

TOMMY GREENE

BIOGRAPHY

Tommy Greene was born in Madison County, Florida, on October 28, 1938, the son of a timber merchant who claimed to be the largest distributor of railroad cross-ties in the southeastern United States. Green grew up poor and spent his youth in the swamp extracting turpentine or logging lumber. He later told friends, "I may not have been born in a log cabin, but as soon as we could afford one, we moved." He graduated from Madison High School in 1957 only because, as he explained, my dad "had something pretty heavy on the superintendent" and "with my wife slipping me notes, I got out of high school."

After attending North Florida Junior College, Jacksonville University and Mercer University, Greene entered the army and was honorably discharged in 1962. After giving up on the farming and turpentine business, Greene decided, although he had no experience whatsoever, to begin a local newspaper. He founded his first paper, the Madison County Carrier, on August 5, 1964. Greene then began buying and opening up other newspapers across the panhandle of Florida, including his competitor, the Madison Enterprise Reporter.

Over the years Tommy Green has established himself as one of the state's most colorful characters. He always wears green, down to his underwear and socks. His office, his truck and his pen are green. His daughter is named Emerald and one son is John Deere. He lives in a green house, eats green grits and explains: "If it ain't green, it ain't mine." He explained his choice of a monochromatic life: "I don't have what it takes

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to compete with the average person out there. If I hadn't been different, I would have been a flop."

Greene believes in a conservative philosophy and resents government intrusion in the private lives of its citizens. He sends back all the money he receives from the government, including checks for jury duty and military disability. He also plans to refuse Social Security. "That way I can write an editorial about welfare, and I'm not a preacher who sobered up Sunday morning so he can preach about drunks." He vehemently attacks welfare. "It lets you earn more with a houseful of bastards than with a pen full of hogs." Greene also favors capital punishment. "The last public hanging was right here in Madison County. If I was the supreme ruler, I would bring 'em back. I would execute all criminals - shoplifters, you name it - and all their lawyers, and then we would rid the country of thieves and we could sleep with our windows open."

Over time, Greene has branched out into billboards, real estate development, cattle, a retail store, nursery, self-storage warehouses, farming, and a hunting and fishing lodge. He set up Madison County's community-access television, the first such station in Florida. When asked about the details of his business ventures, Greene declines comment. "You're waking up dogs that people don't even know is asleep."

Throughout his career, Green has made it a habit to stick up for underdogs and "to do good for the community." He was the youngest president of the Florida Press Association and over the years has been very active in community affairs: Chairman of the Greater Madison County Chamber of Commerce; president of the Madison County Development Authority, co-founder of a charter school; a Boy Scout and Explorer Troop

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Leader; founder and president of the Madison Museum and many other too numerous to mention. He has won many journalistic awards and, in 1994, was Madison County's Citizen of the Year. He is currently drawing and painting, working on a history of Madison County and is recording his memoirs - The Belly Side of Me and My Trashy Friends.

SUMMARY

Mr. Green discusses his early life in the turpentine industry and how he came to lose his enthusiasm for the farming life, as well as how he decided upon the newspaper industry for his next venture. He also describes how he managed to set his newspaper apart from its competition and subsequently build a network of local papers throughout northern Florida. Mr. Greene's involvement in the Florida Press Association is treated at length, as well as his love for, and commitment to, his home of Madison County. Throughout the interview, Mr. Greene's patriotism, conservatism, instinctive business sense and his off-beat colorful personality are displayed to full effect.

Thomas H. Greene, Jr. was interviewed by Julian M. Pleasants on June 27, 2000 in Madison, Florida.

P: Describe for me your early life. What was it like?

G: I grew up in the shadow of my daddy's sawmill.... and so I grew up in the crosstie swamps and the turpentine woods. As I got older, then we got to poleing, or logging the

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big timbers for the big poles like went around the football fields and these big utility poles.

P: Was working with those logs pretty dangerous work?

G: Yes, sir. In fact, it's one of the most hazardous businesses in America, as I understand.

P: And you had one bad incident where you got trapped under some logs. Would you tell me about that?

G: Yes, sir. After I got out of the military, I came back and married my childhood sweetheart. We went all through school together. I was logging by day and farming by night, and we were top-loading.... [Y]ou take a tractor... and... pull the logs up on top of the load of logs that you were going to haul out of there on the truck. The load shifted on me and pinned me under it, and I thought I was dead, but the good Lord saved me.... I promised God I'd never go back to logging if he'd get me out of those woods alive. He did and I've kept my promise.

P: Who did you hire to help with the turpentine business?

