

FNP 59

Interviewer Julian Pleasants

Interviewee Donald C Wright

P: This is December 12, 2001. I am at West Palm Beach at the *Palm Beach Post* and I am speaking with Don Wright. Give me a little bit of your background, mainly your newspaper background. How did you get started in newspapers? Why did you get started in newspapers?

W: [I] jumped right into the newspaper business after high school, as a matter of fact. [I] did not go to college. What I wanted to do initially was, more than anything else, to become a cartoonist, a strip cartoonist. I wanted to do a strip along the lines of – at that time **Steve Canyon** was very popular. That really is what I wanted to do. I was told that the way to find out all of the things that you had to do in order to become a strip cartoonist was go to work for a newspaper. So I applied at the *Miami News* to a woman named **Myrtle Rathner** who was the secretary of the editor of the paper who liked me and made sure that later on when the stack of applications were offered up, when a job opened up, she put my name on the top of the list and I got the job. That is basically how I started in newspapers, as a copy kid at the *Miami News* way back in 1952.

P: Then you worked your way up, I presume, to be a staff photographer?

W: Yes, [I] kind of got pushed into that, sidetracked in my desire to become a cartoonist by the fact that the art editor thought I did not know enough about functioning in his department. [I] was not particularly interested in airbrushing and all the rest of the things you had to do. He thought I was too young to invest any time in because he was sure I was going to get drafted into the army. I was

a copy kid at that time. Someone else on the staff actually suggested going into photography and pushed me in that direction and I did that.

P: Did you like it?

W: Loved it. It was my liberal education. It forced me out of this sort of naive, teenage cell I was living in. All of these fantasies about becoming a great strip cartoonist just went away. I began to understand what life was all about because I was forced into situations I had never dreamed of, covering bookie raids, seeing mutilated bodies and just shocking things that I came in contact with at an age that I think most people my age at that age would never have had to confront. In a sense, it really shaped me.

P: So you covered fires and murders and whatever was happening.

W: Everyone knew I had this sort of latent ability to draw and I was always expressing that, sort of kidding around. I do not recall what year this took place, it was early in my career as a photographer. There was a serial killer running loose across the country. His name was **Dennis Whitney**. He may have started out on the west coast, in California. I am not sure about that, but he crossed the United States and wound up in south Florida on a killing rampage. His technique was to go into a filling station at night where there were not many people [and] wait until there was no one and then go in and rob it. [He would] then take the guy into the back, into the bathroom and shoot him in the head. This was his technique, this is what he did. He wound up in south Florida and indeed committed that same type of crime against a service station attendant I think on

Southwest 8<sup>th</sup> Street, around there. This time, the service station attendant lived. They found him in the bathroom. He had been shot through the head. He was still alive. They took him to the hospital and began treating him. He was sort of hanging on, then he got a little bit better. It occurred to the editor of the paper that maybe since [he was alive, he could give a description of the man]. He was all bandaged up, all covered up. [He] did not want his picture made, but he agreed to let me come in and talk to him about what this guy looked like. [He] took him into the bathroom and shot him. The idea was that I would try to get his likeness down on a piece of paper by drawing it as he described it. My job was to go in and ask this poor guy, who had all of this stuff hooked up [and] could barely talk, about this man's facial features. This may have been one of the first times that police sketches was actually used. Perhaps [somewhere else, but in] south Florida it was something that was not used very often. Without overblowing it, [I] may have helped attached some significance to that technique. Anyway, I sat there and drew as best I could, the likeness that he described to me. The paper printed that in the **bluestreak** edition the next day. To be perfectly honest, the likeness really did not get **Dennis Whitney** to a fault. He saw the picture in the Miami area and cut and run. In the process, [he] highjacked an automobile with a woman in it and he actually killed her, but they chased him down and they caught him. That was probably the first time that anything I had ever drawn really had much in the way of impact. I think about that a lot and wonder if perhaps in some way I contributed to the death of that

woman. Also, I am puzzled as to why he thought he should leave in the first place because to me that drawing really did not establish a likeness at all.

Anyway, that is one of the [stories about my drawings].

P: Did you have any formal training?

W: No, none whatsoever.

P: When did you discover you had an affinity for drawing?

W: I do not know whether you discover that or you just simply love it so much that you do it until you get better and better at it. As a kid, that is what I did when everyone else was out playing and doing football and all of that stuff. I was trying to learn how to draw. It was just an inclination I had as a kid, it never left me.

P: In 1958, you became graphics editor at the *Miami News*. Tell me exactly what that entailed.

W: The graphics editor is pretty much what the photo editor is today on the newspaper. He is pretty much in charge of the photo department, assigns photographers to special assignments. He [handles] special application by one photographer who is talented in one area and may not handle this that well in another. [The job] also involves laying out pages, particularly the picture page, which was one of the highlights of the newspaper at that time. Pretty much coordinating the photo department operation with the rest of the news desk.

P: Would you determine which photographs went on the front page?

W: Yes, I did that too.

P: Did you enjoy that job?

W: I did. It taught me a lot about editing and it taught me a lot about the responsibility of putting out a newspaper every day. [It] involves a lot of people working together and actually coming to some sort of consensus. Sometimes these arguments and debates about what should lead the paper and which picture should go with what can get pretty heated. It is the kind of process you would actually want. I think newspapers today are terribly formula-ridden and in those days you argued these things out. Generally, I think by the time the newspaper came out, it represented the very best efforts of everyone on that newspaper, combining to put that newspaper out and make it work. I thought we were very successful doing it that way.

P: At some point as I understand, Bill Baggs [editor of the *Miami News*] was interested in persuading you to do some political cartoons.

W: He did not just persuade me, he kept on me all of the time. When I went into photo, my priorities changed. I sort of lost interest in doing cartooning as a way of making a living. It just did not appeal to me anymore. I was getting so much out of photography and learning so much, it was so exciting. The newspaper business in general, all of its facets were so exciting to me that becoming a cartoonist was the last thing in my mind. Also, bear in mind, I was young, there were girlfriends and sports cars. That was a very exciting time for me. So, becoming a cartoonist was really not one of my priorities. For Bill, he always wanted his own editorial cartoonist. He always thought that I could do that if I wanted to. I did not want to. He kept after me and he kept after me. Finally, I tried it. It was the result of getting kind of hotheaded and deciding that on the

news desk as photo editor, I was probably a heck of a lot better than I thought I was. When I decided that certain things should happen, by God they should happen. There were people who disagreed with me and it got pretty hot and heavy. I quit one day [and] in the heat of passion and debate decided by God I will put it all on the line. I will quit, they will ask me to come back and I will get my way. Well, it really did not happen. What happened is that Baggs stepped in and told me I would probably make a really good editorial cartoonist. He asked me if I had another job, I said no. He convinced me that I ought to try it. He said, if it does not work out you can go to *The [Miami] Herald* or do what you want. I liked Bill an awful lot. I told him, I am not really prepared to do this. I am not one of these people who keeps current on [the] crises and issues of the day. He said, well, you will, you will. I went in and I viewed this as something temporary just to get me through, get me a paycheck until I could find something else to do and here I am.

P: Was there a trial period? Did you have to start drawing right away?

W: He did not indicated in any way this was a trial period. He really believed that I was going to succeed at this. To this day I wonder why he thought that because I did not think that. When I go back and look at some of that early work I wonder why in the world he ever thought I could do this. Because some of that early work was God-awful. I mean, it was not drawn well, it was not well thought-out. I evolved over a period of time. As a matter of fact, in some ways, I caused them a great deal of pain because I developed some very conservative attitudes. I found myself at odds with the editorial page. Baggs was faced with having to

deal with this. He had an editorial page that was basically fairly liberal. The editorial cartoonist for some reason had become a rabid conservative. Early on, in Vietnam for example. To his credit, he never sat me down and said you cannot think this way, you cannot do this. He let me pursue it, think about it. He let me read about it. He encouraged me to become well-informed and to not go skipping off in some emotional direction, hotheaded direction. Never did he step in and say, you cannot draw those cartoons. I was drawing cartoons that were actually fairly conservative and sometimes a direct contradiction of what we were saying on the editorial page.

