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Interviewee: Ben Hill Griffin

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

Date: June 23, 2000

P: [It is June 23,] 2000. We are continuing from where we were a couple of weeks ago and where Mr. Griffin had told us a great about his background and his family's background and certainly a great deal about the citrus industry. I would like to start today, with asking you, Ben Hill, what would you, primarily attribute your father's success to?

G: Any time I start thinking about my father, I kind of get a little bit choked, emotionally. He and I were very close. I think that his success was due to his driving energy and perseverance and applying good, sound, basic, common sense. And he built upon that and he experienced one thing and then ...He told me a story one time about – I don't know whether it is true or not – but it was in Georgia. They had a watermelon-eating contest. Who could eat the biggest watermelon. And they had to put up some money. Well, this young man out there, he was fourteen or so, I don't know how old he was. But they had to put up some money. And that was big money back then, if you put up five dollars or three dollars. He wanted to enter it. So, he registered but he didn't pay. And he saw this big watermelon that each one of them had to eat. And it was a timed thing. He said, I'll be back in an hour and if I decide to go, I will put up my money. Well, he runs off and thinks about it and so forth. He comes back and puts his money up. They had the watermelon contest and low and behold, he wins. He wins handsomely. He beat everybody, quickly. And they had him up there and they said, son, you were pretty confident you were going to win that, weren't you? He said, yes, sir. He said, well, how did you know that? And he said, well, at my home, my father has got a little watermelon patch out there. And I looked at that watermelon that is up here and I know that there was one back there that there was a little bit bigger than that one that you got up here. So, I ran home and I ate that one. If I could eat that bigger one, I knew darn good and well, that I could eat that smaller one. That is how I knew I could win. So, I think I mentioned perseverance, common sense, [he] applied himself, knew the basics of his decisions, as was known as that time and then he built on one experience, then he got to a bigger experience, like the watermelon. You know, success feeds upon success. And as he grew, grew like a mushroom with many different little heads on a mushroom, if you will. Imagine that. So, that way, later on in life, he started small. He started with ten acres. And he learned a lot from that ten acres. He sold it in bulk and found out that the man bought it knew more about how many boxes on there than he did. That never happened to him, again. Next year's crop, if you sold it by bulk, he had a darn good idea of how much fruit was out there. And if you had a good idea about how much fruit was out there and the man or woman buying it, was basing their bulk – you know what a bulk deal is? I will give you x number of dollars for this crop of fruit that is

on your ten acres. So, next year, he knew – or felt like he knew how many boxes. See, he had been out there when they were loading out last year. He knew that he had picked out more than what he thought. So, the man – he was a good business man. He made a profit. Dad did all right because he accepted the deal. But he could have done better. So, next year, the man came by. He had a good idea about how many boxes and he knew the market price, so to determine the man was offering him a fair price or not. And that year, he knew the market, he had a good idea about the number of boxes – a real good idea. And he made a deal – handshake. You know, that was another trademark of my father.

P: His word was his bond.

G: You betcha. Another thing was, I think I mentioned that to you, before is, of course we didn't have computers back then. We just had the adding machines and all that kind of stuff. And then, computers came in. He said, I want to tell you fellas something. The computers spits it out and gives you the information and I will feed it in and boy, we'll get several alternatives on it. He says, that is fine for you all. And do it. But for me, Ben Hill Griffin, Jr., give me a penny pencil and a piece of paper and I'll figure that thing out. How many dollars per acre? He would be over there plugging in all of the numbers and multiplying. I think that is probably about \$875,000. Just a minute, Mr. Griffin. Mr. Griffin, it is \$843,760. Okay. You see, I don't need a computer. I can do it faster in my head. You get dependent on the computer and you don't work your brain so I am going to stay with my penny pencil and my pad. End of story. Did I answer your question? Perseverance is in there. He was a great believer, Vernon, in perseverance. You fail and you still think you are right, get up and persevere. Persevere, persevere, persevere. Now, if you get down the road and you finally wake up and say, [no], I am on the wrong trail. Drop it. Don't persevere a cold trail. Go get you another goal.

P: What did he do when he found he had made a mistake?

