tell you, I have stepped out of the management of that. My wife is taking care of it, so I am going to let her explain it.

P: Okay. Is it difficult, when you had those papers earlier, is it difficult to run newspapers outside of the United States?

Pe: I will just tell you how I got it, if you want to hear it.

P: Sure.

Pe: And then my wife gets mad at me every time I tell this story, but anyway I had been trying to buy the *Guardian* for quite a few years. I got a call one time from somebody down there, from a banker. He called me up and says, if you want this *Nassau Guardian*, you come down here with Friday's payroll and you can have it. So, I was down there and got the damn thing. Every time I tell this, my wife gets furious with me. Anyway, that is how I got it. Then, there was a guy who was in jail, Mc-something. He sold me the *Freeport News*. I think it was \$100 or something. Then, I got that and turned it into a daily. I remember taking all of the equipment over in the boat I had.

P: Have those papers been successful?

Pe: Oh yes. They are very successful. Well, I would rather not comment on it, but they are doing okay. We started another one down in the Turks and Caicos, a weekly.

P: Is it a lot different running a newspaper in the Bahamas?

Pe: Well, it has a lot to do with politics. Linden Pindling [Lynden O. Pindling, Bahamian Prime Minister, 1967-1992], who was the prime minister of the Bahamas, and I got along pretty well. I am trying to think of this story that was pretty damn funny, but I better not tell you now.

P: So, this is how you got interested in the Bahamas?

Pe: I will tell you what I had got interested in. During World War II, I was taking planes over to Africa, you know, Ascension Island, and so forth. I would fly along and look down and see these beautiful things and say, goddamn, I have to have one of those. So, after the war, I got a couple of my associates, a fellow named Bill Adderbury and the Ramsing brothers. I sent Adderbury down because it was advertised in one of the papers here. I forget which one. He went down and came back with a big smile on his face and said, the price is right, too. Anyway, that is how I bought the island.

P: That is Lee Stocking Island?

Pe: Yes, it is beautiful. It is 600 acres. I could show you pictures of it out there.

P: Now, that is across from Georgetown in Exuma?

Pe: Yes. It is twenty-eight miles north of Georgetown in the chain there, the Exuma chain.

P: Okay.

Pe: So then, later on, when I got appointed by Johnson to the Marine Science Commission, I got interested in using that as a test place to make an island self-sufficient without using fossil fuels, so that is what we have been trying to do.

P: So, what you are doing, then, is converting salt water into fresh water?

Pe: Right.

P: And you use reverse osmosis? Is that how that works?

Pe: Exactly.

P: And, I guess, solar power as well?

Pe: Right.

P: How has that developed?

Pe: Well, it is working out. We are going to get it to work.

P: How much longer, do you think, before you will be totally self-sufficient?

Pe: Well, I would think we are almost there now. It is hard to answer because it depends on what degree you are talking about. But, we have a tape on it.

P: I have it right here.

Pe: Okay. See the tape, and that will answer the question.

P: Alright. What about the idea of producing more fish available for food? From what I understand that you have done is, you have taken females and used hormones and put them into males because the males grow faster, and then you have changed fresh water fish to salt water fish because there is less fresh water in Africa.

Pe: Yes.

P: Now, how do you go about doing that?

Pe: Well, I am not sure I am an authority on that, but we have people who do it.

P: What is the long-term implication of this? This is going to be food to feed the hungry in Africa?

Pe: Right, yes.

P: Where are you in terms of your research?

Pe: I suppose you could say, technically, we think we can do it, period.

P: Have you done some specific . . . ?

Pe: Yes, we have done little bits and bits. My step-daughter is really in charge of that. You will have to ask her.

P: Also there, you discovered this, sort of, first life form, this blue-green algae that is there, the stromatolytes?

Pe: Oh yes.

P: So, that is also part of your research interests?

Pe: Yes, [but] I am not sure I get the connection there that you are trying to...

P: Well, I am just trying to figure out what the Caribbean Marine Research Center is doing. I mean, that is all part . . . ?

Pe: Yes, that is right.

P: Okay. You have also done quite a bit of work in underwater research. You invented this submersible two-person submarine.

Pe: Yes.

P: How did that come about?

Pe: I will tell you. I was swimming off of Nassau one time, with my second wife I guess. She was ashore, and I was swimming offshore there. She waves at me and says, there is a shark following you. I looked around and, sure enough, a goddamn shark was there, [so] I beat it out. Then, I decided to build two spears in the nose of the submarine and shoot the shark from it, which I did.

P: How did you get the background? I mean, you had been to Harvard Business School, and you had been in the newspaper business. How do you get the creativity to build something like that?

Pe: Urge. Inner urge.

P: Obviously, you have some capability.

Pe: Well, you know, I took engineering drawing at Yale, or one of those colleges, or something. The professor said I was wasting my time, but it turns out that was one of the most useful things I ever did.

P: So, what happened in terms of once you had developed this machine. What is it used for now?

Pe: What are we talking about?

