

LUCY MORGAN

BIOGRAPHY

Lucy Morgan is the capital bureau chief in Tallahassee for the St. Petersburg Times. She was born on October 11, 1940 in Memphis, Tennessee, but grew up in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She moved to Florida in 1960 and began her newspaper career with the Ocala Star-Banner while working as a stringer for the St. Petersburg Times. She joined the Times staff full-time as a news staffer in New Port Richey and later as a state-wide investigative journalist. In 1985, she took over as bureau chief in Tallahassee. She has covered a variety of state and local stories including drug smuggling, corruption in law enforcement, Florida politics and the presidential election of 2000 in Florida. In 1985, she won the Pulitzer Prize (with Jack Reed) for investigative reporting of the Pasco County sheriff's department.

Her work has received recognition from the American Society on Ageing, the University of South Florida's School of Communications, the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors, the Florida Press Club, and the LeRoy Collins Distinguished Community College Alumni Award.

SUMMARY

Lucy Morgan first talked about her reasons for coming to Florida and how she got started in journalism as a small-town reporter. She discusses being a woman in a traditionally male occupation, and details her more fascinating investigations,

FNP 48 page 2

particularly the drug-smuggling case which won her a Pulitzer. She also talks about her methods, especially the utilization of public records, as part of her investigative reporting. She shares her thoughts on Florida politicians, most notably Dempsey Barron, Lawton Chiles, and Bob Graham, and lobbyists in Florida generally. She concludes with her perspective on the “arrogance” which she sees as problem among journalists today.

C: What was your first job in journalism?

M: Let me start by telling you how I got here. I am not sure there is anything like it. I had three small children at home in 1965, and a woman knocked on my front door whose name is Francis Devore....She introduced herself as the area editor for the Ocala paper and explained that their local correspondent had been killed in a traffic accident and wondered if I might be interested in writing for the paper. I told her that, well, I had never done anything like that before, or even thought about it , and asked why she would come to my door with that kind of request. She told me that the local librarian in Crystal River had told her that I read more books than anyone else in town, and she presumed that if I could read, I could write. I needed money and I decided, well, I will try it; after all, it was only part-time....About two months later they put me on their full-time staff because, at \$0.20 an inch and \$5 a picture I was making more money than they wanted to pay me.

C: Any recollection of particularly memorable stories that you covered at that time?

M: My assignment, at first, was to do civic clubs, city councils, traffic accidents, anything that happened in the Citrus County area. I remember one of the early city council meetings that I went into. All of the other people who covered governments back then were, like I, stringers who were paid by the story, and most of them had never had professional journalism careers. The city council in Crystal River would look over to the three or four of us who were reporters there at various moments in the meeting and say, now, do not write this, and these people would very cooperatively not write this. I very quickly ran afoul of the establishment because it did not seem appropriate to me. I had no training, but it just did not seem appropriate to let the mayor decide when we would write about what the city was doing, so that I was very quickly in trouble with the mayor and have probably never gotten out of trouble since. But I tended to write what was occurring in front of me, and they took a very dim view of that in the Crystal River City Council, although the citizens of Crystal River and most of the cops loved it. They thought it was great sport. [In] those early city council meetings, they were having a huge controversy over the police department and a sewer system, and I remember a lot of those early stories that were just sheer battlegrounds.... It was a very colorful scene to cover. Back then, you did not write a lot of color, and I am afraid the early stories probably missed a lot of what was really there.

C: Were you using a tape recorder or pad and pencil? Did you use a telephone a lot? Obviously, no computers at that time.

FNP 48 page 4

M:... I used a pad and pencil to take notes.... I would then go home and type it up on an old portable typewriter and then read the story over the phone to an editor who took it down in Ocala. If it was a feature with less of a deadline, I might send it in by bus or mail, but most of the time back then, we had to read the story. Sometimes, you had to make up the story as you went along and read it at the same time, if you were filing at night for the next morning's paper.

C: Any difficulties juggling being wife, mother, and newspaperwoman?

M: Always. Sometimes, I took them with me to news stories. They have probably seen more fires and traffic accidents and things like that than most anybody's children.... I was a single parent trying to juggle these two jobs and three children. I had a housekeeper and either she or her daughter would sleep at the house in case of something happening at night. I was responsible for [covering] fatal traffic accidents in Hernando, Citrus and Levy Counties, and we seemed to have a lot of them back then. So, I would often be at one of these four a.m. accidents....

C: Were most of the journalists that you worked with and competed against male at that time?

M: If they were staff, they were male.... It was entertaining to work against them because most of the people that we covered were men, and it amused them to see me beat the men, so that often I would get a call from, say, a Levy County commissioner

FNP 48 page 5

who wanted to leak a story to me. It would not be the best story in the world. By the stories I work on today, I probably would not even bother to write it, but at the time, it greatly aggravated the men I worked against, that I would often beat them because of the largesse of men who were playing with them, and me too, probably.

C: 1968 was a notable period in which you got attention in court circles, including a state attorney in Pinellas County, dealing with grand jury investigations.