G: You hire only turpentine folks. There's a certain, you can call it, a breed or certain kind of people that just do that. That's what they want to do, carrying those one-sided buckets. You go through and make your rounds... all the way through these woods, and a lot of it is down at the edge of the swamps. But you cut your trail; it looks like animal trails, but it is big enough for a man to walk through.... You try to make your rounds so that when you get back to the wagon, you've got a full bucket.... It took strong men to do this because it's hot down there. You're working them in the summertime. You're

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constantly pulling and chipping, and then when you're dipping, you're carrying that heavy bucket. You're down in that heavy overbrush. There is zero wind blowing, no wind. You got the sun bearing down from the top, and it's like cooking in an oven down there. So people that turpented were an unusual breed...

One problem we would have is stealing families, where the other turpentine woodsmen would come in and steal your help through the middle of the night, just load them up, because all of these people that were turpentiners would wind up getting heavy in debt. They were kind of a hand-to-mouth people. So, you would go to pick them up the next morning, and the house would be empty....

I (once)thought we was going to stake out one of our houses where we had found out somebody was coming,(to steal one of his families)... and we were going to wait on those people, which we did, and we caught them. It wasn't unusual when they backed the truck up to unload one of our houses; we'd just walk up there and shoot the tires out from the truck and send them walking. Then they would have to come get the truck the next morning, and that's when we'd have the law waiting on them to explain our law. ...

P: Talk about your early education

G: ... As hard and conservative as I am today, which came, I am sure, out from my daddy's shadow. I got what some would consider an extremely liberal education extremely young in life. That made me a better man to get into the newspaper business, of which I knew absolutely nothing about, because I knew that failure was not an option in anything I went after....

I started off at Madison Elementary ... and went all the way through. I failed one

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grade. I never was much [of] a student. Reading and spelling, to this day, I don't do well. Nothing leaves my desk that my wife doesn't proof. She majored in English—they say that's the reason I married her. I mean, I do not spell. I write.... I've got some movies that I'm working on now and some short stories and a novel. But spelling is out of the question....

P: You studied criminal justice at one point. How did you get into that and why?

G: After I got into the newspaper business... I wound up doing all the photography work for all the various branches of law enforcement here and gave them the pictures. So I wound up being able to work crime scenes, in the beginning, just from what they told me to do. Then I studied it, and we knew what to look for.... Well, during that time, and this was back in the 1970s, they had a big cattle ring going on in the state of Florida. They were stealing cattle, which was big business, and it was big crime. And I've made front page notes of this a number of times and there's not a judge in this country that can get confidentiality out of me, when I tell somebody what they tell me is confidential, I would look forward to rotting in jail before I'd tell a grand jury or anybody else. Now I'm locked in on that solid. My word is absolutely my bond when it comes to somebody telling me something that's private, which has helped me....

P: What did you do when you returned to Madison after military service?

G: The only thing I knew was the woods..... I was turpentineing and logging and pulpwooding in the daytime. Then I had lights on all my farm equipment, and I'd farm at night and then reserve Sunday morning for church and Sunday afternoon with getting all my equipment ready so I could get everything back in shape for Monday morning....

On the first of June, I was in the middle of a field, and my wife was there.... I'm out there, hot and sweaty and dirty and grungy and all that, working on an old harrow that should have been in a junk pile. I stood up and I looked over at my wife, and she was trying, you know, she doesn't know anything about mechanics, but she would hand me that wrench when I'd finally show her the one I needed. But she was trying to help, and I just stood up and threw that wrench as far as I could throw it, and I said, there's got to be a better life somewhere. So I walked out of the field, left the harrow and the wrench. I didn't even go back and look for the wrench....

But a few days later, about three-thirty on the morning of July 1, I was sitting up in there as miserable as I've ever been in my life. No job, no work, no nothing but a wife and a brand new baby. [and] I'd already exhausted all of my efforts of trying to find a job. One place up here making hubcaps, a man told me he was laying off, not hiring.... I said, Mr. Musser, I need some work, and I was wondering if you'd hire me, you know, if you have an opening for me. And he said, "no, we're laying off right now, but if we had an opening, if I was looking for somebody, I wouldn't hire you." I was quick-tempered back then, but I stood up and I said, Mr. Musser, I thought we were friends. And he said, "Tommy Greene, we are friends, but you have too much talent to be stamping out hubcaps the rest of your life, and if you get on that assembly line back there, you're going to wind up getting in a rut and you may never leave this place, and I'm not going to do you that injustice. Now, you get out there, and you can find something you can do." He said, "but right now, we're not hiring anyway." When I left there, I didn't know if I was mad.... But he was right. You know, the difference between a grave and a rut is

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that a grave has got both ends closed on you, and the longer you stay in a rut, the closer those ends come.

So I tore open a paper grocery sack one night and made a list of a couple of dozen things I wanted to get into, and I can assure you logging and farming were not two of them.... I listed a bunch of them, and then to the right, I listed all the items I needed for each one of them.... I found office supplies and advertising in every one of the businesses that I wanted to get into. So, I sat there for a few moments and I said, you know, let's see if I can pick out some trees in this forest.... I said, you know, if I got into the office supply business and the newspaper business, I could buy my office supplies for the newspaper wholesale and I could take the newspaper and advertise my office supply store, and, this, to me, is about as close to perpetual motion as I'm going to get....