P: This Cubmarine.

Pe: The submarine?

P: Yes.

Pe: Oh, it is used for the James Bond movies and all that stuff. If you want, I will show you the pictures on the wall outside here.

P: Okay. Was that also used . . . it seems to me that I remember a story that a hydrogen bomb was accidentally dropped in Spain.

Pe: Right. Yes, we went out, and they shipped it over first-class and back second-class. We found it in the Mediterranean somewhere.

P: How deep can it go?

Pe: Well, it depends on what model.

P: Okay, the newer models.

Pe: Well, now, I sold the business, so I do not know what . . .

P: Oh, you did? Okay. When you look back at what you are doing on Lee Stocking Island, one of the things, as I was reading about your life, is that you have kept it very pristine, and one of your areas is cleaning up the environment and saving the coral reef and all of that.

Pe: Absolutely.

P: What, in specific terms, have you been doing about that. I understand you have been studying water temperatures?

Pe: You have got a tape of it, did you not?

P: Yes. I have not seen that yet, though.

Pe: When you see that, it will answer the question.

P: From your perspective, I just wanted to know how you view what all of this ultimately will do.

Pe: Well, I hope it betters the environment for the benefit of society.

P: Do you see problems with dumping by cruise ships and all of that.

Pe: Oh yes.

P: Well, how do you . . . ?

Pe: Well, you have to get the government to enforce dumping laws, see, because they have dumping laws now that can put these guys in jail.

P: But they do not enforce them?

Pe: Well, I am not commenting on that.

P: What is the Hydro-Lab?

Pe: That is an underwater lab I built, and I am going to show you a picture of it in the next room here. I built two of them. One is a little one and is non-pressurized, and the other one is a full-scale one. I have a little model of it somewhere up in Delaware, I think.

P: When you put this in, is this to train the astronauts?

Pe: Yes. I have pictures of the astronauts.

P: And that has been going on for how long?

Pe: Well, I took it out, and it is now up in...I do not know.

P: Okay. So, it is no longer active, then.

Pe: No.

P: Again, what enabled you or why did you decide to build this?

Pe: Well, I love diving, and I love to see what I can do to enhance the work it could do.

P: So, while people are working on the ocean floor, they could literally, in this pressurized lab, come in and out?

Pe: Yes. The space people used it for training.

P: Yes, but you could also use it for research and experimenting. I mean, people could come in and out of that lab, right?

Pe: Yes. If you want to come out, I will show you the picture of it.

P: Okay. Now, a couple of other issues that you have been involved in that I wanted to talk to you about. This is something you mentioned earlier that I wanted to follow up on, your National Dividend Plan. Tell me briefly how that

works.

Pe: It is very simple. Ronald Reagan likes it. I have a lot of work to do for the public to accept it. I want it into a constitutional amendment. But it is so simple. It just takes the corporate income tax and funnels it to, sort of, a pot of money that can be distributed to each voting citizen. All you have to do is be a voter. Then, they get a part of the corporate income tax collections at the federal level.

P: But now, first, you would have to freeze federal spending. The whole idea is to reduce the debt?

Pe: Well, if you had this, in effect, it would automatically freeze it.

P: But, the whole idea is to reduce the debt?

Pe: Right. Well, no, now, wait a minute. Let us get that right. Not to *reduce* the debt, but to not have it get any bigger.

P: Okay. And then, the idea is that, at some point, that would produce a significant amount of money, enough money, to pay all voters? The corporate income tax?

Pe: Oh yes, absolutely.

P: It is that significant?

Pe: Well, it depends, you see. It depends on the economy. If you are making a lot of money, it would do it very quickly.

P: But, at some point, as I recall, you would put a cap on corporate taxation. Is that right?

Pe: Yes.

P: What point is that? Where would you reach that point?

Pe: I think the Congress would have to do it but if this thing were in effect, you see, it would not be any problem.

P: Okay. What kind of response are you getting today?

Pe: Well, from the people who understand it, and it is a little difficult to get people to understand it, a very good response. Now, what I have to do to make the thing work, I know this, is that I have to get a poll taken. I have a reliable firm that I have it picked out, Peters and Heart. Have you heard of them?

P: No. I know Heart. I know who he is. He is a highly regarded pollster.

Pe: Now you are talking. Anyway, what I have to do is get the research necessary to show A, B, or C. You want what the Republicans are doing or what the Democrats are doing or what this would do, see?

P: Now, some people, like Senator Larry Pressler [R-South Dakota], have come out and supported this.

Pe: Larry is all for this, many times.

P: But, it has not gotten much commitment from Congress?

Pe: I have not followed it, but Larry and I were very good friends.

P: But, it is sort of, at this point, dormant? Nobody is really pursuing this?

Pe: No, because it takes money, and I do not have that money at the moment.

P: Alright. Let us find out a little bit about the other current interest you have, Energy Partners. What about that, and what are you doing with that?

Pe: We are going to get rid of the combustion engine.

P: What is the concept of this fuel cell technology?