P: That is pretty extraordinary.

W: It is very extraordinary, but he was an extraordinary man. He seemed to see something in me that suggested that I would eventually come around. I did come around, but nobody pushed me, I got there by myself.

P: How would you assess his term as editor of the paper? He is pretty legendary in Florida circles.

W: Well, he deserves to be a legend. We are talking about a different kind of newspaper man. You do not want to fall into that trap of saying, you do not find many like that anymore. Bill Baggs was a courageous individual who thought newspapers ought to serve the community without giving itself away to powerful interests within that community. He had a marvelous way of becoming an active member of the Chamber of Commerce and all of those movements within the city that wanted to go in certain directions and then coming back to the paper and allowing the paper to blast these same people who actually were very

chummy with him. He had a marvelous way of actually encouraging that and still maintaining the friendship and respect of those powerful interests who were constantly complaining to him. Bill, look what your editorial page said today. Bill would say something like, you know, I just cannot control those guys. Things like that. He made that work. He understood that at the heart of all of that, a newspaper really should try to tell the truth, no matter how hard it was to do it.

P: It seems like today, from what I have learned, newspapers have shifted away from that and now it is the bottom line that is most important.

W: Shifted away from what? Telling the truth?

P: Yes.

W: Well, we are generalizing of course, and I know a lot of really fine newspaper men today who are constantly fighting to get newspapers back to doing what they are supposed to be doing. To say that the bottom line is the chief concern for newspapers today is a generalization and it is true in most cases, but I think the biggest threat to newspapers is that they really have lost their identity and do not know exactly what they are anymore. Television changed newspapers. As television became more and more popular and newspaper subscribers started to fall away, newspapers sort of lost their way. The competition seemed to confound them. Quite gradually, I think it was quite gradually, they began to do strange things like adopting sort of garish magazine formats and deciding that somehow, maybe if the newspaper front page looked a lot like a television set with things splashed all over it and very very short, that this somehow would get readers back, thus get advertisers back. Well, it did not work. This kind of

abrogating their real responsibility to this battle and to television has caused all of us who really believe in this business a lot of pain. I do not have any monopoly on caring about that. A lot of other people have already written and talked about it at length. It is not just the bottom line in my organization, the Cox organization. [It] pretty much lets each newspaper run the way it wants to. We can call the shots here. This is a good newspaper actually, by the way. We are lucky to have people running this newspaper who are a lot like the people I grew up with. Those people are dying away.

P: Carl Hiassen [writer/columnist, *The Miami Herald*;author] told me that one of the problems with Knight-Ridder was that they had cut back money for things like investigative journalism.

W: That is true about Knight-Ridder. They have a different problem than this organization. Here, that has not really happened to us. There are pressures, of course. These giant corporations are trying to decide where technology is going [with] computers, combination of phones and computers and all of this. In order to stay a viable media powerhouse, they practically [have] to invest in it. They have invested in a lot of them and they have invested at the expense of the newspapers. They have drained their newspapers. My organization I believe has been pretty good, given all of those pressures, because they are investing too, but allowing their newspapers a lot of slack. There has not been as much of this concentration on drawing everything out of the newspapers and gutting the newspapers, as has occurred in some of the other organizations like Knight-Ridder. I know Knight-Ridder has been particularly brutal to the *Herald* and

some of its other newspapers.

P: Have you ever gotten any reaction from Cox, or from the headquarters about any editorial cartoon you printed?

W: Never, in all honesty, never. I never have. Sometimes I worry about it, where are they? Do they care? No, they have never pressured me about anything I have ever drawn.

P: Let me go back to your career. From 1960-1963, you are a political cartoonist, then from 1963 on, you have been an editorial cartoonist. What is the difference?

W: I do not know why that is there, there really is not any difference.

P: When did you come to the *Palm Beach Post*?

W: 1982? No. 1988?

P: I have 1989.

W: 1989 is about right. Beginning of 1989.

P: Why did you decide to come to this paper?

W: When the *News* closed down, I had some other offers. I had been with Cox all my life. Other people on the paper were accepting jobs clear across the country. We had some good people on that paper. I just waited. I did not know exactly what I wanted to do. **Dave Lawrence** actually asked me to hang on and wait until he got there [*The Miami Herald*]. He had offered me sort of a situation in which they would keep their present cartoonist, **Jim Moore**, and he would give me a spot on the op-ed page of the *Herald* to say anything I wanted to. He

made it sound very, very nice. [From] the Fort Lauderdale paper, Texas paper, Chicago, I got some very interesting offers.

P: By this time, you were already syndicated?

W: Yes, the *Chicago Tribune*. To make a long story short, Cox stepped in and offered me a number of options. The Washington bureau and also the *Palm Beach Post*, which at that time had become a very fine newspaper under **Eddie Sears** and **Tom Jefreeda** and had its own editorial section, which no other newspaper had. It has since gone by the board because of potential pressures. All of a sudden, they just started pursuing me with a great deal of enthusiasm. They offered me that [position]. All of my roots are in Miami and in south Florida, my wife and her mother. Her mother was terribly upset about the idea – she lives alone – of **Caroline** leaving the area. We thought this would be the best compromise. I came to the *Post*. **Caroline** kept in touch with her mother-in-law, everything worked out fine.

P: Have you ever wanted to be with the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post*? I know **Ricky Bragg** started out with the *Herald* and never anticipated he'd get to the *New York Times*.

W: Just before Baggs died – I do not know whether this has been made public or not, it can be verified through **Howard Kleinburg**, former editor of the *News* – Baggs was offered the job of the editor of the *New York Times* just before he got sick. Baggs came to me and sat me down over at one of those fancy clubs downtown. I knew something was up when he invited me there and asked me if

I would be interested in becoming the first editorial page cartoonist for the *New York Times*. I said, you are damn right, I would. He said, I am going to bring you there. There were two people [he was] taking with him, that he decided he wanted to take with him. One was his editorial cartoonist and **Howard Kleinburg**. It was not long after that that he came down with pneumonia and passed away.

P: The *New York Times* still does not have an editorial cartoonist.

W: No, they do not do that.

P: I wonder why.

W: I do not know, I really do not know. [They are] snobs, I guess.

P: When did you first become syndicated and was your first syndication with the *Chicago Tribune*?