There was a 100-year-old newspaper in our town, a father-son operation. The son, to me at that time, was an old man. I was twenty-five years old, and he was probably fifty, and his daddy was probably seventy-five. He had a degree from the law school at Harvard. They were wise old men, and I was so full of ignorance and energy, I didn't have sense enough to know that I couldn't make it [purchase and run the paper]. Failure never crossed my mind as an option.

P: What was the name of that paper?

G: The *Madison Enterprise Reporter*, founded in 1865. Anyway, first thing [my wife] told me, she said, "Tommy Greene, you can't spell, you don't read, how do you expect to run a newspaper?" I said, well, if you'll do the spelling and the writing, I'll do the

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drawing and the figuring. I said, I can figure out a way to make this thing work if you'll do the spelling and the writing for me....

They [the newspaper owners] were real friendly and nice to me, but they'd just tell me right quick that new newspapers don't last....The only person [to encourage me was].... Carr Settle in Monticello that had the *Monticello News*. I went in and introduced myself to him, and he said, "I can tell you right now, it's going to be the toughest thing you ever tried, but you're not going to be happy till you can look back and say, at least I tried it, so why don't you go on and... get it out your system...." The more they told me I couldn't do it, there was just something, I don't know, it was like cross wiring a battery, I guess....

Then we went up to Jim Thompson up in Callahan, Florida, and told Mr. Thompson up there that we wanted to put out a newspaper and we understand he had a printing press, but we didn't want anybody to know about it. He says, "well, have you decided if you're going offset or letterpress?" I said, well, Mr. Thompson, really, we haven't made our mind up. He looked at me and he said, "you don't know the difference, do you?" And I said, no, sir. He said, "you two kids are just out for a good time. He said, yeah, we can print you, and the [printing] world [prefers] offset, so let me tell you what you're going to need." So, he took us to a restaurant, and he made out a list there on the napkin of things I needed to get, to get into the newspaper business....

P: Where did you get the capital to get this business started?

G: All my life, from day one and I haven't stopped, I pinched pennies and saved my money. When I would go to the theater, my mother and daddy ... would give me a

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quarter, and my brother, and we would walk across to the theater.... Well, a quarter, it took us \$0.14 to get in the show. We called it the picture show. Then, you could get a cold drink, a Coca-Cola, and a bag of popcorn for a nickel each and bubble gum for a penny.... So, that took up the \$0.25. Well, I'd spend the \$0.14 cents to get in the movie, but I'd put that \$0.11 in my pocket. I never bought a single piece of gum or a single Coca-Cola or a single bag of popcorn. I'd bring that \$0.11 home every Saturday. Plus, my daddy gave us ways that we could make money... I was selling slabs coming off the sawmill for firewood.... So I had a way. The one that my mother never approved of, but my daddy told me that I could do it as long as I was there on the farm, but for me to never do it any other place, and I stuck to that, I always kept cornbuck.... Daddy had a big sugarcane mill and a big evaporator....., so he was selling sugarcane syrup.... Cornbuck, basically, is kind of like beer made with corn, where you shell out your corn and, if you are making good [moon]shine, if you had fifty pounds of corn, you'd put in fifty pounds of sugar.... [W]hen you drain that buck off, you can drink it as beer....

P: So you had saved enough money over the years to start your business.

G: Every time I'd get a jar of money, I'd bury it, and I had money buried. I was going back, digging up jars of money I had buried....

P: Your first edition is August 5, 1964. What was your first paper like?

G: It was an eight-page tabloid. We laid the first paper out on the wrong side of the layout page and didn't know it till we got over there and Mr. Thompson like to have come into a back-flipping fit. It was all black grid, and we were supposed to put it together on a layout table, a light table with the black grids on the bottom side, and we

had them up on the top side. We put an index in it because the other paper didn't have an index, but we forgot to put any page numbers in it. We had a complete page just left vacant, so I took a black magic marker and announced our grand opening, come by for some free drinks and hot dogs.... [and] there was no address or nothing... so nobody knew where we were open. Nobody knew anything. It was a... well, we look back now, and that first paper was quite a joke....

So I started off with one employee, and I was selling advertising through the daytime. When my wife would come in after school, she'd come straight back and she'd proof the ads that I'd brought in.... Then the stories I'd bring in, she'd do the same.

P: You were the reporter and the boss and you two did everything. How did it go initially? Did you get ads right away?

G: The first edition, we got a good many because, you know... I worked at it. Sleep is something, to this day, I've never been fond of.... I resent lying down to go to sleep. It's a total waste of life, in my opinion. The only difference between sleep and death is a heartbeat, and that's always been too close for me....