Pe: I will tell you. You take water. There is plenty of water in the world. You split it. Then, you bring it back together in a fuel cell that makes electricity. They use them in the space effort all the time. The space people say that this will be a \$2,000,000,000 to \$3,000,000,000 business, what I am talking about, in no time at all.

P: What do you call the end product? It is a gas? Is it methanol?

Pe: The end product is electricity.

P: Okay, but is there a gas involved at all?

Pe: No.

P: So, the fuel cells convert the water into electrical power?

Pe: Right. That is exactly right.

P: Okay. How long a process is this?

Pe: Oh, It is an instant process.

P: Okay. How would you put it into people's homes? How would it work?

Pe: We are doing that now, actually. We have something called NUI, National Utility Investors. It is listed on the New York Stock Exchange. It is up in New Jersey. They bought into 5 percent of our company. Now, they use natural gas.

P: Okay.

Pe: You got it?

P: Yes. That is where . . . I knew there was gas involved there somewhere. What is the cost of something like that.

Pe: Well, that is the whole secret, and I think we have an answer to it. We have a patent applied for it.

P: What would be the process?

Pe: The process is that you have to get the damn cost down.

P: Yes, and how do you do that?

Pe: We do that by a thing called injection molding. In other words, we try to make these plates, and we have the patent applied for. We make them bang, bang, bang, bang, once every twenty-two seconds. Now, if we can do that and we can demonstrate it, then we can go to the rest of the world and say, look, do you want to be a licensee? Do you want to buy some of these? That is the process.

P: So, what you are doing, in effect, is trying in the home, and the ultimate goal is to put them in automobiles. Is that right?

Pe: Well, they go together. Now, I want to tell you something. We are not the only ones doing this now. General Motors is doing it. They have a firm in Germany called Opal that is trying it out. We have, maybe, three or four others that we are negotiating with to be a licensee in Europe and, let us see, where else is it?

P: I understand that Ford and Deere and NASA are somewhat involved.

Pe: We already have built, in our plant here, on 45th Street, we have three John Deeres, and they are all hooked up to this process.

P: And how are they working?

Pe: They work fine.

P: What is the problem with the fuel cell? Is there a limit on the distance they can go?

Pe: That depends on how big of a stack you have.

P: Well, and that is the other problem.

Pe: Well, you have to store the hydrogen. There are three or four ways of doing that. We have tried three or four different ways to do that, and that is another problem. Basically, it depends on the size unit you are trying to build. Now, we have gotten an awful lot of money from the Federal government to do this, see, so we are not talking about chicken feed here.

P: Why have electric cars not caught on?

Pe: This is what is going to catch them on, see? The electric cars run on a battery. The battery runs down, and then what the hell do you do?

P: So, these fuel cell powered vehicles, they will be able to run indefinitely? If you have a big enough unit?

Pe: Yes. I think . . .

P: So, you want to reduce the size of the unit? Is that part of your strategy?

Pe: No. We want to get the size of the unit more efficient and less costly.

P: Now, you have produced, what I think you call, the Gator Fuel Cell Utility Vehicle.

Pe: Yes, for John Deere.

P: Yes, and those are, in effect, lawn mowers or tractors?

Pe: No, the John Deere little wagons. We have three of them down at the plant.

P: Then, they are going to be developed ultimately as the forerunner as a passenger vehicle? Is that what you are looking for?

Pe: Yes.

P: When do you see that coming to fruition?

Pe: We have it right now. It is a question of getting the cost down.

P: And the government will continue to support your research effort?

Pe: Oh yes, very much so. This is their job, the Energy Department. That is their mission in life, to get this goddamn thing so we are not dependent on fossil fuels.

P: And you have other companies competing with you?

Pe: Oh yes. Oh, God, it is very competitive.

P: And, therefore, the prognosis is pretty good that somebody will come up with a...

Pe: Yes. Well, we think we have the answer, but we have not had a chance to put it in effect yet.

P: And it is a possibility that you will have this kind of system in homes?

Pe: Oh yes. That is the whole point. We have already built those. They are in homes now.

P: And they are working fine?

Pe: Yes.

P: How much would you save in terms of your electric costs?

Pe: There is a story on it somewhere. I can give it to you, and it tells it all.

P: Okay. That is okay. I can get that. What do you think is the future of two areas: the energy problem and environmental problems.

Pe: They go together, and it is right around the corner.

P: What other innovations or challenges are you working on? Are you concentrating on fuel cell now?

Pe: I am definitely concentrating on the fuel cell and the National Dividend Plan.

P: But you always come up with new ideas. Anything else percolating?

Pe: Well, I cannot go any further than that today.

P: Okay. There is always something.

Pe: I do not have enough wind left to do that.

P: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or add to what we have discussed.

Pe: No, I think we have covered it. If you want me to take you to show you some of the pictures.

P: I would appreciate that. Okay, this would conclude the interview. Thank you very much, Mr. Perry.

Pe: Okay.

[End of interview.]