W: No, the first syndication was with the *Washington Star*, I think they called it at that time. I consider myself somewhat of a purist in that I did not really seek syndication. I wanted to be able to do work that qualified to be reprinted nationally, but syndication, I did not really pursue that. Most cartoonists that come into this, say [they] want to get syndicated and make a lot of money. I did not think I was actually qualified nor consistent enough to be syndicated, frankly. I did start getting reprinted nationally and drew some attention from syndicates and the *Washington Star* syndicate moved in pretty quickly. His name was **Harry Elmark**, one of these old crusty guys who gave you a great spiel. He sold

me on this. I ran it through Bill Baggs and some of my friends, the contract. I signed up with him and it was the biggest mistake I ever made because **Harry Elmark** was pretty much a one-man operation. He had some pretty good people, but not many. His idea of selling your work was to call people on the phone from his house and say, would you like to take him. It just did not work. I seemed to be getting more and more interest, nationally, in some of the things I was doing. But Harry was sitting there. Harry was a conservative, I mean a rabid conservative. By that time, I was notoriously liberal. I do not know why he signed me up because he did not like anything I was saying in those cartoons. There really was not much enthusiasm to sell me because he did not agree with me. I must have had maybe fifty, forty-eight clients. I did not make an issue of it, I had signed up for five years to do that. All [this] time I was working for the *News*. There was a change in both the stature and future of the *News* when it joined in that agreement with the *Herald*, joint operating agreement and moved over to the *Herald* building. I was with the *Star* syndicate when that happened. No, I was with the *Star* syndicate shortly after that happened. When those changes took place, Sylvan Meyer [editor] left the *News*. I do not know whether you know all of this or not. It gets kind of boring. There was a change in editors, **Jim Fayne** came in. **Jim Fayne** was from Detroit, he was the editor of the Detroit paper, and very very large in the Cox organization. There were rumors flying around that I was getting very dissatisfied with my job because of things that had happened to me. Those are things that happened to all kinds of people

who get into the newspaper business and get in arguments with their editors and things of that kind. I was young and still felt that I knew all there was to know about practically everything, that nobody should question anything I did, most particularly my views in cartoons. I did not want anybody messing with me. That is a privilege no cartoonist should enjoy, by the way. There was friction with the present editor who was Sylvan Meyer. Sylvan Meyer was later removed. **Jim Fayne** came in. I consider this all terribly boring. **Fayne** asked me if I was syndicated. I said, yes, sort of. When I said [I was with the] *Washington Star* syndicate, he said, they are doing a terrible job for you, they really are. The fact that he was interested in that, I was overwhelmed that he cared about that. Fayne got me a lawyer and we sued the *Washington Star* syndicate to get out of that contract. That went on for two years and actually drew a lot of publicity. I served out my five years with the *Star* syndicate and after that there was some sort of clause in that contract, it said if I wanted to cancel the contract and break my association with the *Star* syndicate, I had to wait an additional five years before I signed with another syndicate. Fayne got me a lawyer. That lawyer was Sandy D'Alemberte [President of Florida State University, 1993-present; FL state representative, 1966-1972; attorney], by the way.

P: He is a tough lawyer.

W: Yes, he is a damn good lawyer. I said, Sandy we are not going to win this. He kept saying, yes, you are, you are going to win this. We went through that whole process, but we did indeed win. As soon as it became clear that we were going

to win, the [*Chicago*] *Tribune* moved in and said we would like to sign you up.

We had discussions with them and I have been with them ever since.

P: How many papers are you syndicated in today?

W: You would have to ask **Caroline**, but we are mailing off every day about 325.

P: How does that syndication process work? Do they pay you per paper or a flat fee?

W: Every newspaper, depending on their size and circulation, pays the syndicate a fee and we basically split that. They [the syndicate] really determine what they charge to those newspapers.

P: You have also done some animated cartoons.

W: That was a project that was started by *Newsweek* magazine and it went on for a number of years, it looked like it was going to be very successful. It was a first attempt at animated editorial cartoons. They sold it on a syndicated basis to local television stations throughout the country. There were a number of cartoonists involved in that. It actually was a good idea but it eventually died because it did not generate enough interest amongst news directors who did not want to take up too much of their TV time with animated cartoons. Today it might be a good idea to resurrect that because television has gotten so trashy and ridiculous. Why not try something substantial?

P: It is cartoonish anyway. You have published three books, *Wright On!* and *Wright Side Up*. You were also part of this Tom Brokaw-[NBC Nightly News anchor; author]-edited book, *The Gang of Eight*. Do you have plans to publish another

book?

W: The option is with Simon & Schuster to do a collection, it is always there. I have decided that those anthologies really do not work. Everybody is doing them, they do not really sell. I do not think there is any natural interest among the public at-large across the United States to buy an anthology of Don Wright's work so I really have not followed through on that. Excuse me, any book I do by the way, I would love to take on a subject both in writing and in cartoons about this business I am in – about journalism.

P: I was going to ask you that. Have you ever wanted to be a writer?

W: Everybody wants to be a writer. Everybody thinks they are a writer. Writing is tough. I have known some very very fine writers and I know how hard it is. I am not sure that I could be the kind of writer I like and respect and admire because of their turn-of-phrase and their intellect. I do not know that I can meet those standards. I might be willing to try.

P: You were able to evolve into an editorial cartoonist.

W: Yes, and I never thought I would. Let me tell you in all honesty, I am continuing to evolve. I think probably when I stop feeling that there are experiments I need to conduct both with my artwork and my thinking, if I have matured as an individual and a newspaper person, I am still very much interested in what I am doing. I think when I stop being that interested and moved by all of these events that are taking place. I am able to sit here read about them [events], spend all of my time digesting them and then telling people what I think about them. I like to think that my cartoons are a legitimate, valuable form of commentary. I think

there are a lot of cartoonists who are doing something else. To me this is quite serious. I think there is a time to be funny and a time to not be so funny.

P: You have always been pretty much issue-oriented have you not?

W: I hope so, yes.

P: Do you consider yourself an artist or a newspaper man?

W: I do not know whether I am an artist. That is for others to judge. I have tried to be an artist. I am sometimes surprised at something latent within me that comes out and makes me believe at times I might qualify as an artist. There are other times I do stuff that I cannot believe I did and would like to have over to be changed.

P: You have had a one man art show at the Lowe Art Museum at Syracuse University. They have a collection. Other people consider you an artist.

W: Yes. Sometimes I think they are wrong, though.

P: I wanted to talk to you a little bit about two important events in your career, the winning of the Pulitzer prize in 1966 and 1980. In both cases, it was awarded for general excellence. What was you think the key factor in the 1966 award? Were there some issues that you had taken on? Do you send them a collection of your cartoons?

W: I think it is hard to know why the Pulitzer does some of the things it does. That entry included the number of cartoons they needed, that the entry specifies must be included. They did say it was for the body of my work, but the cartoon they selected was a cartoon of two people standing in a bombed-out landscape. One here and one over there. They obviously had been blown to bits and they just

barely survived and one guy was saying, you mean you were bluffing? That is the one they selected as a representation of my work. If you are asking me what the criterion is, I am not sure, really. I do not know. The other one, I do not even recall what they selected as an example. Rarely if ever, at least with the editorial cartoons, do they select one cartoon and say this is the smash winner, no matter what. Everything else is irrelevant and this thing is just so great, this one cartoon is why we are giving the Pulitzer.

P: Were you surprised at the 1966 award? You had not been an editorial cartoonist very long.

W: No, I had not and I was shocked. As a matter of fact, I remember I was out at the water fountain. Newspaper offices always gather around to find out who is winning what. They do not do that much anymore, I do not think. I was at the water fountain in the middle of the city room. I used to clean my brushes in the water fountain because I did not have any other sink. I would go over there. I was standing there when everybody screamed. I looked up, all these people running at me. They told me that I won the Pulitzer. I said shit! Or something like what. That is how it happened. Stunned, I was stunned.

P: What was your reaction to the 1980 award?

W: I was grateful. So many things had happened to the *News*. This was my newspaper. It had gotten involved in this joint operating agreement with the *Herald*. We were gradually whittling away to nothing. Our advertising was disappearing, deadlines were being cut. It was obvious that this could not possibly go on and we were not going to survive if we did not find some way to

turn this paper around and get a better arrangement with the *Herald*. We were dreaming actually. To me, it meant a lot to the paper to get it. This time, I thought gee, this is great for the paper. [It] helps in some small way by putting us back on the map. You see, we are still full of quality here. By God, we can do these things.

P: It is pretty unusual to win two. It is an achievement to win one.

W: [Jeff] MacNelly [editorial cartoonist] won three, Herblock [Herbert Block, editorial cartoonist] won three, actually.

P: What other awards, you won a lot of other awards. Sigma Chi, Overseas Press, Kennedy Memorial Journalism Award, David Brinkley Award, among many others. Which other awards are meaningful to you?