M: Yes. ...By then our staff had expanded substantially and we had been doing some stories on corruption in city government in Dade City. I was asked to go over and babysit the grand jury one day. The grand jury returned a sealed presentment. I wrote about that, speculating on the contents of that presentment, somewhat successfully, apparently. The state attorney, on the day the story was published, dropped a subpoena on me, demanding that I appear and give him the source of the information in the story. I refused and was immediately sentenced to five months in jail.

On that day, we raised an objection to the state attorney's legal ability to do what he was doing, which he apparently decided might be correct. So he issued a second subpoena for me a few days later ordering me to appear before the grand jury. I again refused to divulge the source, although I did give him a nicely colored copy of the story. I colored in blue the stuff that I had observed, you know, the state attorney walking into the grand jury room with the Dade City Charter [and] the names of the witnesses of people who went. I painted in green the two paragraphs that came from a confidential source, and I painted in bright purple the information that had come from the state

FNP 48 page 6

attorney himself. It made the state attorney very happy, and I gave that to the grand jury. I was subsequently sentenced to another three months. We appealed both sentences and ultimately won.

C: Did you actually serve any length of time?

M: No, it was really kind of disappointing. I bought all these books to read while I was in jail. Like the complete works of Tennyson, I have yet to read them. But they let me out on bail from the courthouse. I did not have to get locked in the cell....

At the *Times*, Gene Patterson was editor and made every court appearance and immediately said, Lucy, we do not think you are going to have to go to jail, but if it ever happens, the *Times* will hire a housekeeper to take care of the children; we want you to write a daily column from the jail. So, the *Times* was prepared to do whatever had to be done and certainly gave me all the legal support that I needed.

C: Ultimately, there was a Florida Supreme Court vindication of that act that you took to protect a confidential source.

M: Yes. Up until that time, there was no court protection in Florida. The reigning case was an old Miami case where the person subpoenaed had been forced to testify. In July 1976, the court came with a ruling written by Justice [Joseph] Hatchett, which said that only under certain compelling circumstances could a state attorney compel a newspaper reporter to testify. What he did was follow very closely the three-part test

FNP 48 page 7

that was set out in *Brandsburg* originally, that there had to be a compelling state interest, they had to prove that they had looked elsewhere for the information, and they had to prove that I might be the only source of that information to subpoena them. They had done, of course, none of that having subpoenaed me on the day of publication. So, that became and remains the law today. It has been through a few curves since then, but was now reiterated just as recently as last year in a decision. That is still the law in Florida....

C: In 1982, you investigated drug smuggling in Dixie and Taylor Counties. How did that come about?

M: At the end of 1979, my husband wanted to leave the job as bureau chief on the north Sun Coast and to take a job as editor of editorials. My youngest was almost turning eighteen, and I thought it might be a good time for me to quit working for the Pasco section and do something else. I sent a note to Andy Barnes, who was then ME [managing editor], saying that, if they ever would like to create a roam-around-the-state-and-cause-trouble job, that I would be interested in doing it. (Barnes)

decided on the spot to create the job. I started it by spending about a year looking, at about the same time Richard Kelly, the congressman from Florida, fell into Abscam [a national scandal stemming from FBI investigations into congressional corruption], and he was conducting his own investigation. I had covered him when he was a circuit judge, so I had a good road into both him and his attorney.... I began that year by spending almost all my time on Abscam and covered the trial in Washington at

FNP 48 page 8

the end of that year, and the election that swirled around it.

I had been fascinated by some of the old Florida drug cases.... I started looking at the statewide grand jury, which had been an early tool used against drug smugglers, to no avail. Every time I would go ask prosecutors or cops or drug people questions about drug prosecutions, inevitably someone would say, you know, you should go and look at Dixie and Taylor Counties; the drug smugglers own the counties. I sort of tossed it aside the first few times that I heard it, but I was in Tallahassee interviewing the head of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, who at the time was Jim York. He gave me a great quote that day. He told me they were never going to stop drug smuggling in Florida until they could drive a stake through the heart of... a drug smuggler in Dixie County of some renown.... The state attorney for that area told me that a majority of the county commissioners from Dixie County had gone to a drug trial and testified for the smugglers. I knew there must be a record of this. The potential for a story, I could see there.

I really thought I was going to go there, write a few stories, walk out the door and not spend a whole lot of time on this, but before it was over, I had spent several years. A chief deputy in Dixie County had come to me, offering to rat out all of his fellow deputies and wear a wire if I could turn him over to an honest cop; he did not know any. I gave him to the U.S. attorney's people from northern Florida. Before I was able to finish there, a whole bunch of deputies, a school board member, a county commission chairman and 250 other souls went to jail, because the Feds took an interest in my stories and pursued the smuggling. It was a rather interesting chapter, where the smugglers had pretty well co-opted the local officials.

C: Why do you think they felt so safe to be so openly corrupt?

M: Part of it, I think, is the lack of journalism.... I subscribed to the local weekly papers. There were three at the time, the *Dixie County Advocate*, which at one time was owned by the sheriff in Dixie County, and the *Taco Times*, ... [and] the other one was another Perry paper; I think it might have been the *Perry News* or something. Of the three papers, only the *Taco Times* reported drug arrests as being real. The *Dixie County Advocate* would often not report them at all, or report them if some out-of-towner was arrested. They did have to report when the Cadillac owned by the Dixie County school board chairman was found parked next to 30,000 pounds of marijuana in neighboring Taylor County. However, they ran a correction the following week saying that Cadillac did not belong to ... the school board chairman. What they did not tell you in the correction was that it belonged to his wife....