G: He was a great believer in cutting his losses short. If he had gotten himself into something – what he thought was good – and he gets in there and he says, oh, oh. This thing is bigger than I can handle, or I don't like what is laid out, here, he would try to get out of that situation. Sell it to somebody that knew how to run it better and all those things. Buy me out. He never – to my knowledge he never sold something, like an automobile that he knew was a lemon, he would not sell that to you. Other than to tell you that, Vernon, this car, in my opinion, is a lemon. Now, maybe you can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. That is another thing he would believe in. Making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. And that meant you look at a situation and everybody thinks that it is terrible. He would try to look in there and see that it is really now what it appears to be. I am

going to buy this because I know how I can turn that thing over and really make something out of it. And may other people have walked by and looked and considered – they didn't want to touch it. Dad walked by, considered it, asked the price. If he felt like that he could take that and turn it and make it beautiful -- make it successful, he would buy it and then he would apply his experience and knowledge as quickly as he could to make that investment -- whether it be a truck or a car. Some people walk by and say, oh my gosh. Look at this, it has some dents in it. Paint doesn't look good and say it has 60,000 miles on it or something. But Dad would look in there deeper. And he would say, hey, I know how to fix dents. Doesn't cost much to paint a car. 60,000 miles, that thing will run to 120,000. He would investigate the engine. You know, the difference between an engine and a motor, representative? What is the difference an engine and a motor? I'll tell you like my father told me. He asked me that one day. Twenty years ago. I never forgot it. He said, Now, son, listen to me and pay attention. What is the difference between an engine and a motor? I don't know. He said, all right, pay attention. An engine runs off of separate fuel power -- to run the engine. That is the gas motors and the diesels. Okay. A motor runs as a direct result of a power line like an electric source. So, an engine runs from it's own combustion. A motor, like an electric motor, it runs off electricity. So, in a car, you don't talk about a motor -- that ain't tied to a power line. It makes its own energy to drive that. But if you have got a grove and you want an engine or a motor, you decide at that point, do I want something that is self sufficient? If they brown-out or black-out, my engine is going to continue to run and be able to irrigate my groves and protect it from freeze. If I have a motor running that water supply and the power company over there in Tampa, think brown out or black out, that grove, I can't put water on it because my source of energy -- I can't do anything about it. So, he paid more for an engine than he would for a motor. That is it.

P: Being in business as long as your father was and as successful as he was, can you think of the one or two of the most significant decisions that he made?

G: Yes, sir. I think I told you about him going to New York and selling beans and coming back.

P: Yes.

G: He lost money on that deal. So, you see, that was something that he did not want to persevere. He found out he better find something else. Another thing that he found that, you know, he knew something about groves. My grandfather, of course, had taught him and he had been there and he knew how to spray and how to fertilize, etc., etc. He plied himself and then he got into the...he ran that

little small fertilizer plant that I was telling you. He was hired to do that. After two of three years of that and he was accumulating a little groves along, himself - land, turning them into groves. Then, he began to form his own care taking company, Griffin Care Taking Company. At one time, my father had eleven different corporations, eleven! Late sixties, they were all combined into one. He had a fertilizer company; he had a grove care taking company; he had a concentrate company, where you make frozen orange concentrate; he had a packing house, fresh fruit packing house, Ben Hill Griffin Packing House. Eleven of these things that he had made up, every time he got into a new business, he would make another corporation. Well, in the late, sixties, no, wait a minute, late fifties, he had a very good accountant friend - he has passed away, now - but he was not only an accountant, he was a good business man and a good advisor. Dad loved him. And he advised my father -- see, he had eleven different corporations. He was borrowing money from one corporation to put in the next. And then, put it in there, put it there. I mean, it was all legal but it got to the point, he just threw his hands up. I am going nuts. This corporation's year ends in December, this one here ends in August; this one here in July and this one fresh fruit, I want it to end in June. Because I will have all of my packing done by then. Then, I will have all of my cost and revenue. He said he all of these things in his mind. So, he brought them all in -- merged them together, fertilizer company as well, and made it Ben Hill Griffin, Inc. That way, all he had to do was think. He didn't have to think where the money was coming from, timing, losses, profits - put them all together. And that was a real significant thing that he did. Probably about 1956, just before he bought the concentrate plant or right after he bought it because we had the Griffin Concentrate. There was even a Griffin Single Strength Juice Plant over in Bartow and here -- sectionizing plant. Sectionizing grapefruit. Two hundred very skilled ladies that know how to be dexterous, you know. They take the grapefruit and they jerk the hide off it through a system - heat and so forth. The grapefruit would come to the ladies just in a pure meat [form]. And they would take that grapefruit and they would put it on a metal spear, if you will, zap. That was the grapefruit. And it was so positioned that they could then, take their knife and - I have already told you, if you have got your knife, your got your britches - I have got my britches on, so I got a knife - and those ladies would come in. This is the membrane between each section. Membrane is bitter. If you are eating grapefruit try not to get that membrane. Just get the pure meat. That is going to be your sweetest. And I think I have already mentioned that the sweetest part of any fruit, be it an orange or a grapefruit, is the body. That is the blossom end. The stem end is on the top. That holds it to the tree. So, if you take that piece of fruit off, you turn it, you see the blossom end and you are going cut it in half, give your best friend the top half and you eat the bottom half and don't tell him anything, and you will have the sweetest part of that particular piece of fruit. But those gals, those ladies, they were so skilled, they would just run down that membrane, zap, zap, zap, zap, all the way around, and they could turn it. Pick