W: This is going to sound harsh. They are meaningful to me only a temporary basis. My lovely wife will hand you a list of these awards, but I have been in this business long enough to know that the only thing that matters is how you are judged on the cartoon you have done today that is in the paper. Fame is fleeting. I do not think that I want to attach too much priority to having done some work that a lot of very nice people though deserved an award. I would rather be judged on what I do every day and my consistency. I am not putting you off nor am I putting off the question, but that is my attitude about that.

P: Let us talk about the process you go through every day to produce an editorial cartoon.

W: The process varies from day to day. The question that puzzles me the most and I almost resent, but the one that most people ask invariably is how do you get

your ideas?

P: Notice I did not ask that.

W: Bless you, sir. I have never been able to answer the question adequately and honestly do not even know why it is being asked. How does anyone get an idea? The fact of the matter is that it happens sometimes in a different way than it might have happened the day before. It is all contingent upon your passions, your feelings. Are they running high? Are you worked up by this? Do you have to get something done by tomorrow that you are not particularly enthusiastic about? Those constant pressures lead you to tackle every day in a different way sometimes. You come in and you do not have anything. The closer you get to deadline, the more frantic you become, then you realize you have got to do something. Then your head says, okay, you have got this idea on that, but you did that before four or five years ago. You are just recycling an old idea. You think that is dishonest. You are reaching and you are trying to do something else, so that in your own mind you do not feel that you are cheating by recycling an old idea. As the deadline gets closer, you have to do something. Those cartoons are I think the real test of the cartoonist. Can he maintain some kind of quality and get a thought across in a coherent matter on that kind of deadline? There are other times when the issues are so acute and, to you, so clear-cut where you want to be on them that your passions start running very high. You get five, six, seven ideas tumbling one over the other. You know every one of them has merit. That is a wonderful feeling to be able to select from one of those seven or eight and then go at it.

P: Do you always get the idea first and then start drawing?

W: Get the idea first? Yes.

P: Do you doodle?

W: Sometimes I doodle. I mentioned the pressure of deadlines. When it gets down to very close to knowing how much time I have allowed myself to draw a cartoon then I will sit down and start doodling and hope that somehow the hands will come up with an idea.

P: I talked to Doug Marlette about that and he said that sometimes under pressure, he starts drawing anything in hope that that will create a cartoon.

W: You do other things, too. You start scratching yourself, you start getting up, sometimes you swear, you walk around the room, you sit down and doodle some more. That is painful stuff.

P: What time do you normally come in? Do you always work here in the *Palm Beach Post* office?

W: Yes, [I] try never to take it home with me.

P: What time do you usually come in?

W: [It] varies, depends on when I get out the night before. I am chiefly a night-worker so I will start right around 1:00 am, then get the cartoon out. Usually I will have started that cartoon because of the deadline pressures here, they are different [because] this is a morning newspaper. The *News* was an evening newspaper. I had to make that adjustment. I worked at night throughout my entire career at the *News*. Here, I tried to get my cartoons started the day before then when I come in at 1:00, finish it. Sometimes I come in and start fresh, it

depends on whether I find an issue that is moving me and whether or not I feel I can get a good start and perhaps not shortcut the artwork to the extent that I might deprive the cartoon of its impact.

P: What time is your deadline?

W: 3:30 am every day.

P: This is every day. Do you work fifty-two weeks a year?

W: Five days a week. What does that amount to?

P: That is a lot of cartoons. When you are going through the process and you look back on what you have accomplished, what would you say are the characteristics or qualities of a good political cartoonist?

W: Independence, for one thing. I think it is critical. Independence within the framework of being allowed to say pretty much what you want within the bounds of good taste. I do not believe – I used to believe otherwise – I do not believe an editorial cartoonist should be able to do whatever he damn-well pleases, no matter what. I do not think that will work because the editor is always responsible for what you put in that paper. There are a lot of people who will be shocked to hear me say this now, but I have gotten older and I am a lot wiser. You know, strangely enough, devotion to the craft itself, to understand that the cartoon is supposed to be a legitimate form of commentary that stimulates people and moves them to think, if you could possibly achieve that in a cartoon. I do not think there is much of that going on today. That is what I believe. I think you should always be able to impart as much impact to that cartoon through your artwork, if you have to, keep it to a minimum so that it does not interfere in your

message. That is a balance that I think only another editorial cartoonist would understand. Sometimes a perfectly good idea is overdrawn. It just gets cluttered. That is a shame.

P: Is too much text a problem?

W: Yes, too much text, but it is possible that sometimes what you call too much text or a lot of text is quite necessary. Change of pace is quite necessary. I have gone to doing a lot of panel cartoons and changing the format of the space that I have so that I do not become too predictable. Holding readers on the editorial page is the hardest challenge of all. I think editorial pages – I do not think this one is – but most of them are basically dull. It has been very difficult to get young people into editorial pages and I think I play a critical role in that.

P: Recently you have done four squares.

W: I even vary that sometimes.

P: Someone else I talked to said that the reader needs to recognize who the people are and what the issue is so it has to be drawn well enough so that when somebody looks at it, they know that is [Richard] Nixon [U.S. President, 1969-1974], for example. [End of side 1, tape A]

W: I think each cartoonist develops their own caricature of key figures. For example, [Bill] Clinton [U.S. President, 1993-2001] was easy to do. If you looked at all of the cartoonists doing Clinton, you would see that none of them really matched up very much. Each one decided that their special Clinton looked like this. Their readers eventually got to the point where they accepted this caricature of Clinton whether it was remarkably close to the way Clinton looked

or not.

P: The reader knew it was Clinton.

W: The reader knew it was Clinton, even though technically, as a legitimate caricature of Clinton, it really was not on the mark. You develop your own stylized Clinton, Nixon, George W. Bush [U.S. President, 2001-present] and all the rest of these key figures. Some of them are better at caricatures than others. Someone like Mike Peters [editorial cartoonist] who does some of the most grotesque caricatures, but at the same time so inane funny that you not only accept them, you like them. This is Mike's George W. Bush. Look at that thing. But you know immediately it is George W. Bush without the label or anything else.

P: Mike Peters tends to be more in the vein of being humorous, does he not?

W: Yes, indeed he does.

P: Is humor an essential quality for an editorial cartoonist? Should you have a good sense of humor at least?

W: [You have] got to have a good sense of humor, but I think the problem with editorial cartooning today is that most of the young people doing it feel that is all they are supposed to do – be funny. If they all had Mike's ability to be funny in the way that he is funny, that would be fine. But it seems to me they think are and they are really not. For some strange reason the editors seem to think that this is all there is and they are reprinting this stuff. As a consequence of that, we are losing our reputation for being able to offer legitimate form of commentary through the cartoon.

P: While we are on that, I want to quote Tom Brokaw from the forward of the book, *Gang of Eight*. "In these cartoons we find a simple true vision, one man's reaction to the maniacal, the tragic, the comic, the amazing world in which we live." What would your reaction be to that statement?

W: I would say that is nice stuff and I think he thought it over very carefully because he knew it was going to be the forward to the book. It is what most people who write forwards to books about editorial cartoonists say. It is not that I do not appreciate it, but I think basically it may apply to a few people but not enough people who are doing this work.

P: Critics say what we would like to get from editorial cartoonists is truth, but what does that mean?