The first thing, in 1957, when I was going off to school, my mother and daddy gave me... a little old dictionary, and I still got it, carried all through service. It's a little old pocket dictionary, and the first thing I did was mark out those four words: impossible, can't, if, and but. My mother says, what are you doing marking up a brand new dictionary? And I said, I don't want those four words in my book.

P: How long did it take you to become established as a newspaper? I know in the beginning, you gave away the papers. Did that help?

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G: Yes, sir. I mailed them out to every box holder in the county for a year and a half....

P: Were you able to get enough advertising to carry the paper?

G: I still got my first deposit books and records... You can see half of those checks is stamped insufficient funds. So the bank president would call me up and tell me how much I was overdrawn, and I'd just laugh about it. I said, well, you must know that I'm not going to leave because if I'm overdrawn, then apparently I don't have enough money to leave town. The banks worked with me real well because, of course, I grew up here, and they knew my folks....

P: How about the supply store business, was that successful?

G: I bought \$240 worth of discounted office supplies out of the back of a man's truck.... So we started from there, and the office-supply store went real well in the beginning. We kept it for thirty years.

P: What was the name of your paper when you first started?

G: The *Madison County Carrier*, and people told me, as bad as I spelled, I probably meant to say *Courier* and did not know how to spell it. I put a back slant on it, also, a left-handed slant. I'm left-handed, and I just wanted something different. I named it that because we were going to be carrying the news and the advertising and the information for the people of the county. I didn't realize that the word carrier also meant some other bad things. You know, I was a country boy come to town. I was just short of being webfooted when I got up here.

P: Is there a point where your circulation matched the circulation of the established

Madison Enterprise Reporter.

G: It started off greater because I was mailing free to everybody.

P: But once you were charging for the paper?

G: We still continued to print more papers, because I was working stuff as I studied his newspaper. He [*Madison Enterprise Reporter*] was a social-type newspaper. He had a more liberal slant that a lot of country crackers of Madison County liked, which wouldn't be considered liberal under today's standards but, back then, it was. Almost no pictures because they were hot metal.... But he made money.

P: Because he was the established paper?

G: Well, he was the only paper, but after I opened up and I was struggling, I bought nothing that I could make or build myself. When I bought equipment, I saved the packaging—most of it was wooden packaging back then—and I'd build tables, light tables, drying tables, whatever I needed to do. I didn't throw anything away. I even saved the nails that came out of those packages.... We never threw away a piece of paper that was white on one side and had been typed on the other. Everything was used to the max. I guess one reason I stayed in business is that I kept my expenses to the absolute minimum. I worked as close to twenty-four hours a day as I could work. Our office had an old hard concrete floor out there, and I'd take a stack of newspapers and lie down on that floor and put those papers under my head for a pillow and set my clock for fifteen minutes or ninety minutes later. That seemed to have been the two times that I could wake up feeling good....

P: Did the competition make him any better?

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G: I think so... That was a fine old gentlemen [T. C. Merchant, Sr, the owner and publisher] that had his own niche, and it worked. It really did. So what I had to do was something different, so I wound up putting blood-and-gut pictures on the front page: car wrecks, murders, bodies, hard-hitting editorials about this government that was caving in on us.... I wrote all my own editorials. I'd write them usually late at night, and when I'd go home to wake my wife up to get her ready for school, she would proof them for me....

[One time]... we didn't get called [by the police to cover] the bust up [of] a liquor still.... I got a call at three o'clock that morning, and someone told me, did you know there was a liquor still busted yesterday afternoon... And I said, we didn't know anything about it. Because I encouraged people to call, my motto was, put Tommy Greene on the scene, twenty-four hours a day. My motto was, if it happened in Madison County, I wanted to be there. I didn't care what time it was.

P: Would the police usually call you?

G: Yes. I worked with them hand and glove, rode with them, backed them up when it came to fights.... I always worked hand-in-hand with law enforcement and still do. So when I found out that the sheriff had gone out there and busted a liquor still—we were getting ready to go to press the next morning—I just wrote a front-page notice that I knew nothing about this liquor still. [And] did the sheriff own part of it? You'd have to ask him. I asked a whole bunch of really intimidating questions. Had the sheriff been involved with other liquor operations in the county? Don't know, have to ask him, and all the way through. All of these things that -I didn't say that he did any of it, but I asked

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those questions, and every time I'd put his night number and his office number and told them that both phones were twenty-four-hour-a-day phones. Of course, when the paper hit the street, he pitched a fit. I told him, next time, you call me... That got his attention, and we were called from then on.

P: What day did you publish?

G: I hit the street Wednesday night, Thursday morning was the paper date.... We was primarily a Madison County deal, and my theory was that if the moon fell, we didn't care unless it messed up fishing in Madison County, Florida, or somebody from Madison was on that moon. Our target was Madison County, Florida, and its people.

P: And was that enough?