up another one, put it in, zap, zap, zap. And then, they had a conveyor system that took just the pure meat segments -- we call it segments of the grapefruit -- beautiful. And then, it would go down and go through a process to be put in the can and be heat treated to pasteurize it, put it in a can. We call them brights. The bright -- give me a can, darlin'. A bright can, there is one, right there. There is one, right there. Give me that. They weren't cans like this, but you can imagine. The label was paper. They had indented on the top what the product was, inside -- when it was packed, what it is. Consumer couldn't understand it but we could understand. And they would all come out in brights. Come through the pasteurization -- just thousands of them. And they were bright. Put that in the warehouse in a corrugated, paper box. Your customers make orders and you got twenty customers -- some real big, A&P, some small, some Piggly Wiggly, or Mom and Pop deal, and we already had their labels made up. But we didn't know what that customer wanted; maybe the customer didn't know. But he would call and make an order and want to buy five thousand cases from you. Fine. When do you want it shipped? Fine. We would take that segment of the warehouse that had that particular product -- you and I and everybody else that walked through there, and they were just bright cans. They didn't have a label on them. We would take out that five thousand cases and run it through what we call a labeler. And that is a single chute deal with all of these brights rolling down there and as they rolled, they would come across A&P's label. One end was glued and the other end was glued. And as that can came across there -- and these are all lined up. I mean, it was zip, zip, zip. It came across there -- that label would pick up, wrap on the can, and then, when it got to the end, it would pick up again, and then, it would say...see, it had got the label, the beautiful label. And it is A&P, red grapefruit sections. Quality is our name, or whatever they wanted on there. And then, that is what, A&P or Piggly Wiggly, or whatever. They would go and put it in their stores. But that is what we called a bright. Nowadays, they have this lithograph. They know about how many Coca Colas there are going to sell, or Pepsi colas or whatever. They go ahead and put the label on it, when the product goes on the can. That saves a lot of money. But back then, in the forties and the fifties and the sixties, the brights -- since you didn't know who you might be selling that to - you couldn't pack up a hundred thousand cases for A&P. The A&P might not order a hundred thousand cases. They might order fifty and then, what are you going to do with them other fifty thousand, carry them til next year? That is not good. The quality of the product goes down with time. To get back to your original question -- some of the things that were decisions...I would say when he put all of his those eleven or twelve corporations together, that put it into a mind set that he didn't have to think about eleven. All he had to do was think about one. So, he was better focused, wasn't he? Right. Better focused. So, that made him more successful. But he bought, he added some groves. He then, he saw the benefit of being in grove care-taking business. Other growers around, they liked him. He would come to them and say, let me take care of your groves and I will