W: Yes, what does it mean. My truth may not be the same as your truth. I would like to think that any cartoonist doing this has studied his issue quite carefully and is prepared to defend it once he takes this volatile position that upsets all of these readers. When they call, he is prepared to defend it in detail. If he is not, I think to some extent he is cheating. He should be as qualified to defend his position as any columnist is qualified to defend his position. Most columnists can tell you what they think and give you the background and fill you in on all the details as to why he got to that point. Cartoonists cannot, but nonetheless cartoonists ought to be able to do that when readers call and say, you did this to Bill Clinton or you did this to George W. Bush. Why did you do that? Then you need to explain to them why you believe what you [do and] how you have interpreted this crisis, why you think George W. Bush's role in it was not up to

snuff [and] where you think he made mistakes. Usually, if you do that, particularly with some of the readers who call in, they are livid beyond the point of even, at first, feeling that there is anything legitimate you can say to them. They just want to paste you as quickly as [they] can, then get off the line. If you can hold the line up and you get involved in a conversation you find that they come to believe that this whole idea of differing with one another is really part of a democratic system and it actually works. They leave the conversation actually liking you and still disagreeing with you. If you can do that you have accomplished a great deal and it all started with your cartoon.

P: I bet you hear, "you have gone too far this time," a lot.

W: Yes. When they say you have gone too far this time and you keep them on the line, you can actually realize that the two of you have differences about this and may never agree. They feel satisfied that you are not completely beyond hope. It means they are going to come back to the paper the next day and maybe they will find something that they might agree with.

P: Would you feel like you are not doing your job if you did not get any responses?

W: There is nothing worse than not getting responses. Nothing worse than being ignored, believe me.

P: What do you read in preparation for your opinions?

W: I am a news junkie. I keep this horrible thing [television] on most of the time.

P: CNN.

W: That twenty-four hour news cycle is a subject all by itself. [I] try to wade through all the talking heads and some of that hot babble. I have the wire services, all of

them. I read the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, my own paper, *The Miami Herald*, and the *Sun Sentinel* every day. In between that, I have got *Time* and *Newsweek*. My recreational reading generally leans toward current events. That is what I do.

P: Once you have read all of this and you come up with an idea, do you at any point run this by somebody else, ask them what they think?

W: I have been doing this a long time. Here, they pretty much let me go. When I was coming up of course, the idea was to submit the idea first to get an okay on it. Now, what I do is work out a cartoon that I think is the one I want to go with after wading through a lot of different ideas. I check it out with my wife, mostly. [I ask her,] what do you think about this? Here is the sketch. She will critique it and say, no that is not you. I will go back and start all over again. By the time I come in and get down to work, that is my cartoon. That is the one I am going to do. I will just turn it in. This really is not as arrogant as it sounds. It has never been disapproved, but if it was, they certainly have time enough to argue it out. If they do not want it, they do not have to use it. It is not as though I am shoving this in the paper. There is plenty of time for them to say no, we cannot do this. That really has not happened.

P: It seems to me, from viewing some of your cartoons, that you are very concerned about punctuating pomposity and exposing hypocrisy. It seems to me that is one of the areas that you are particularly good at and you provide a lot of satirical comments on current events. Is that a fair assessment?

W: I think it is a fair assessment of any really good cartoonist. You are talking about

those character flaws that are I think running rampant throughout our religious leaders and our politicians. It is sitting there, I think you should go after it. I do not think you should hold back.

P: What sins are most abhorrent to you?

W: Hypocrisy is I think probably at the head of my list. One of the phrases that makes me cringe when a politician uses it is, the American people think or the American people want. I do not know what the American people want. Sometimes do not think the American people know what they want. I know that most of these politicians really have no idea what the American people want. I know there are polls. I have my problems with polls being the deciding barometer as to how the public is going to go on much of anything.

P: I have tried to go back and look at some of the cartoons to see some of the areas you have been interested in over the years. I have noticed that you have always had a very strong interest in the environment and you do cartoons on that issue. When you start something like that, do you pick say a big developer that is getting ready to pave over the beach or do you do a generic kind of cartoon? Do you focus on one issue, or an individual or developer? All of the above?

W: All of the above. This is going to sound really strange. When I grew up as a kid playing in the woods – and I did a lot of that – I was always mesmerized by nature. I always used to just gaze in wonderment at some of the things other people were not seeing that I was seeing. For example, I remember in a touch football game, I was just a small kid [and] I got knocked down. My head went into the grass face-first. My eyes were open, I was not hurt or anything. I was

looking down into this grass. I saw all of these bugs, all of these things going about their duty, doing all of the things that bugs do down there in the grass. I remember thinking, wow, all this [is] going on and we do not know anything about it. It was a part of nature, it was part of my initial enthusiasm for finding out what nature provides for all of us. It makes me angry when we take it for granted.

This is a beautiful planet and we are screwing it up. We really are screwing it up in so many ways. That is my very profound attitude about that and every chance I get to say something on behalf of the planet, I try to do it.

P: You have gone after the Big Sugar companies a couple of times.

W: Yes. I do not think I have exempted anyone from blame for what is happening to us here. I take the opportunity and the shot every time I can.

P: Several of your cartoons are on labor unions. For example, one I was looking at one the other day which is appropriate for this season, the reindeer were going on strike and asking Santa for shorter hours and better working conditions. You tend to write a lot of those kind of cartoons. I noticed one, the Polish unions' model on American unions. This was a solidarity, we are going to have more coffee breaks, shorter weeks.

W: That is correct, but you have got both positions represented there in some sense. Some sympathy for labor unions, then pointing out that labor unions have actually, in some respects, killed themselves by asking corporations to do entirely too much to facilitate their leisure lifestyle. At times, it got to the point where actually it hurt them badly. Right now, they are trying to recover from all of these years and years of being greedy as hell. Corporations are just as greedy,

but labor unions got terribly out of hand for awhile. I am not opposed, certainly no one should be opposed, to the idea of labor unions. We need them. They have a magnificent history in terms of turning around the treatment of American workers in this country. Power brings with it abuses. When they start to abuse that power, my job is to say hey, no you cannot do that, whether you are a labor union or not.

P: What was your reaction when the New York Pressman's Union, Local Number Two went on strike over that Polish cartoon? They did hold up the publication of the paper for awhile.

W: My reaction was to give the stock line on the democratic process and the First Amendment. The radio station there called me and that is what I did. That is pretty evident, what I should be saying about that. It was a stupid thing to do and I do not think it reflected very well and actually verified everything I was saying in the cartoon.

P: Do you see your job more as a catalyst or as someone trying to educate people about issues?

W: That is a good question. Probably some of both. If you have been doing this a long time, you know that editorial pages, particularly in this day and time, have trouble getting the people on to that page that are most important to all of us, and that is younger people. Getting them involved in reading, but especially getting them involved in issues to the extent that they really want to read what you are saying on the editorial page about this and that. I think my job is to try to be stimulating enough to that age [of] reader to get them maybe hooked on the

editorial page if I can do that. That is a tough order and I do not know that I am really accomplishing it, but it is one of my jobs to help be a stimulus to the editorial page itself. [I] get people to the page, if I can, by virtue of what I am doing so that they will linger long enough to read that column to the left and the columns underneath. I may be dreaming, but I think that is what I should be trying to do. In order to do that now, you have to walk right to the edge sometimes with a younger group of people. You have got to be willing to sometimes say things in the manner in which they are used to dealing with one another now. It is not the way it used to be. They are growing up quicker and they know a heck of a lot more because of television and computers, than they used to. They are a rare, young audience the likes of which we never had to deal with before. If you are going to interest them, you had better be stimulating enough to keep them there long enough to be interested. That is a tough order. Again, I say that. I am not sure that some of the people putting out editorial pages understand that. It is vital that we get young people back into reading, it is vital that we get them back into newspapers. It sounds terribly preachy, but we will not survive if we do not and I like to think that I am searching for some kind of way to get them into the editorial page.

P: Do you see that as some kind of a competition with the thirty-second sound bite?