The guy at the *Advocate* told me that when he first came to Dixie County, he wrote an editorial about the illegal [hunting] of doe deer, denouncing it, thinking that he was on the side of motherhood in an area like that, only to wake up the next morning and find a dead doe's head on his doorstep. He subsequently wrote an editorial about illegal dumping of garbage, only to wake up the next morning and find his lawn strewn with garbage that had been dumped there. He said those were his only two efforts to get into journalism that was at all controversial. I think the lack of a daily newspaper in that area simply allowed those officials to run roughshod in any direction they wanted

FNP 48 page 10

to.

In fact, the county commissioners who went to testify in Wakulla County on behalf of a convicted drug smuggler of some renown, urged the judge not to send him to jail, saying it would be an economic loss to the county if (he) was sent to jail. They apparently did not realize that the court reporter sitting in the front of the room was recording all these words. When I went up and read and bought the transcripts and went to interview them about it, they denied ever having said these things and kept telling their friends that none of this was true, only to have it hit them broadside when I wrote the stories. One of the most fascinating things about Dixie [was] we did not sell a paper in Dixie County or Taylor [County]. We had no circulation. We had a truck that went through there every day on its way to Tallahassee. Often, the sheriff would stop our truck and demand a copy of the paper to see what was in it....

C: That coverage was nominated for the Pulitzer in 1982. I am interested in how you utilize public records in the kind of reporting you do. Would you be offended to have your type of reporting defined as investigative reporting?

M: No, not really. I have at times in my life taken offense at that word. I suppose I take less offense, having won a Pulitzer in a category called Investigative Reporting. I think a lot of what many of us do is investigating. If you are going beyond simply walking out of a public meeting and writing what occurred in it, there is some level of investigative reporting. I think a lot of reporters see that title as rather pretentious.... So, yes, I would not label myself that if someone were to ask me what I was, but, clearly, a

FNP 48 page 11

lot of the work I have done over the years that has been well-received has been investigative in nature because I have gone beyond taking what was given to me on the surface. I have gone into every conceivable record. If I am going to take a project, I will isolate the principal names that I know in the beginning I am dealing with, and that is essentially where I start. I strip the public record of every record that is there.

Nowadays, it is almost too easy to start, with the electronic systems that are there. You give someone the results of, say, an AutoTrack, and you have there your Social Security number, date of birth, the property they own, the vehicles they own, the accidents they had, their driving records, their criminal records, all kinds of different records just handed to you in the space of a few seconds. However, experience tells me [not] to trust those as being all that is there, or as even being correct all the time. But, I would strip the records that are available [and] go to wherever those people have lived in their lifetime, if I am seriously looking....

C: The purpose for the searching of public records has to do with litigation?

M: Well, it is two-fold. First of all, you bulletproof yourself from an attack. You have the record in front of you. Secondly, if you look at a deed that was recorded twenty years ago, and you see that the subject of your story bought a piece of land somewhere and paid X amount of money for it, that might be the focus of what you are looking at, at that moment, but down the road, it may be that one of the people who witnessed that deed is a figure in the rest of what you are doing, and you are looking to establish a relationship between that person and another person.... Also, in the moment that you

FNP 48 page 12

get sued, you are not scrambling around trying to prove what you have already written; you have the documents there. I am a big advocate of keeping very good files. I can go now back to files of virtually any project I did, including that Dixie County drug project in the 1980s, and pull the files.... I can go back and pull them and confirm or find a fact from many years ago....

C: How important is meshing public records with human sources?

M: I think it is important to also talk to the people. If what you have is a public record trail, you have a pretty dry account. People can add information and context to that record. For instance, in the Dixie County series, a lot of those smugglers were people who had never made more than \$13,000, or \$14,000 in their lives, but they were paying cash, \$20,000, \$30,000 for vehicles and things. I went to interview the car dealer in Dixie County who had sold them all these vehicles, and he put that in a lot of context in talking about them. [About]... the notorious smuggler, [the car dealer] said, you know, Lucy, you need to get to know the whole [man]. He taught me one of the best lessons I have ever been taught. He said, you know... the drug smuggler, who makes a lot of money and pays cash for cars, but you do not know the guy who buys a boat for his neighbor when his boat sinks, pays for surgery for a neighbor's child when the child is ill, or builds a church with the money he has made from it, and unless you know all of those things about him, you do not know the whole [man]. From that moment on, I have realized how important it is for us to know the whole [person], in anything that we are looking at....

C: Back to 1982, the Dixie County investigation is fairly well completed, and attention to the St. Petersburg Times coverage merited a lot of national review at the time it was nominated for the Pulitzer. The next three years, you are working in another county with reporter Jack Reed on Pasco County corruption charges.