G: ... [we] survived ... because, to this day, if the United States bombed Canada, we'd probably have something to say about it, but that's not of interest to us. It's of interest to me as an individual, but as far as that newspaper, if somebody wants to know about Madison County, Florida, then we've got the only thing in town....

P: And what happened to the *Madison Enterprise Recorder*?

G: The other newspaper thrived and continued on, and nobody could understand why, because no town is big enough for two newspapers. But, again, he was so unique and unusual, and, I guess, as I look back, I was also. Mine was in the extreme opposite direction. The bigger somebody was, the quicker I wanted to take them on, and the people out there, by nature, they may tell you they don't want to see blood, guts, and fights, but you let one break out in a grandstand and see if they continue to watch the football game or if they look at that fight. You know? I mean, it's just human nature. And

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I guess it was the competitiveness in me, ... my daddy's raising, that, you know, we didn't come out of those swamps 'till we got what we went in there after.

P: But they finally closed down?

G: He sold out to a [con]glomerate, and then that [con]glomerate sold out in 1983....

P: When did you start buying other newspapers, and which ones did you purchase? Obviously, you had at that point made a success of the local paper in Madison, correct?

G: The first one that I bought was one that we were printing here, the *Mayo Free Press* [purchased August 5, 1976] which was also an extremely old paper....

P: Your second paper?

G: My second paper was the following January 10. I bought the *Branford News*.... I went to Lake City and bought it from Tom Haygood.... We put the deal together pretty fast. He said, yeah, I'll sell it, and I said, okay. I said, here, let me give you some money down on it, and he said, no, I don't need it. And I put a \$100 bill, and I said, let me give you \$100 right now; just write me a receipt out as a down payment and the balance due, and I'll get you this money back, how about in the morning? He said, well, fine.... I don't know what was in me that day, but on the way back to Madison, I came through Madison and I saw a city block there that was vacant. So I... bought that city block.... I came home and told my wife that we had bought the Branford paper and the city block uptown, and that was another one of those fine times when I thought she was going to leave me....

[The next paper was when]... I drove over to White Springs and got me a post office box and telephone number and ... went over there and parked my motor home in

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a trailer park over there... and spent a week over there, and I opened up the *White Springs Leader*....

P: Was there a paper there at all?

G: No, sir.

G: ... I eventually put it [*White Springs Leader*] up for sale and ... just closed it, pulled out of there.... That's during that time when Judge Smith in Lake City, the circuit judge, was accused of the big dope dealings and served some time for it and all this big drug trafficking was going on. We didn't know it, but the old hotel that was there was the main headquarters. My newspaper staff, and I were not aware of this, until they all of a sudden just quit. Everyone just quit on me. I found out later, the little girl... had been given threatening(warnings)-our phones were tapped (as) she was doing an investigation on this Judge Smith and all these other people and was writing all these heavy hard-hitting stories. I told them, I said you know, if it doesn't rattle some cages, it's not worth writing; I want some cages rattled. So we just got threatened out of business, and I didn't realize it till after the fact, or I think I would've moved over there and probably wound up getting waylaid one night. It got real serious because that was during the time that a Mr. Gate went missing, the road guard... and they found him tied to a tree and executed, a bullet in the back of his head. She was doing a story on that, and we had run the pictures down in those woods. There was three or four different people who'd gotten killed during that time, so, yes, it was serious business. My advertising lady, who lives here in Madison now,... she was the heartbeat of the profits. She could sell snow to an Eskimo....

P: What finally happened to the *Madison Enterprise Recorder*?

G: [Here Greene talks about his competition with the *Madison Enterprise Recorder*] ... the [con]glomerate had moved in a girl in here [as publisher] that... must have been raised on blood because she went after mine.... So, that's why I brought my people in and I said, we're getting ready to go twice a week, and we're going to start today. This was a Monday morning. I said, Friday, we will have a second paper on the street. That's what I've always done. We've always moved. Let's do it now! Don't plan to do it, because if you plan to do it, then the word gets out and this, that, and the other. So, we just do it. One of the people up there said, what's going to happen if this thing doesn't work out twice a week? I said, then we'll go three times a week, four times a week, five times a week, we'll put [it] out twice daily. That other paper is not going to whip us. They had the finances to do it with, or do it under normal conditions. So we were sitting here, and I was losing money. We fought for two years. The last year, we'd lost \$35,000. They'd lost \$140,000, according to their own spokesman.... So, Mr. Ricketson called me, [and] we went over... and had three different meetings.... In those meetings, I sold him the *Mayo Free Press*... And I bought the *Enterprise Reporter*....

P: Why didn't you merge the two Madison papers?

G: My thought was two things. Number one, I didn't want to give up my baby because it was so well-established, the *Madison County Carrier*. I did not want to close down a legend. The *Madison Enterprise Recorder* had been here since 1865.

P: But they were losing money.