W: Absolutely I do. When I was growing up the newspaper was the information hub for the family, particularly on Sundays. The kids got the comics, it was just a vital part of the culture. It is not any more, newspapers are not. Television is having problems of its own. Viewership is falling off. People are satiated with talk about

the information age. I think they feel they have been bludgeoned and they are looking for something else now. I think newspapers are probably missing a good bet. I think they ought to go back to doing what they do best. This includes beautiful writing, it includes a detail beautifully written, telling people the truth, no matter how hard it is. Engendering that kind of respect for people who want to find something they can rely upon. Also, at the same time, they can choose their story. [If they are] seeing something they do not want to read, they can turn the page and go to something else, where they have complete and total control over what they are seeing and reading in the newspaper. It is vital that we give them the quality and we keep them there with really good writing and good reporting.

P: Tom Fiedler [editorial page editor, *The Miami Herald*] mentioned that everybody was watching the 2000 presidential election on television, but the newspapers were the ones that made sense of what was happening. They were not up to the level of television, which was covering events as they changed rapidly. The next day, it was the purpose of the newspaper to explain what had happened.

W: We were filling in the holes. Television is a medium of the moment. The trouble with newspapers is that for some reason, for the longest time, they believed they had to be that too. They cannot do that. They cannot compete with television on that basis. They can fill in the holes. Television leaves us [with] lots of holes. They do not really cover [news] that completely. That is our job. If we did that in the way that we are capable of doing [newspapers could compete better]. This is going to lead to a debate over the quality of people coming out of journalism schools and all of that which we will save for another time. It is critical that we

understand that and that we go back to doing what we do best.

P: While we are on that subject, what is your opinion of *USA Today*?

W: I did not approve of *USA Today* at first because I thought it was more of that same stuff. Colored boxes and glitzy this and that plastered all over the front page, but *USA Today* has evolved into a newspaper now that does fairly good reporting, good investigative reporting. They have transformed themselves quite gradually into quite a substantial newspaper. Now, I do not read it religiously or regularly. I am seeing references to *USA Today* on these wires on what they are uncovering so I know they have changed. I do not really see *USA Today*, I am not an expert on *USA Today*, but obviously they have come a long way.

P: When you write your editorial cartoons, let's say an editorial on the Everglades, do you hope that impacts Governor Jeb Bush [Florida governor, 1999-present] or legislators? Do you expect to have some shift in opinion as a result of it?

W: Of course you do. I think one of the mistakes that editorial pages make is that they seem to be writing solely to those people, solely to politicians, solely to the governor, solely to the legislature, solely to United States Congress or solely to their congressman or senator, trying to pressure him into doing what the editorial page wants. The bet that they are missing is [that] they ought to be talking to the people who elect them. I think that is a better way to go after it. I may be dreaming. Usually when you read most editorial pages you can see that they are not talking to people as much as they are talking to those who run the government. They should be stimulating the people to react to what that senator

or congressman is doing so that they will make it clear to him that if they do not do what they think is right, they will just throw you out of office. I really think we ought to talk more to people than to politicians. But we absolutely do try to influence politicians. We have them in, we talk to them.

P: Do you think readers read the editorial pages?

W: No. We get back to what my job is. Our job is to be stimulating on the editorial page. I do not know whether it means changing the format somewhat, perhaps changing it, altering it from day to day or something. The editorial page is extremely valuable. It is full of facts. [In] the *Wall Street Journal*, that column down the left hand side which reflects their view is beautifully written. It is mean, it has an edge to it. You cannot take your eyeballs away from that baby whether you agree or disagree with it. We have got to be able to do that on our editorial pages. We need to do that. If we could do that consistently we could get people back to editorial pages, I think we could get young people back to editorial pages.

P: Over the years, how have the responses, either letters or e-mails or telephone calls to your editorial cartoons changed?

W: No, they have not changed. We are living right now in a particularly volatile time. September 11 [date of terrorist attacks] has made their senses far more fragile and acute. They are responding now as they never responded before. There is this sense that it is our job here to be extremely patriotic and support the president, no matter what, even if he is using September 11 to push through programs he could not get through before September 11. Our job here is to

support him no matter what. Of course, we cannot do that. We are getting responses [from] people saying, what right have you to criticize the president right now, when he is under all this pressure? Those sorts of things. It is not unhealthy to go through this process. Particularly if you get a chance to talk to them. The e-mail does allow us to respond to them. The telephone calls and all of that, it is all part of the process.

P: What did you draw for September 11?

W: One of the things I cannot do is describe my cartoons. My first cartoon was about intelligence and it just made everybody mad. My first thought was how in the world could our intelligence have been so bad? There has been a major slip-up here. Instead of being properly sympathetic about the tragedy itself which I did later, I went right after one of the problems I thought led to it.

P: One of the areas you are obviously very interested in is nuclear energy and nuclear power plants. You have drawn editorials that are relevant to those issues. I notice that another important issue for you is education. The editorial cartoon the day before yesterday, I believe, is two kids talking about the governor and legislature slashing spending for our schools. The end result of it is that these kids are not going to be able to read, therefore they think they end up dumb and vote the same legislators back into office. Quite clearly, this is kind of a hard-edged comment on the decision on the legislature to cut funding for public schools.

W: Should I pussyfoot around that? This is extremely partisan here. The governor will not even come and talk to us. He will not come in here because we pound

him pretty good sometimes. I think the balance between funding education and giving tax breaks to corporations is so bizarre as to warrant that kind of criticism.

P: A previous cartoon you did showed teachers on strike because teachers are underpaid and demand more money. One of the students says, is that our teacher carrying a sign? What do you suppose it says? The other student says, don't ask me, I can't read, either.

W: That cartoon is pretty old. We are getting back to unions again.

P: Also, I notice you have had an interesting time with Richard Nixon, as did most editorialists.

W: Everyone had a great time with Richard Nixon.

P: You miss him terribly, do you not?

W: We have got John Ashcroft [U.S. Attorney General, 2001-present] now.

P: He is a good substitute. One of the cartoons has the Nixon memoirs and the guy that runs the bookstore says, put it in fiction. What did you draw about Watergate [scandal during the Nixon administration]?

W: All kinds of cartoons. You are going back quite a ways. I have drawn so many cartoons. These issues really do not change. Watergate was certainly, unto itself, an issue that we have not seen the likes of since. You are asking me to recall cartoons. All of this tends to run together when you have been doing it as long as I have. Let me tell you there is no bigger critic of my cartoons than me. Every time I look at one, I say, geez, I could have done better than that, changed this and changed that. If you are asking me to dwell on some of my old cartoons, I probably will not do it.

P: You indicated that you are pretty liberal in your views. How do you see Richard Nixon as president? How would you personally assess him?

W: I think Richard Nixon was personally a very troubled man who lacked confidence. I think he had a nature, an instinct that led him to believe that everyone around him really could not be trusted. I think there was paranoia there beyond belief. In summing up Richard Nixon, I would have to say, [his presidency was] one of our biggest tragedies. It is not that Nixon was not capable of being president, it was just that he would never allow himself to be president. His entire time seemed to be spent trying to figure out who was going to do what to him. He did not even trust his own aides. I think that just held him back and kept him from being a good president.

P: What is your view of Ronald Reagan [U.S. President, 1981-1989]?

W: My problem with Ronald Reagan is they kept calling him the Great Communicator. Every time they say that I keep thinking about how the standards for communicating with one another has plummeted. I think there are very few politicians today who can use the English language – either write it or speak it. I guess the last one that we know of who could use it in the view of everyone living today, analysts, politicians, and the public was Ronald Reagan. Yet I did not think he was a great communicator at all. I think he was an example of how standards have plummeted so precipitously that concentration on using the English language in the kind of way that would move people to believe you and get the public moving in the direction you wanted them to move in is lost. It perturbed me that we considered Reagan to be a great

communicator. Other than that I think he was certainly conservative, but he was a nice enough man. I disagreed with him most of the time.