M: In the beginning, I was working on it myself. All during the Dixie-Taylor [stories], I lived in Pasco County.... And I kept running into people at home who would say, quit going out of town--you need to be looking at the local sheriff. And I had covered that department years before, I knew it fairly well. [In] February, early March, of 1983, I accepted a speaking engagement at the local police academy, which trained sheriffs, deputies, local police, and anybody around there, and it was run through the junior college, to talk about press relationships. I just had assumed in accepting it that this would be raw recruits getting their initial police training and did not think much about it, but when I got to the class, it was about fifty veteran police officers. It was a refresher course of people who were already in jobs. Our paper, in just that week, committed a rather egregious sin in their eyes, and actually in mine, too. One of our reporters had quoted an anonymous spectator at the scene of a police shooting, saying that the police murdered this guy, which was against our policy and certainly not conducive to good relations between reporters and police. So this whole audience was ready to fry any reporter they could catch in their grasp. I spent the night defending--although I did not defend that conduct, I told them I agreed that it was wrong--but discussing police relationships, in an atmosphere that was first very hostile. By the time we got to the

FNP 48 page 14

end, I think most of the guys in the audience were at least cordial to me on the surface.

The next morning at about seven o'clock, I got a call from one of the men who had been in that audience. I had known him for years and knew him to be very close to the sheriff in Pasco County, and I would have considered him to be totally the sheriff's person, but he called and said, I would like to talk to you; I have come to the conclusion that the sheriff here is quite corrupt, and somebody needs to do something about it. I said, well, I am not sure I am your person.... [He said] ... you would be the only one I would really trust, because to do this, I am trusting my job, if not my life. So, I agreed to talk to him that day, and he and his wife came to the house that day, put their car in our garage so nobody could see it, and they spent the entire day telling me, with some documentation, of the broad outlines of what they thought was going on there.

C: Did she also work for the sheriff?

M: No, she just came along with him. In fact, she became an important part. She became a conduit. As things developed and got hot, she and I would often both go shopping at Belk's at the mall, and when we went to try on clothes, she would pass under the booths in the fitting rooms, in the ladies' room, the documents that he would need to get to me, or I would hand back stuff to him, because most of the people that the sheriff assigned to follow me were male. We just found that was a good way to circumvent them.

C: Was that your idea?

FNP 48 page 15

M: Yes. It sort of came to pass because she was supposed to meet me at the mall to give me some documents he was sending, and we realized I was being followed when we got there. So, I just got out of my car and went into Belk's, and she came in behind me. We saw the guy come in following us. I do not know whether he knew who she was or not, but we did not speak to each other. I picked up the first item of clothing I came to and went into the fitting room, and she followed. I do not think they ever caught on to what we were doing because we never acknowledged each other's presence, but we did it a number of times over the years that passed. We had all kinds of ways of trading documents. Sometimes he would drop them in my mailbox at night and put the flag up to let me know he had been by, so that when we went out to get the paper in the morning and saw that the flag was up, we would know there were new documents in the mailbox. There was one hilarious incident where he was trying to deliver an entire box of documents that he had come upon to me. I had parked my car and left it unlocked in a K-Mart parking lot and had gone in the store. I was tooling around the store and, usually, whoever was following me would follow me into wherever I went. So, the guys who were following me had come into the store. I looked out the window of the K-Mart and saw that as he was transferring this box of documents from his car to mine, he dropped the whole damn box and was scampering around in the parking lot getting them picked up. So, we had some near hilarious misses.... I warned everybody from the beginning that we were dealing with a sheriff who absolutely hated me and the minute he were to see me on his tail, he would assume the worst and be the worst. So they decided that I should follow the story, primarily because of the source that was there. This was March of 1983, and I thought any story that was done

FNP 48 page 16

should be finished and in the paper before the end of 1983, because 1984 was an election year and I did not want whatever we did to be perceived as an election attack. I still think that is a very important part. It is a real problem for journalists. You get the most negative information on a public official during an election campaign, [but] it is absolutely the worst time to unveil it because the politician can say, oh, those are just my political enemies after me, so that [the story] gets, in a sense, the least credibility at that time....

About this same time, the captain of that department was indicted with Santos Trafficante [Mafia mob boss from Tampa], and one of his allegations was that a lot of the members of that department had organized-crime ties and that the department had done inadequate backgrounds on them. I went over with this original source the entire 300 or so men who worked for the department in a roster of them which he had provided and identified the ones he thought had a problem of some kind.... I decided that I would have to do background, certainly on these that [were suspicious]. I began working in Tallahassee at police standards. At the time, they had to file with the state a copy of the officer's birth certificate, training records, employment history, a number of various pieces of information that included any prior arrest record and their fingerprints, and they ran them. I was able to get a basic look at each sworn officer by doing that.... Then I took the ones who were either in leadership positions, had rank, or had been in some sort of trouble or who had been identified to me as potential trouble sources and did a more thorough background on them. What I found by doing that was that one in every eight officers had a criminal arrest record. More than half of them had lied about

FNP 48 page 17

that arrest record to get certified as cops. That did not include things like DUIs [driving under the influence arrests]. I took only criminal arrest records, non-traffic and non-DUI. And [nothing] juvenile. One of them, in particular, had been arrested by some of the officers he was now working side by side with, for theft-related [reasons], like stealing stuff that he was caught in possession of. One of them had been a Hernando County deputy.... At the time he went to work in Pasco, his driver's license was suspended, he had an arrest record for theft, and he was given a badge and gun and a green light to drive in Pasco County. My favorite of the deputies was a guy who had been the wheel man in several armed robberies in Tampa, and the Tampa cops had given him immunity from prosecution because he ratted out his co-workers in several armed robberies. When he was caught, he tried to kill himself, missed, and shot out a hole in the side of his trailer. So he was a guy who ratted out his co-defendants, was an armed robber to start with, or the wheel man for them, and a bad shot. He could not even kill himself when he tried. He was wearing a badge and gun in Pasco County. One of them had an outstanding grand theft arrest warrant for stealing the police dog when he left a similar job in the Keys. He had stolen the dog. I mean, most of them were funny if you were not thinking of the liability that the department was creating for itself there.