treat you fair and I have got to have a little bit of profit but I won't take much, But, you can see my grove and you can see yours. You want your grove to look as good as mine? Well, yes, sir. Well, I'll treat your grove just as well as I'll treat mine. And if you want me to seel your fruit for you, I'll do that, too. What did you get for your fruit last year? Oh, I got "x." Well, that is pretty good. Yes, sir, that is pretty good. Really, really good. I don't tell everybody this, sir, madam, but I got a quarter a box more than what you got. How did you do it? He wasn't braggin'. He said, I may not do that, again next year, but I have done it the last three years. If I have done it for three years, I think I might do it for four. I know one thing, I am not going to get the bottom of the market. He always wanted to be equal to the market plus. Plus. He didn't want to go out and just -- you know you sell fruit several times of the year. Some people will sell to somebody but they don't have a pot nor a window -- we know what that means, and they are fly by nights. So, a market is doing like this. That buyer comes in and he offers this big peak. Wow, I'd better sell my fruit to him. Come to find out, the man doesn't have the money. He is running on an empty gas in his vehicle. So, what he thought he had sold for four dollars a box, he may not get anything. Or he may get half. And the man comes back and says, I can't pay you four. I can pay you two. Well, man, the market has been three all year long. Well, I am sorry. I made a mistake. You can put me into bankruptcy, if you want to. I can pay you two. Then you think, I better get that money while I can. But the next day, the next week, the next month, around the coffee shop uptown, he is not crowing any more about how high he sold his fruit, when everybody else sold theirs for less. He doesn't say that he got snookered. He just doesn't talk about the price of fruit, anymore. Man, when is it going to rain? But that, then there was a big, big decision in 1960, when he mortgaged everything he had to buy out **Satilly**. It was about six or eight thousand acres of groves from Polk, Highlands, and Manatee Counties. He had to borrow all of the money. I think I told you about him going to New York, because the bank in Florida weren't big enough to handle him. And I think maybe I am going over some old stories, here, but he mortgaged everything he had and thirty days later, all that millions of dollars of fruit that he thought he had, that is that isn't a bird in the hand, is it?

P: No.

G: That is a bird in the tree. He woke up within thirty days -- he didn't go to sleep that night because he knew that the hurricane was coming. But when dawn came the next day after hurricane Donna came through in 1960, about the tenth, eleventh, or twelfth of September. He woke up the next day and his grapefruit -- he had lost seventy-five percent of his grapefruit crop. He could go to any grove he wanted to and look at that grove and the ____ was literally covered with grapefruit on the ground. You could not take one step from here to there without

stepping on a grapefruit. That is the truth. About seventy percent of his crop was on the ground. It was worthless. He couldn't do anything. It wasn't mature. He tried to make cow feed out of it. He couldn't do it. There was no salvage whatsoever. The only benefit, I guess, he got out of it, was the grapefruit deteriorated and rotted and added humus to the soil. But he was broke. He was bankrupt. And that bank didn't stay with him. All he could pay was the interest. He could not pay the principal that he had agreed to. Now, maybe he could sell his ranch to help pay his debt but he wanted to keep his ranch. So, within two days, he was in new York City talking to those men and women that had trusted him to loan that kind of money. It was the biggest citrus loan that had ever been made in the state of Florida at that time. That was in 1960, when I was at University of Florida as a freshman. And, man, I wanted to come home. I knew he was in bad trouble. My Dad used to kid people, you know, his close friends, not everybody. He says, I want to tell you all one thing, when I bought that grove.... See, many people had looked at those groves. They turned them down. When Dad bought them, it was like that silk purse and sow's ear, they saw problems; Dad saw opportunities. At that particular time, grapefruit weren't worth very much. About twenty percent of this acreage was grapefruit, maybe thirty. It was the old deal, I think I mentioned to you, you had six rows of oranges and then four rows of grapefruit, six rows of oranges and four rows of grapefruit. Knowledgeable people in the Florida citrus industry said Ben Hill Griffin -- he has finally has messed up, bad. He bought that thing. There is no way that he can take grapefruit and oranges and make a profit out of it. See, what they missed was that Dad already had a concentrate plant. He had a single shrink juice plant in Bartow. And do you know what else he had? He had a fresh fruit packing house. So, he had three different ways to handle grapefruit that other people could have done -- you don't have to own a concentrate plant. You don't have to own a sectionalizing plant. You don't have to own a fresh fruit plant. But you have got the fruit and then you go to the different people and you make your best deal. Well, he didn't have to go to people. He was fortunate. And he had a fresh fruit house. He had a concentrate and then he had a single strength _____. He knew he could put it all together and make it work. But, there were many of his good friends, probably not behind his back, not disrespectful, but they would get together and kind of shake their heads, I was told. They would say, boy, Ben Hill Griffin has been a success all these years but he got a hold of something that might wipe him out. Some of his enemies were glad he bought it. But, the end of that story was that he went to those bankers in new York -- they didn't know P-turkey about citrus. They liked juice or something. They agreed to modify the contract [to] interest, only for two years and then kick back into the principal and the interest on the declining basis. They hung with him because Dad told them, if you will stay with me, we will make a profit out of this. You can bankrupt me, because I have got -- I'll sell out and I'll have a little money left. But all of my life's work will be gone because I will have to liquidate. And those bankers -- they made a