G: They were, under separate ownership. That's when I called my daughter in. My daughter is good with figures.... She became our bookkeeper and our general manager.... I

stopped publishing the *Carrier* on Fridays and came back to once a week with the *Madison County Carrier* and moved ... the *Madison Enterprise Recorder* (also a Wednesday publication because we were butting heads, Wednesday-Wednesday) to a Friday publication. So, rather than putting out two *Madison County Carriers*, one on Wednesday and one on Friday, we're now putting one *Madison County Carrier* out every Wednesday and a *Madison Enterprise Recorder* out every Friday. The *Madison Enterprise Recorder* carries certain columns every week, that these people that like those columns can look forward to, and weekend-type news. We also carry hard front-page news, the same as the *Madison County Carrier* does. And we got certain columns that run in the *Madison County Carrier* every week that do not run in the *Enterprise Recorder*. So, there are two separate banners in one respect, but they are still owned by us.

P: When you started out, what were your ultimate goals for that paper?

G: ... I wanted to let the folks of Madison County know that if it happened in Madison County, Florida, they could read about it in the *Madison County Carrier*, period. I didn't want anything missed, and we worked desperately to cover the county.

P: What do you consider the most important functions of a newspaper?

G: Truth. There's no truth on this planet that I'm afraid of, period, and when I find, especially a government official, elected, hired, appointed, any way shape, fashion or form, that is not totally leveling with me, I instantly smell a skeleton in his closet, and we don't quit digging till we destroy that closet, or find that skeleton. I think the editorial pages, the letters to the editor, are first and foremost. We need pages there that the public can sound off in. We need to be an alarm clock, not to alarm people but to awaken people. Basically,

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we need to be, kind of, a half-breed dog, between a bloodhound that can sniff out wrongdoings in government, and then a bulldog, with an attitude that would be just about like a brain-dead bulldog with lockjaw. We hang in there until we get that story and we expose what's out there....

P: Did you try to balance your editorials with the letters to the editor, so if you took one position, you would print letters representing the other view?

G: Yes, sir. I never answered but one letter to the editor in the same edition, and that came from a feller in Madison who was going to the University of Florida down there and wrote me a letter to the editor and says, I guess you must be an FSU [Florida State University] fan, being that you live so close to FSU. I wrote under and I says, ... I'm going to take exception to my policy and I'm going to answer this letter in the same edition, and that is that when FSU and Florida play one another, I hope they both get beat because neither school let me in. That's the only letter I've ever answered in the same edition. I'd answer in the following [edition], and that does two things. That gives the writer, the author of that letter, the one that's ticked off or whatever the case may be, that sees a different view than I do, gives him an opportunity to express himself without a rebuttal. It gives me an opportunity to come back, and when you get in this type [of] tennis match, then you build readership. You know, what are they going to say next?...

P: So with two papers you now have a much larger staff in terms of reporters and columnists?

G: [Actually] we have a third newspaper, *Madison County News*,... [which] has been established... for about five years. We have a total circulation of nine. The *Madison*

County News that we started about five or six years ago is really a scavenger paper. It's a one sheet, eight and a half by eleven. We run off ten or twelve copies of it. We pick up just stuff that we've run in either the Madison paper or the other paper that's already set up. It takes us about ten or fifteen minutes a week to do it. We've met all the criteria of the post office. It's as legal a newspaper as the *Madison County Carrier* or the *Enterprise Recorder*, so we got three legal newspapers.... A number of years ago, a paper started in here, just one that was coming off of a copy machine, and that came out on a eleven-seventeen folded and was running off 300 copies. So, when they hit the street one week, the following day, we came out with the *Madison County News*. I said, Madison won't have three newspapers unless all three of them's mine.... So, right now, we've got the three legal newspapers. The *Madison County News*... sells for \$0.09 cents a piece in one location, which is our uptown newspaper office. Nobody buys it. The subscriptions are \$100 a year. We have no subscribers. But, it's sitting there, and if we ever need to bring it to life for any reason, it's sitting there idling on the runway.

P: Let's talk about your association with the Florida Press Association [FPA]. You eventually became the youngest president of the Florida Press Association. How did that transpire?

G: Well, our first Press Association [meeting] that we ever went to was in 1965.... My wife and I were both twenty-five years old, and it looked like everybody in that bunch down there was 100. I realize now that they weren't. I just, from the beginning, knew that if we stayed in the newspaper business, we needed to find out something about the newspaper business and that nobody should know better than the people associated with the Florida

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Press Association. I didn't even know that there was a Florida Press Association when we opened up the newspaper business.

Again, I stayed in the newspaper business out of sheer energy and ignorance, and that is the absolute truth. I didn't know what we couldn't do, so we did it.... Then, I became just heavily involved with the Association and wound up on the board right quick-like.... One of the things that I wanted to do was to get our Florida Press Association on good financial ground, which, during my years on the board in the beginning, it was not, and we were all very concerned about it.... Then, the Florida Press Association membership was extremely low, and, again, I have more energy than control. That's always been a major problem of mine, I think. But I told them, if I become president, I will visit every single newspaper in this state. So I wound up as vice-president, and then I became president.