One of them had been a sheriff's deputy in the Keys who had been drunk and high on cocaine and had a minor traffic accident and pulled a gun on an elderly couple who were involved in the accident. The couple fled into a Holiday Inn. A trooper arrived on the scene and had a dramatic description of this deputy holding a gun out at the crowd. The trooper called on him to drop the gun, and he turned toward the trooper

FNP 48 page 18

aiming this .38. The trooper, just at the moment he was about to fire, thinking that he was going to have to kill this guy, recognized him as a local sheriff's deputy and managed to get him to drop the gun, rather than simply shooting him. But they let him resign and go on his way, and Pasco picked him up without ever determining that about his background, although it was clearly in the public records of Monroe County.

C: That kind of drama is a Lucy Morgan trademark that pops up in your stories.

M: Yes.... He [Jack Reed, assigned to assist Morgan by the St. Petersburg Times] was a Pasco reporter covering the county commission in Pasco. So what I did was assign him the financial side of it. You can get an idea when you are looking at public officials; this was a sheriff who had been a city police chief, [and] he had been in the public arena most of his adult life; he had come into office with a net worth of, say, \$70,000 [and] within a few years, earning nothing more than the salary we knew about, he had become worth \$300,000 or \$400,000, net worth, and acquired a lot of property. He had not inherited any; his family was very poor. He had been through three divorces, I think. So, just looking at his financial disclosures, you knew there was something going on in this, other than him being a law enforcement officer.... We found, as a matter of fact, that he would put the departmental money in a bank; often on the same day, he would get loans of \$400,000 or \$500,000 from this bank to invest in private property schemes. He got himself extensively involved in the ownership of a small shopping mall, of a funeral home, of a lot of property. He was way overextended and making a bunch of money on the side. Some of the people who worked with him,

FNP 48 page 19

like his partner in the funeral home, was the guy who he assigned to be his administrative chief in the office, who was supposedly doing backgrounds and did such a poor job with backgrounds....

We also found... a part-time deputy who bought his own patrol car and his own gun and his uniform and put himself on the road and directed a lot of investigations, some of them against his enemies. This was an eccentric millionaire, who was almost running the department, or at least running the things he wanted to run, and the sheriff was letting him. He gave the sheriff a house and a lot of other things....

I knew he hated me because I had caught him with his pants down before. But I also knew, because of that dislike for me, that everything we wrote better damn well be exactly right and documented.

C: And he did sue.

M: Oh yes, but I required from the very beginning that nothing go into print that did not have a paper document to support it or a taped interview, that there would be no unnamed sources [and] there would be nothing we could not simply prove in a court of law. I had covered the courts for years, so that became my standard, that it had to be something that would pass muster as evidence, and we did that. Nothing in that series, which began running in December of 1983 and wound up in April of 1984, was un-sourced. I mean, you could use it as a textbook case. He did ultimately sue us. We itemized and numbered to inventory 14,000 and some documents, when it got down to the lawyers.... We won a jury trial. [It is] very rare to win a jury trial in a libel case, but

FNP 48 page 20

the jury came back and said, each and every fact challenged was absolutely true. It cost us a fortune to defend it, but we won it in the end. I suspect that is a deterrent to a lot of other people who might file libel suits.... We won the legal fees back out of it, and we always give legal fees to charity when we win. It was a great victory....

C: What was it like to learn that your work has won the Pulitzer Prize, in 1985?

M: It is interesting. I had never even thought about a Pulitzer. I had never thought about contests. I had never entered one myself. I did not know that the Dixie County stuff was heading in that direction. I remember when he was editing the Dixie County stuff, Rob Hooker had jokingly said, Lucy, this stuff is either going to win you a Pulitzer or get you killed.... I had been through so much torment in that project. Not only were the stories good and it was fun to report, it was a tremendous strain to report on a sheriff in a county in which you lived. He waged a vehement attack against me, us, the *Times*. He had bumper stickers out that said, Screw Lucy Morgan, and, I Do Not Believe the *St. Petersburg Times*. I mean, he waged a lot of personal attacks. His friends threatened and were very aggressive toward my daughter-in-law and her baby who lived there at the time, threatening her, terrified her several times. On occasion, they would give me a description of what my grandchild had worn to daycare. There were just all kinds of threats that came with that project.