smart decision. If they had called his loan, who are they going to get to run all of those darn groves? They believed in my father, Ben Hill Griffin, Jr. They agreed to lower that -- cut out the principal -- just pay the interest and boy, that was a great decision for the bank. It was a fantastic decision for my father. I joke about it. He didn't. He didn't say this. In the 1960s, I said, you know, my father, he mortgaged everything he had except his children. And if they had been worth a damn, he would have mortgaged them, too. Anyway, that was a successful deal. And from there, all this time, Vernon, he liked politics. Going back to Governor Fuller Warren -- we went through that. Governor Fuller Warren, the silver tongued orator. 1950, he was the one who edicted or led the legislature to put in fences. Before, you fenced your groves to keep the cows from getting in. That flipped it back to the rancher and says, you have got to fence your property. But to keep the cows out of the groves; keep the cows out of the highways, etc, etc. That was a wonderful thing that Governor Fuller Warren, by himself, or with others -- you knew that Senator Pat Thomas passed away, yesterday?

P: Yes.

G: He was a great man. I really liked Pat. I called Senator Pat Thomas, of course you worked with him. You knew him better. But I had known him for many, many years, dating back to when my father was active, serving in the legislature or working with elected senators and representatives. In his later years, I have always felt like that Senator Pat Thomas, you correct me, he was more of a statesman, like Benjamin Harvey Hill. Benjamin Harvey Hill was a statesman. He voted for what he believed in and I believe that Pat Thomas did that because I know, many times you have to show your constituency that you brought back a little bacon or something -- going back to the old porkchop days.

P: Pat Thomas was a very effective legislator.

G: Do you think he was honest?

P: Yes, sure do.

G: Did you enjoy working with him?

P: Yes....

G: You didn't always agree, did you?

P: He was a person you could always believe, whatever he told you.

G: Kind of a man of his word.

P: Very warm and personal. His represented his constituents well.

G: I would put Representative Vernon Peoples in that same category, sir.

P: Well, thank you.

G: I worked with you when you didn't even know me. You always told me straight.

P: Tried to.

G: You did what you said you were going to do. But you had an open ear to listen to my side, possibly it may have veered you a little bit one way or another. I don't know. Probably not. But at least, you made me think that you gave it consideration. I appreciate that. What is your next question?

P: I always did. I believe that your father purchased an existing citrus concentrate plant...?

G: Yes, sir.

P: How important was that to the overall success of his operation.

G: It was very important. Dad served on the Minute Maid Board. Minute Maid was a result of Snow Crop. Snow Crop, you know you have got to go back a few years to remember Snow Crop. That is still a recognizable name to people of a certain age and older. Probably if you are in your forties or something, Snow Crop doesn't mean anything. Minute Maid is still there. Dad was on the board of Minute Maid and he owned a lot of stock in Minute Maid. I think I mentioned to you that the federal government came in and said that Minute Maid had too many concentrate plants. So, they picked two to sell. One was over in just north of Tampa. That was not a good location because there wasn't much fruit around it. A lot of people. Industry and people don't necessarily mix real well. And the other plant they were going to sell was in Frostproof. So, you see, he had his groves; he had his caretaking; he was taking care of other people's groves; he has got his fertilizer company; he had his packing house for fresh fruit; he had his single strength plant for juice, grapefruit and oranges, etc. and sections. But he didn't have a concentrate plant. And he felt like that those people that owned the concentrate plant, they would buy fruit, convert it into juice, and they would make more of a profit than did the grower. You know, at each point, middle man, middle woman, somewhere, somebody got to take a cut, you know, of the profits. So, he got off of the board. I don't know if he sold his stock or part of it or what. He never told me but in my mind, I think that he liquidated a great portion of that to be able to afford to buy the concentrate plant