P: I noticed one of the interesting books about Reagan, Lou Cannon's book was called *The Role of a Lifetime*.

W: Yes, we have pinned that on Reagan a lot. I have done it too. Reagan gave me this feeling in his press conferences and practically everything else he did, I thought wow, he is getting through this and he is not screwing up. Hey, that old guy is doing great. But is that what you are supposed to think about your president? He is remembering all of that, he is getting it out. You know his aides are standing back there saying he has got it, he is not going to screw up. I always thought, if you are going to give Reagan credit for anything, given the stress and pressures he was under, he did pretty well in holding it together in front of the public. A great communicator? I do not think he was that.

P: What about Bill Clinton?

W: Interesting man, great cartoon subject. Someone I would not trust as far as I could throw him, of course. If you want me to sum up Bill Clinton that would take probably an hour-and-a-half. As a cartoonist, I have to tell you I really miss him.

P: I guess the current president [George W. Bush] is a little too bland.

W: No, to me he is not bland. This is going to sound harsh. To me, he is in way over his head. All the times I have been doing cartooning, [he is] the single most uninspiring president we have ever had. I do not think he can use the English language, I think he has trouble in front of audiences. I do not think he likes to do that. In a sense I sympathize with him, but he is the president of the United

States. I know he is trying very hard to promote this image of rousing the American people to his cause in his battle against terrorism. I suppose I have to say at this point, he has done a pretty good job. On the other hand, the American people are going to support him no matter what anyway. All he is doing now is the right thing to do and I think most presidents would have done the same thing. It is sad to see him using September 11 to push through programs that no one really wants, [such as] drilling in the Arctic wildlife preserve, cutting back on environmental probes and things of that kind because he knows he can do it now because he has a ninety percent approval rating.

P: One of the things I have noticed in doing research for this and I wanted to ask you about, why are there not many female editorial cartoonists?

W: There are a couple. When I was asked about the state of editorial cartooning, I used to maintain that if one really good female cartoonist came up that made a lot of impact, who was strong and independent, that she would almost become instantly wealthy overnight. We were ready for that. Even if it was feminist, we were ready for a strong female viewpoint on the editorial page. I am telling you it would have been widely accepted by newspaper readers and maybe widely disagreed with, but who cares. I do not think we ever really got someone of that stature. There are some female editorial cartoonists out there. If you ask me their names, I could not tell you.

P: Could you discuss some of the other editorial cartoonists you admire?

W: Jeff MacNelly I guess would be right up at the top of the list. Jim Borgman [editorial cartoonist]. I like Mike Peters. That is kind of hard to do. My general

feeling is that the editorial cartooning, in terms of quality, has fallen off again so precipitously that my first reaction is to get mad as hell at what is happening, then the next thing I do is try to back off and not start getting into that again. I do think it is critical. I do think that the survival of editorial pages is critical and the survival of editorial cartooning I think is critical. That battle is not being waged.

P: Do you read a lot of other editorial cartoons, editorial pages?

W: I see them a lot. I see them in the *Sun Sentinel*, I see them in *Newsweek*, I see them in *Time*, special drawings for *Time*. I see what other newspapers are using because I read other newspapers. Incidentally Pat Oliphant [editorial cartoonist] I would put in that list right up near the top.

P: What was your assessment of one of the giants of the industry, Herbert Block who recently passed away on October 7, 2001?

W: I admired Herbert Block for a lot of reasons. Herblock could write, he was a good writer. He was a good student of politics. He was a detail person and he was tough. He was the guy who got Richard Nixon, really. He really was. No matter what you say about all the other cartoonists and the stuff they did, Herblock was the guy who got Richard Nixon.

P: His cartoons had a huge impact on the public view of Joe McCarthy [U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, 1947-1957; held hearings to root out communists in America]. He presented him as sort of an ape man.

W: [I give] credit to the *Washington Post*. It took courage to do that kind of work at that time.

P: Same for Nixon too.

W: Yes, absolutely.

P: As you know, Katherine Graham [editor, publisher of the *Washington Post*].

W: Credit to the paper, credit to Herblock too. You are only as good as the paper who backs you.

P: Nixon, as you know, was threatening Katherine Graham, so this was a difficult position.

W: Katherine Graham was a great lady.

P: What about our editorial cartoons as compared to the British? You read the *London Times* and the *Guardian* and all of these newspapers. The editorials seem to me to be different in context. Theirs are perhaps a little more satirical.

W: You are talking about the cartoons themselves? I am not as big an authority on European cartoonists now as I was ten, twelve years ago when I decided that they were being given more independence than we enjoyed and were probably far more satirical and mean than we would ever be allowed to get. I do not know that that holds true today. I am really not sure.

P: Since Palm Beach was at the center of this 2000 presidential election, would you comment a little about the impact of that election on both the newspaper here and the county itself?

W: The impact on the newspaper was that it had to cover the story and I think it did a damn good job of covering the story. I hardly know where to begin. We had a major screw-up in the ballot design, you know that. I think watching the partisan views of all of this – this newspaper had to sort through that and eventually did

and came to the conclusion that that ballot design was unacceptable.

Throughout this entire process, the pressures were such, coming [from a] national [level and] from Tallahassee. You had so many different views you had to sort through as a newspaper and try to get that information to people so they could sort it out. I think in the end, the ballot design was critical. I do not think George [W.] Bush would be president if it had not been for that ballot design. A lot of pressure has been brought to bear on Theresa LePore [supervisor of elections, Palm Beach County]. In cartoons, I pretty much held her responsible for that chiefly because she denies it. When I came in that day, before I voted, Shirley, the secretary said, when you go vote, watch out. I said, what are you talking about? She said, people have been calling up saying they think they voted for Pat Buchanan [unsuccessful presidential candidate, 1992, 1996, 2000]. I said, why would that happen? The ballot that was sent out to people to prepare them to vote did not look like the ballot they found when they got inside the voting booth. **Tom Blackburn** who is one of the most intelligent people I know, piped up [and] said he thought he voted for Buchanan. I thought, my God. I went to vote and I saw immediately what had happened. Those holes were so close together, you thought you were voting for the [Al] Gore [unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate, 2000; U.S. Vice-President, 1993-2001] ticket, you actually could hit Buchanan quite easily. When you get a sizeable Jewish population here voting for Pat Buchanan, you know something has really gone amiss. That was one of the things the paper had to sort through. In Tallahassee of course, you had Katherine Harris [Florida Secretary of State, 1998-present],

then you had [George] Bush, Senior [U.S. President, 1989-1993; U.S. Vice-President, 1981-1989] calling in Jim Baker [U.S. Secretary of State, 1989-1992; Campaign Manager for President George Bush, 1988] saying, go help Georgie get elected president. Then all the lawyers jump in. Then we find out that there were police roadblocks to help prevent blacks from voting in some areas, that blacks got confused in Jacksonville. This does not mean it was some sort of coordinated plot, it was not. It does suggest that because of all of this, George [W.] Bush was elected president. The court battle itself, I was of the opinion, this is my interpretation, that the state Supreme Court actually distinguished itself in the way that it handled it. Then we had a movement here by some local Republican, **Mary McCarthy**, to start a movement to get all of these judges kicked off. All of this stuff was going on, all of these dynamics flying back and forth. That is a lot for a newspaper to sort through. I think we did it pretty well. You hear this brought up so many times sarcastically by people across the country that look at Florida as some sort of backwards swamp that did not know how to get through a major election. That really is unfair.

P: If you looked at almost any other state you would find similar situations.

W: A lot of states had similar problems in recounts and otherwise.

P: Georgia had twice as many under-votes and over-votes as Florida did.

W: In the end, we were the one that was critical and decided who won.