... Anyway, the day after the Pulitzers were announced, I came into work and Dick said, a source wants you to meet for lunch and asked me if I would come with you, (he) has something to talk about the sheriff's thing....I thought, I really do not want another source on this sheriff's department; I am tired of this story; go away. But, I went to

FNP 48 page 21

lunch, and when we got to Pappas, Gene Patterson and Andy Barnes, our then executive editor, were waiting with champagne to tell me. ...The *Times* gave me an immediate pay raise, I think of \$100 a week. The editor I worked for spent the rest of the week beating the weekender I had promised him out of me, because there are so many distractions. You learn quickly that it is the next story that is important, not the one you just finished.

M: [In 1985, Lucy Morgan became head of the Tallahassee bureau of the St. Petersburg Times]. So I went from looking at drug smugglers and public corruption and organized-crime into state government and politics. Somehow, it seems like a natural transition. The drug smugglers were more candid than the state officials to deal with. But it has been an easy transition, and it has been a lot of fun, because I have been able to take the investigative techniques that I developed along the way and apply them to state government. It is amazing how much you find when you do not take what comes to you at face value.

C: What are your observations about the various governors and administrations that you have covered?

M: It has been interesting. Graham [Bob Graham, Governor of Florida, 1979-1987] was by then very comfortable as governor. He was very open. Of all the governors that have come along, he was the most accessible, of those we have had since then. We

FNP 48 page 22

had free run of even his office, except for his own office. We could go down and talk to the top of his staff without having to go through a gatekeeper. In fact, we were invited to the mansion more than we wanted to go. We always paid. We still do that; when we are invited to the mansion, we go and eat or drink whatever is going on there and make a donation to the mansion fund equivalent to it to pay for it.....

Our policy at the *Times* is, we take nothing from nobody, and, believe it or not, that is sometimes hard to do. I adhere to the policy. Sometimes, I simply am in the position of handing cash to a lobbyist who has picked up the tab. I do not have a clue what he is doing with it, but I know that I have paid my share. In the case of a governor, you can usually make a donation to somebody. I recently went to Israel with Governor [Jeb] Bush [Florida governor, 1999-present], and I was faced with a situation where Holland & Knight's [law firm] Israel office was paying for some of the meals we were having. I did not want to be rude but what I did when we got back was make a donation to Holland & Knight's Holocaust Fund. You usually find some appropriate way to repay the money.... Where possible, we buy our own tickets. I recently went to the Sugar Bowl to tag along with [Talbot] "Sandy" D'Alemberte, the FSU president [1994-present], and there were a number of functions, one, a dinner which we paid \$150 to get into which was not worth \$150. I paid for my game ticket, \$125. I thought clearly the game ticket was worth it. [FSU won the national championship in 1993.]

C: You were chosen to be a member of the Times board. What does that mean to you? What does that represent?

FNP 48 page 23

M: It was interesting. My whole career, I have been overly frank with everybody everywhere. It is just my nature to be too frank. I had always assumed that there would be a day when I would get fired for being too frank, that I would call some editor a shithead who had really been a shithead. I had been really fortunate over the years at the *Times* that most of the editors I had worked for had been people who could take it when I dished it out. I had just assumed that trait in me would get me fired some day. Well, Barnes [Andy Barnes, managing editor?] calls me in, in the summer of 1991, and says.... I want to put you on the board of directors. To my knowledge, there is no reporter anywhere in anybody's organization that has crossed over that line and been put on a board like that. My immediate response was to say, Andy, I do not think you are ready for anybody who is as frank as I am to sit on that board. He swelled up like a toad and said, you really do underestimate me; that is why I want you on this board.

C: Talk about your observations of Lawton Chiles' administration and your coverage of his funeral.

M: I think [when] Chiles came into office, all of us had great hope that this was sort of dream governor. You had a governor and a lieutenant governor with Buddy MacKay who were enormously experienced, had good reputations, and came back from the dead, so to speak, to run this state and did nothing with that.

C: Did you think he was going to win that election?

FNP 48 page 24

M: Yes. I thought from the moment he entered, he would to win. Martinez was not a charismatic governor. I think that Martinez would have won re-election if Chiles had not come in, that Chiles essentially came in and saved the Democratic party from itself. In a sense, he also killed it.... But Chiles had this sort of mystical quality about him that made people just worship him, just lots of charisma.... I think the liberals saw him as a guy who would be willing to pass taxes and to do the uncomfortable things that needed to be done to govern. The conservatives saw him as still sort of a good old boy.

Actually, I think the conservatives were more right. I think Lawton Chiles was basically a good old boy from Polk County who was most comfortable around his own cronies. The people he appointed to jobs were generally his cronies, not necessarily the people best qualified for the job. I think he made a lot of mistakes. I think he generated a lot of goodwill, and that may have been his best asset.... I think much of his time as governor, he was not interested in the day-to-day job of governing. I think he liked being governor and liked using that role for things he was really interested in, but there was not a whole lot that interested him....

The biggest disappointment that I had in Lawton [was] I had always assumed him to be very ethical. When he went in, he established this rule for his staff that nobody could take anything valued at more than, like, \$2.50 from anybody, which was a great standard to establish in government, where you had, for contrast, legislators taking expensive meals and trips and bottles of wine and everything from lobbyists and [coming] under fire for [this]. So, it was a great contrast, but Chiles did not himself adhere to that standard. He took free hunting trips, free trips to games. He took free shotguns and things from sugar interests. So it was a disappointing contrast. I think he

FNP 48 page 25

saw himself above the fray. There was a sort of arrogance to him, where he thought, these things do not influence me, so I do not need to have a rule. The standard that he set for the people who saw that happening was poor.