-- or at least to cut it down to the point that he could borrow on it, see. The concentrate plant was x number of dollars but he could only get a 75-80% loan, so he had to take some money out of his own pocket to get it down where the banker would loan him the balance to finish it up. That was very important. But what happened? Bingo, he owned the concentrate plant. Right? All of a sudden, he has customers all over the United States. Big responsibility, satisfy your customers. Service, quality, you know, commitment. I'll be here, the rest of the year. You want a 100,000 cases? Don't worry about it. I am going to get you 100,000 cases. Well, what if it freezes? Don't worry. I'll protect you. I'll have them. I am not going to run out. Act of God is always in there, you know. You could have a freeze that just kills every tree in Florida. He can't produce something that he doesn't have. But, then, Vernon, what happened was the people that were in the bulk selling business, they call them bird dogs. [A] bird dog goes out and buys somebody's fruit, here, here, and here -- [for] cash. Generally, [he can] get it at a lower price. He has got a pretty good sized bunch of fruit. He comes in to Dad's [place and] Dad needs 500,000 boxes to run his plant. That man knows he [Dad] has got to have it. He says, Mr. Griffin, I'll sell this fruit to you, there is [are] 500,000 boxes. I'll deliver them however you want them. Well, what is your price? My price is "x". Dad says, what? You are a quarter a box, [or] fifty cents a box, higher than the market is out there. Okay. Maybe, maybe not. Volume helps to reduce your cost. Do you want the 500,000 or don't you? Dad says, gee, that is just too much. Can't you lower the price? Nope, can't do it. Well, see you, later. So Dad sends his men out to see if he can buy 500,000 boxes of this and this and this -- [from the] growers. He can only get 100,000. They just don't want to sell. They want to wait for whatever reason. [He] calls the man back. [He has] got the 500,000. He says, okay, I'll pay you the exorbitant price. We will be doing business. So, he pays him the big bucks. He has got to have the volume. If he doesn't have the volume, that concentrate plant will eat you up and spit you out. You have got to have the volume. If you don't have the volume, if that plant -- well, that plant, today, runs about 13,000,000. If you want to put 8,000,000 boxes into a 13,000,000 box capacity processing plant, your costs are going to go whoom!, right, straight up. If you can get 90 to 95%, your costs are going down and probably leveling out at a very competitive rate. Now, have you got the puzzle put together? That is why he bought **Satilly**. He bought those groves -- hocked everything he had, mortgaged it to the hilt, so that he would have his own fruit to run his own plant. So, when that guy comes in and he had 500,000 [at] a quarter or 50 cents over the market, Dad would say, thank you, but, I would like to have it but I don't have to have it. And I'll be picking up some fruit as we go along. We had daily prices out there. A thousand boxes -- what is the price? Five dollars. Okay, bring it in. Next day, four or five others...I got 500. I got 1000. He had a man handle all of that stuff. He not only bought the **Satilly** House for that purpose...By the way, in that deal, Mr. **Satilly** (I think his name

was Jimmy **Satilly**) he had the biggest packing house in the state of Florida, at that time. It was a monster. Dad already had the size packing house that he needed, the one in Avon Park burned down one morning, about four or five o'clock in the morning. Dad lives half way between here and Avon Park. I'll tell you where he lives. We came up there, today. But, he called me and said, son.... We called it the little packing house. Back when he was first starting, this was the big packing house -- the only one he had. So, when he bought the Minute Maid operation, they had a pretty good sized, fresh fruit packing house in that package. So, that became the big one. And he ran the little one on specialty stuff. It was built out of hard pine. And I don't know, they say some stuff under it or in it (it was right next to the train track, railroad tracks) caught on fire for some reason. So, I dressed and at that time, I lived about.... I don't think I lived on Lake **Reedy**, then. I think I built my house out there 1976 or something like that.