P: How would you assess the performance of the canvassing board? Theresa LePore, Carol Roberts [vice-chair, Palm Beach County Commission; member, Palm Beach County canvassing board], and Judge Charles Burton [Palm Beach

County Court; chairman, Palm Beach County canvassing board]?

W: I thought it was abominable. I said so at the time. As we proceeded through this thing, Judge Burton got so caught up in the national publicity that he was appearing on Nightline [ABC news program]. When he was supposed to be counting he was giving him time off. I do not know what [Carol Roberts] told you. Carol Roberts was the feisty one of that board. I think she was outvoted most of the time. They took so much time off from their responsibilities during the critical time of that recount. Broward County did it right. Broward County just kept on. No matter what the disagreements, what the discussion, they just kept on counting. They did not take [time] off. This guy was giving them time off for this and time off for that. Then he was allowing the Republicans and the Democrats to come in and influence everything he was doing in the recount. Most particularly, my quarrel with Burton was this. [He was] a traffic court judge appointed by Jeb Bush and they kept saying to me, he is a Democrat, he is a Democrat. It did not make any difference to me. This guy I thought seemed to be looking at this as some chance to elevate himself to the status of a celebrity. That is my view and I think when that happened, he forgot all about what his real responsibility was. Theresa LePore, I think, seemed to be totally confused. I think her inclinations were to try to cut this short as quickly as she could to avoid any controversy. I do not know, but I thought on the whole the canvassing board did a terrible, terrible job.

P: One of your political writers, and I cannot remember his name, said that the legacy of this election for Palm Beach was that three Democrats gave George

W. Bush a fair shake.

W: Are you serious? Thinking it was open, above-board honest and handled in the way that it should have been? Because I do not agree with that.

P: Just that his argument was that he thought that although they were Democrats, they were not partisan and that they did, in fact, put on a higher standard.

W: That is the kind of thing people in the media do. It really galls me because I do not think it applies at all. All we want to know is [whether] they [did] their job regardless of whether they were Democrats or Republicans. That is the way they ought to be judged. Partisanship, I think in this case, should be put aside. I think that each one of them bears the responsibility for this outcome. Carol Roberts, of course, was outnumbered, basically. I just believe that whether they were Republican or Democrat does not really matter when you look at the way they handled this.

P: When you look back at your career as an editorial cartoonist, what do you consider to be your most important contribution?

W: I do not think I have made my most important contribution yet and if I thought I had I would stop doing it. I keep hoping that I can somehow make some sort of big difference. As sappy as that sounds, every day I think maybe I can change something. My major contributions, if there is such a thing for me, would be influencing some kid to become an editorial cartoonist in the vein I would love editorial cartoonists to be. To understand that we need to recapture our legitimacy as commentators. If I could turn out somebody like that just by talking to them and encouraging them, I would feel that was a major contribution.

P: What is the future for editorial cartoonists? What will happen once Oliphant and Mike Peters and the rest of the current group are no longer doing their work? Are there some up-and-comers?

W: The trouble with this subject as long as I have been doing it, is you come off like some kind of old fart complaining about the way how good things used to be. I do not mean to do that, I just think that we have lost our way. I think editors are putting up with junk and running it because they think that is all there is. I think we ought to be providing them with something better. I think syndicates ought to be providing them with something better and I do not think it is happening.

P: Is it the responsibility of journalism schools?

W: Yes, if they treasure it. I think it is partly their responsibility to help us with this. I do not know that they will. I cannot honestly say that the kinds of people we are getting from journalism schools are particularly qualified to write and cover stories, as harsh as that may sound.

P: One newspaper writing about your career said, he is one of the guardians of America's conscience.

W: Oh, how lofty.

P: It does seem to me, from our discussion, that you have a strong moral sense of right and wrong and like to point that out.

W: I do not have a monopoly on that, I just think that it is part of my job. It is what we are supposed to be in journalism. One of the things I read the other day – at first I laughed and then I wanted to cry. I get a magazine called *Press Time* which is devoted to this profession. I was sitting waiting for my wife and I was

reading the back cover page. It was talking about keying to some of the stories, it all had to deal with how all of the current newspaper people and newspapers were handling [coverage of] September 11. All of these pieces dealt with finding psychiatrists and psychologists. [End of side 2, tape A] If we are hiring people that are supposed to be able to cover serious crises like this, but before they can cover them, they have to have psychiatric treatment and be treated for three or four weeks until they can get their feet back on the ground, what kind of people are we hiring? What has happened to our business? It is not going to work. That is all. I was just amazed. You expect a tried and true professional – the ones I grew up with – to go out and not only cope with the story but to cover it. Now, I do not know.

P: Are the quality and the background of reporters are just not as good as they used to be?

W: Again, that is generalizing. I know some really good reporters now. There are some good reporters here, good reporters on the *Herald, Sun Sentinel*. They are there, there just are not enough of them. That kind of quality is not consistent throughout the newspapers. It is not. If we want to win the public back to newspapers, we are going to have to confront that.

P: What are the best newspapers in the state of Florida?

W: The best newspaper in the state of Florida?

P: The best ones.

W: The best ones. *Palm Beach Post, Miami Herald, the Sun Sentinel, the Orlando Sun*. I think the *Tampa Tribune* is a good newspaper too.

P: The *St. Pete Times*?

W: The *St. Pete Times*, absolutely.

P: It does seem to me that this state has a large quantity of outstanding newspapers.

W: This state [does], yes. By comparison with other states, [this state has] some of the best, [and more] really fine newspapers than any other state in the union, I believe. How about California? I am just not sure about California. We have some really great substantial newspapers in this state. We are very lucky.

P: Where do you think that came from?

W: Why did that happen? Burgeoning population probably demanded it. We get people from all areas of the United States who, from whence they come, demand good newspapers. It is partly that. I think we have just been lucky in getting good people in the right places at the right times to put out good newspapers. [This] does not mean that these newspapers cannot improve. They certainly can and should.

P: What is the future of newspapers? Are we going to eliminate the hand-held document that we have now?

W: I have never believed that. I think people like something tactile. I do not think the printed page is ever going to disappear. I think one of the biggest jokes is, with computers supposedly, we are going to start using less paper, but now everybody prints stuff out on [from] a computer, we are using more paper than ever. No, I do not think the printed page will disappear. I do think newspapers have to improve drastically. I think they are missing a bet in not realizing that

there is a vacuum developing because television [has started] floundering and wondering where its viewership is and going to all these extremes and boring the hell out of people and fluttering around kind of making them angry in terms of quality they are being offered both in news and entertainment. There is a big opening there for us and we can fill that by just going back to doing what we do best, or what we have not really done best in a long time, but should get back to doing. That is just absolutely superior writing and coverage.

P: I want to finish up with just a couple more questions. One of the questions is, have you finished your cartoon for tomorrow?

W: No. I will start that after you leave, as a matter of fact. No disrespect. You do not have anything to do with whether I am going to make it or not. I will be okay.

P: What will it be on?

W: I do not know yet. I really do not know yet. I need to sort through that. It is part of my process. I will sit down here and start reading the papers. I have not touched the papers yet. I had to get my cartoon out so I could be sure that I was ready when you got here.

P: Do you not do many local cartoons since you are syndicated?

W: [I] do not do enough local cartoons. Actually, I keep saying this and in some sense this is not fair to my newspaper although they never complain about it. I have to get five national [or] international cartoons out a week. When I comment on something local that means I have to do one or two extra. I have done that but I do not do it enough. Some of these issues are getting more and more critical here.

P: Is there anything that we have not talked about that you would like to discuss?

W: No, my God, you covered just about everything. I am surprised I am still talking.

Usually the subject matter, it seems to me is not all that interesting to average people, but perhaps I am wrong.

P: I beg to differ, I think it is quite fascinating. I want to thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

W: Thank you for coming. I have enjoyed it.

P: Good. [End of interview]