C: What about the cast of characters in the legislature that you have observed during the time you have been bureau chief. Dempsey [J.] Barron, for example, President of the Senate?

M: I enjoyed Dempsey a lot. Unlike many people in the legislature, Dempsey was pretty frank about what he was doing and where he was going. You could disagree with what he wanted to do, but he knew how to use the process to reach an end, probably better than anybody since then has ever achieved. Dempsey knew how to horse-trade and how to get something done. He knew what everybody wanted, and he knew how to trade what one senator wanted for what another senator had and how to use that to get a bill through the system....

He and I had a great relationship. When his office would get too filled with lobbyists wanting something, Dempsey would call me and say, would you drop by? Of course, the minute I would come and start to spend a little time in there, the lobbyists would leave, so I was the periodic cleaner-out of lobbyists who did not want to ask for favors in front of me.... When there was a huge power struggle in 1986 over who would become the Senate president, Ken Jenne had thirty-nine signed pledges from members of the Senate to make him president of the Senate. He never achieved that position because Dempsey overthrew him. I was sitting in Dempsey's office when I realized that

FNP 48 page 26

it was final because the sergeant-at-arms delivered to Dempsey the parking cards for the chairman of the rules committee and the leadership positions for Dempsey to distribute to whoever he wanted to have them. The key to all power in Tallahassee is the best parking spots....

I watched him bring all of the [legislative] process to a halt in the final week or ten days of session because an elderly retired teacher from FSU—Ms. Fay Kirtland was her name—was lobbying for a group of retired teachers who had been left out of a benefit by some sort of timing problem: they had retired in a certain year, and there were a few years where they did not get adequate health insurance.... So, it appealed to Dempsey not only to give Ms. Fay an appointment but to bring the whole budget process to a halt until somebody was willing to put the item in that would fix this little problem for Ms. Fay and her retired teachers, most of them elderly women spinsters who contributed a dollar to Dempsey's campaigns each time. Dempsey was perfectly capable of using his power for that kind of person as he was for the head of St. Joe Paper Company or somebody. I think it probably amused him more to use his power in moments like that than it did for the big-deal people.... I think that is part of what made him such a charming political character; he learned how to deal with the powerful people in this world and the little people in this world he had once been part of. Early on, when I first came here in 1986, I was appalled by the free stuff that legislators took from lobbyists, including Dempsey. I mean, they could eat every meal, just constant gifts of things. They took them on trips, hunting or golfing or whatever else they wanted to do.

C: Did you write about it?

M: Yes. In 1987, I decided to compare the gifts that legislators reported getting with the gifts lobbyists reported giving. The law required a legislator to report any gift valued at more than \$25. The lobbyists were supposed to report the aggregate, but they did not have to identify who got the gift. I know you would be shocked to know that there was a difference of several million dollars in what was reported given against what was reported gotten. I kept notes during the course of the year when I saw a legislator leaving on a trip with a lobbyist or something like that so that I had some basis, but I did a story. At the time, it was a criminal misdemeanor for a legislator, or any public official, to violate that law. Well, the legislature's reaction to the stories I wrote in 1987 on this problem was to go back into the law in 1988 and eliminate the criminal penalty from the law and raise the amount of the gift they could take to \$100....

Dempsey always preached that a trip was not a gift, that you could not make that comparison, which, I think, even Dempsey knew that was a ludicrous position to take. But, one morning in the midst of all my reporting and questioning the legislators about this, Dempsey calls me at the office about nine-thirty and he says, Lucy, you are right. He said, last night, I went out with a bunch of lobbyists, and they bought this huge steak dinner with a big baked potato with all this sour cream, and I drank all kinds of whiskey throughout dinner, and after dinner, they bought me all these fancy after-dinner drinks, and I drank all this brandy and stuff. And, he said, this morning, I feel like a bouquet of dog-asses; I should not have taken those [gifts].... That is the way Dempsey was. I also think that Dempsey, somewhat like Lawton Chiles, saw himself as unreachable by this largesse. He felt that everybody gave him things and that none of them bought him by

FNP 48 page 28

doing it, that it was an entitlement....

Lobbyists at that time were, I thought, tremendously demeaning of themselves. You would see them cleaning up the garbage or serving drinks or slicing the ham, doing things like this at events that Dempsey or other legislators had....The successful lobbyists were those who could drive them around, extricate legislators from drunken incidents, pave the way for them to get from point A to point B, or, if it was a legislator's birthday, stage a party for him....

C: Who is the lobbyist of 2000?

M: ... At the turn at the century, the best lobbyists are those who thoroughly know the issue, know the process, and know the member.... But, as term-limits impact [politics], the one underlying influence that is always going to be there is the lobbyist who has contributed money to the campaign and has gotten his clients to do it. [A good lobbyist]... will help them raise money, help them run whatever campaign functions they need done. He cultivates the secretaries everywhere in the building. He will be sure they get an appropriate gift at times, nothing lavish, flowers or candy at the right moment....