P: What year was this?

G: 1974-1975. I bought a thirty-six foot Pace Aero motor home.... So... we toured the state of Florida in that motor home. We went to every single solitary newspaper in this state. We didn't miss a one... So we put on a campaign and... we found out that people were wanting to join. A lot of them didn't even know about the Florida Press Association... and we worked really hard and heavy on trying to get the profitability of it turned around and get a positive image, and it worked.... we brought in a bunch of members.

P: When you talk about lobbying, give me an example of what the FPA would do for the members of the Association.

G: At any given session, and the fate of no man is safe as long as the legislature's in session, and especially the fate of the newspaper because somewhere in this great state

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of Florida, some newspaperman has ticked off some legislator. So they go to Tallahassee with a spur under their blanket, and they're going to get that newspaper.... [One legislator] was determined to eliminate the three times that you run the delinquent tax rolls and bring it down to one time [which would have reduced the paper's revenue by two-thirds].... Dick Shelton [Executive Director of the Florida Press Association] kept us aware of what was going on, all the newspapers across the state. Consequently, that bill never got out of committee. Now, had we had somebody over there that was not as sharp enough on it as Dick Shelton or a Reg Ivory, if we'd had someone else that was coming in drunk and not showing up at these meetings, that thing could've eased on through.

P: Let's discuss some broader issues. How is your audience different today than it was in 1964?

G: Well, we have a lot of newcomers who have come into this county, but we have still stuck, I guess, to our original deal, that if they want to read about something else somewhere else in the world, then they need to get a daily paper or *USA TODAY* or something else....

P: How has the county changed in thirty-five years?

G: In some areas, it's made major changes. We have people moving in here, we call them South Florida Yankees. They come from the North and they go South, and then they get fed up with that down there and they ... move up here. We're the ham between the two pieces of bread. Every time somebody tells us, well, this isn't how we do it up North, we tell them to take I-95 or I-75 north and do it now.... The worst thing that happened to the state of Florida is when Bob Graham promoted this \$25,000 a year homestead exemption. It

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threw the burden of property taxes now all on the businesses, and the one that's hit the hardest is agriculture.... Our problem now is we're getting so many people moving into North Florida who want an acre of land and a \$2,000 mobile home, and, consequently, they're not paying any taxes. They come up here either retired and not producing any goods or services, or they come up here with a trailer full of young'uns that we've got to school. We've got to protect them with an ambulance and law enforcement and fire protection and all this other stuff, and they're not paying any taxes. That's really bringing a hard crunch in on the locals that's been here over the years who have bought land and has to live off the land.

P: This is still pretty conservative country, is it not?

G: George Wallace was somewhat liberal, in our opinion.

P: Do most people here vote Republican or Democrat?

G: ... the Republican party has really flourished out.... We got 10,000 voters in Madison County, Florida, and we're looking now at right about 2,000 of them are Republicans and they are coming on hard and heavy.

P: With the state legislature and the governor controlled by the Republicans for the first time in the history of the state, that shows the whole state has changed.

G: This pendulum, and the swingin' pendulum is what keeps the clock ticking, has swung so far to the left until it's bringing on so much resentment towards government.... I've got a lot of resentment towards our government, not towards this country because, like I say, I'm still standing [when] the flag comes by.... I've never accepted a penny to build a bluebird nest or build a fishpond, and they're doing it right here in this county. You can get

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money today to build bluebird nests....

P: When you first started the newspaper business, was there much competition from radio? And how did you deal with that?

G: ... When somebody would say, well, I'm spending this much money with the radio station, I'd say, well, good, but I can show you this: when it's published, it's permanent. I think we had a big advantage over the radio station in several respects. We had something they could hold (a newspaper) in their hand, and they knew that it was something you could clip coupons out of....

P: Do you think that's going to change, that everything is going to be on the Internet?

G: We're looking into that. In fact, we're already on the Internet.... I don't know how, but we've hired somebody to help us learn. I told my children all these years, you know, if you're not living on the edge, you're dying in too much space....

P: Have you ever had any pressure from an advertiser because of something you either had written in an editorial or printed in an article?

G: The best way for somebody to get something on [the] front page is to tell me what they're going to do if I print it. God be my witness, it goes on front page. It may have been an inside story to start with, but it'll go on front page with an editor's note that we don't take threats and they can take their money and walk with it because the newspaper business never kept me in the newspaper business anyway. It was my other doings that did.

P: Would you discuss how you have adapted new technology over the years?