M: [Morgan talked about finding hidden items in legislation].... I love to find those little buried treasures in a bill. Unfortunately, I fear that we find very few of them. These things are put into complex bills that relate to insurance and very dull issues and things that you think are not interesting at all. I think a lot of things get into law that you just do

FNP 48 page 29

not realize until later, way down the road, you see the impact, if you see it at all.

C: Are they also more overwhelmed the closer you get to the end of session?

M: Yes, you have so many bills and so many issues floating around that it is very easy to technically tweak a bill, to greatly benefit one business or another. Most legislators do not have the time or the expertise to understand what a little tweak here or there does on the other end once something gets into law. In these last-minute amendments, you do not have any staff to analyze them most of the time so that it gets onto the bill, usually in the final week of session or the final day of session, and it gets into law without anybody really having looked at the consequences of it;.... Ideally, any change in the law ought to go through that process where it is heard at public hearing and staff can analyze it and you know what it is going to do at the other end. In fact, that does not always happen....

C: Do you see yourself [as a journalist] as having a leadership role, a responsibility?

M: I have always felt that a reporter had to set an example, that if I am going to throw rocks at a public official who misbehaves, I need to be behaving. I cannot establish a different standard of behavior for myself, so that I have always expected to be arrested if I broke the law, to have a listed phone number, to meet the criteria that I would expect of a public official. I have always tried to live by a standard that is, if not above reproach, as close there as I could get....

C: One of the quotes attributed to you was, it has been an enormous benefit being a Southern woman dealing with good old boys; when they hear that Hattiesburg accent, they think you do not have a brain in your head.

M: ... When I open my mouth and speak Southern, it is disarming to the average man who has been in control of the world and not expecting women to play much of a role in that. They assume I have no brain when they hear this Southern brogue, until it is too late. Many times, I have had men just walk themselves out on a limb, terribly, and get caught out there lying to me or being dumb, because I am smart enough to catch them doing it. And they just haven't realized it. I would much rather be underestimated than overestimated....

C: Are a lot of your sources uneasy or on edge, just because you are Lucy Morgan and you have the reputation? Are they wary of you?

M: Yes, people are wary of me. People tell me, the worst thing in the world is to come in your office and have a message that Lucy Morgan is looking for you. But I think the people who have a reason to be wary, are wary of me, if they have done something they know that I could catch them doing that is wrong. People who have gone about their business in an honest fashion, and have done the best they could, do not worry about me. They understand that I will be fair.... Public officials get shot at from every angle all the time, and I know that. I do not want to be guilty of picking on them for

FNP 48 page 31

minor offenses. When I shoot at them, I want to load the gun, and I generally have that reputation. ... Generally any public official who knows me well knows that when I call, it is serious. They better return the call; there is a reason to call me back...

[Being a journalist means]...you have to develop a tough hide. People are going to yell at you when they are caught doing things wrong. Usually, the lower they are in the food chain, the city councilmen will squeal the most, because they are the least experienced at having bad things written about them. I can go into almost any town and tell you whether there is a good newspaper there, because if it is easy to get public records, if public officials are responsive and appear to be candid, odds are there is a pretty good newspaper working there....

[Having worked for the St. Petersburg Times for thirty-two years]... I cannot imagine working for a company that was... restrictive on whether you could spend money or what options you could take. I think I would have a lot of trouble there. Those are the kind of horror stories I am hearing out of the chains these days, and it frightens me terribly for the future journalism, because those people who work for them are very disheartened. There is no *esprit de corps*. There is no fun for them in what they are doing. The *Times* has let me pursue stories and things that are fun. I mean, why should I look anywhere else?....I mean, the Times is often branded as being arrogant. Well, I think we are different and, in many ways, we are better, because of our independence.... We can make decisions fast, and a lot of our people can make decisions.

C: Can you think of anything that having a journalism degree or a bachelor's or

FNP 48 page 32

master's degree or a law degree would have added to your capability doing this job?

M: I am sure it would have made me better educated. Most of my education has come from the two-year degree and the reading I have done, probably far above that, but I would have liked to have had it. I think that it gives you credibility that you do not have without it. I guess I have a Pulitzer instead of a degree. That gives me some credibility. But I think a basic education is now a requirement. I probably could not get a job at the St. Petersburg Times with my basic credentials now. The competition for jobs, for good jobs, is so high that I think you have to have that basic degree to have the credibility to go beyond it.

C: What have we not talked about that is of interest about Lucy Morgan?

M: It may be clear, but I think that reporting becomes a highly personalized thing, whether you want it to or not. There are lots of people in the Capitol who will tell their secrets to me but not to my staff. So I think reporters most of all need to be nice to people, need to develop that line of contact so people feel free to talk to them. If I fail to teach that to people I speak to, I have failed at everything. I do not think there is any need for the arrogance I see among some reporters and journalists.... I think we need to be nice to people, respectful of them, and ask them for information rather than demand it. Only in that way can we be successful in getting to the bottom of what we are doing and finding all the information. Nothing turns off the average person who possesses information like the arrogance of a reporter who comes in demanding

FNP 48 page 33

something.

SAMUEL PROCTOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

FLORIDA NEWSPAPER PROJECT

Interviewee: Lucy Morgan

Interviewer: Jean Chance

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