G: When something new was on that drawing board, we wanted to be the first to get it.... In 1982, I got to hearing about this LP TV, and I didn't even know what it stood for (low

power television). They had to retrain me to operate one of these remote controls. So I'm not technically knowledgeable. But the first thing I did was applied for the TV license, for a television station.... So, in 1983, we put our television... on there. That works hand-in-hand with our newspaper because we were already in the news-gathering business.... So we became the second in the nation and the first in the state of Florida to have a TV station here, and we still operate it.

P: What content do you have on the station, and how many hours do you operate it?

G: We operate twenty-four-seven, 168 hours a week, around the clock.... We've got several things right now that's never been tried anywhere else in the country that we think will work, and we're getting ready to [implement] that.... Any time of the day or night, you can turn on and we've got these ads up there where you can buy and sell and trade and swap.... We go on six- and twelve-hour tapes. We promote Boy Scouts. We promote the National Rifle Association. We support Americanism and all, at all levels. We promote the Church of Jesus Christ, the Latter Day Saints, the Mormons, real heavy, and any other church that'll bring us in tapes....

P: You obviously are very involved in community activities. I notice that you're a member of probably every club that exists in Madison. Why do you think it is important for a newspaper publisher to be civic minded?

G: ... if you're not totally committed to a community—and I loved it so much, my second son was named William Madison Greene—totally dedicated to this type work and have, I guess, a certain degree of insanity about you, it's not the right job for you. I wanted my community to be the very best community on this planet, second to none. One of the

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sayings that we've got: the problem about being second is that you're the first one to see the winner and the first one to see the loser....

P: Were you heavily involved in politics?

G: I've always been involved in politics. I like the behind-the-closed-door-type stuff, one-on-one....

P: But you've never held political office?

G: No, sir....

P: But isn't your opinion fairly influential in this county?

G: I don't know about that. I'm just a country boy that stuck it out....I put on a lot of socials. My motto: if you don't wake up to a party, start one. Consequently, I try to stay in very good with all the local and area state politicians, and I wound up getting on as a state witness to that execution [John Spinkelink]. I've always believed in capital punishment. Swift and severe justice, I think that's an absolute key. In fact, I've run in the paper several times in my editorials, if we want to stop crime, we need to execute all criminals and their lawyers.... I was asked then if I believed in the electric chair, and I said, no, I'd prefer electric bleachers....

P: You started a newspaper without any journalistic training and learned on the job. Do you think that people in the newspaper business need a journalism degree?

G: Not to knock our J[ournalism] schools, because they may be changed from sometime back, but the first thing we tried to do was de-program them [new employees]....

We were having students, J-school graduates, come to us that had not taken a photographic course.... Now, last St. Patrick's Day—because of my all-green doings, I'm

always interviewed around those days—they sent two people to cover one story. They sent a photographer and they sent a newswriter. That would've never happened [here], and does not happen, in our business because the same person who's going to write that story is going to take that picture. We're not going to have two people on the payroll doing the same job....

P: What's the future of independently-owned weekly newspapers?

G: We could sell out today to a [con]glomerate. I think it's getting slimmer and slimmer that you're going to find independently-owned newspapers, of any kind.... Right now... Monticello and Madison... is the only two independents that I know of in north Florida....

P: What is the major source of income for a weekly newspaper? Is it still advertising?

G: Yes. Advertising, advertising, advertising.

P: Do you think that the larger chains can buy up these independent newspapers and operate them more efficiently than an individual owner?

G: What they do, they come in, like, for instance, if they bought up Greene Publishing, they would come in and they would trim it down to the bone. Madison people would not be getting the same newspapers that they're getting today. They'd have this thing cut down to a survival-type publication.... It's going to be extremely difficult for a new paper to come in against a (con)glomerate.... A lot of people, just like me, gets into the newspaper business not knowing what's in front of them, and most of them's smart enough to get out.

P: When you look at the time you've been in business with this paper, what has been the paper's greatest contribution to the community?

G: Whew. Well, we have promoted industry as hard and heavy as we can promote

because without that, we don't have a tax base. Industry includes agriculture.... We promoted law enforcement, and a lot of times, we'd sit on a story... so that we wouldn't break something before they got their case put together.... I'd say our biggest contribution right now is trying to keep as much government control out of our lives as anything. Right now, I just found out yesterday that now you've got to go get a permit for a man to slip an air conditioner in your window, even if he plugs it into a one-ten outlet, and they [are] getting ready to go from a \$20 permit to a \$40 permit....

P: When you look at your career in journalism, and I know you have other interests, are you satisfied with what you've accomplished, given where you started?

G: Well, I've never been content in my life, so I don't really know how to answer that. I'm happy that I've reached the thirty-five year mark and I've got a daughter that can take this paper and go with it. I was extremely blessed that my wife has got the sales ability and the love to sell. She stays in on that telephone all day. She'd sell toe tags in a hospital waiting room.... So we've lived one endless party, and we made a party out of this newspaper business. When it gets too rough, she and I will maybe take off one night and go somewhere, but we're back the next morning.

[End of Interview.]