W: Let's take a break here and flip the tape.

[End of side A1]

P: One more question about your father and his business acumen and that is, how was he about delegating authority and responsibility?

G: Let me think about that. He started small so it was a little bit more difficult for him to take a division or something and just say, you handle it. We will meet once a month. If you have got something big you are working on, like capital acquisitions or something.... I guess I should say he was more of a "hands on" man. I can't do that. My father has been dead -- passed away now, I don't like the word "dead", ten years this past March, the first. That is when he passed away. If he had lived two more days, he would have passed away on my birthday. That is an interesting thing. He had three sisters, right? He had three sisters. Each of the three sisters had one son. Okay? All three of them died on -- their birth date was the same birth date as their mother. Not the father. The father didn't have the Griffin blood in him, see? And everybody was worried that I was greatly concerned that my father was going to pass away on my birthday. I didn't want him to pass away. If he wanted to go on my birthday -- [if the] Lord called him on my birthday -- that is okay with me. But he missed it by two days. So, all of his sisters' sons died on -- they died on their sons' birthdays. My father passed away two days earlier than my birthday. Does that mean something? I don't know. I don't know. His first two daughters, my oldest sister and my youngest sister, I think I have already told you this, they were born two years apart on the same day. He didn't like to do anything much on Friday. Friday the thirteenth or whatever. If he was going to hire you and he needed you, he would say, well, you are going to start Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday. He didn't want to hire anybody on Friday. Why? He

never told me. That was just him. I do the same thing, don't I?

W: Just about.

G: Have you ever thought of the word "fear"? Like "that puts the fear of the Lord in me." Or "I am so afraid I can't move". I have got a friend of mine that -- fears is anxiety, also. F-e-a-r, she thinks stands for "false evidence appearing real." Read that. And if you ever get fear, think of "false evidence appearing real." So, I like that. I keep that close where I can see it every now and then. However, you know, fear is not necessarily always false evidence appearing real. You can get out there on the street and see that big ole truck coming and boy, I need to get to the other side of the road, quick. I think I can't make it. Whoa. Stop. Don't go. You fear crossing that thing because you know, if you don't make it, you are going to die. So, fear of heights means something, also. If you are on the edge of a cliff, you say, oh, boy, I just can't look down. I am so afraid. You better be afraid. If you are up there that close, you might slip and fall. So, fear, many times is trying to tell you something. Other times, our imagined fear is false evidence appearing real. Wait until you know it is real. If it is real, fear is good. If it is not real, it is just false evidence appearing real. That gives you peace. Go ahead.

P: When your father passed away, you became the operating head of the Ben Hill Griffin Enterprises?

G: Yes, sir. Actually, he gave me power of attorney months ahead of when he passed away. He felt like he had a good opportunity to recoup. He had a blood disorder that now is very common. All the doctors know about it. He had this very simple -- I am trying to think of the name of it. What it is -- it is a blood disorder that you manufacture in your body, excess iron. When that iron gets to your liver, that is bad. You can replace your kidneys, but you -- or you can live with one kidney but you don't have but one liver. If that goes bad, your only shot is to get a donor to give you a new liver. And many times that doesn't allow you to live out your full life. It might give you five to ten more years. But he had this particular disease and he went to Mayo. He went to Shands. He went to where ever to find help. Finally, University of Florida -- Shands -- they finally found it. [It was a] Simple cure. [It was to] Give blood. Give a pint of blood every month. Give a pint of blood every three months, every six months, once a year. Whatever it takes to pull your iron down. Now, I am no doctor but if you give a pint of blood every month, your body has got to regenerate the blood, I think, to get you back up full powered. When you get full powered, you have less iron in your system and then you monitor it. If it is in the safe zone, you monitor it until it starts building up again and then you give another pint. So, had he known that, see, he did not have enough time to lower his iron - if he had known it a year earlier or five years earlier. You go in and -- ferritin is iron. You go in and

you get a blood check at the hospital or your local doctor and they run all of these things out. Normally, they do only the regular iron test for ferritin. There is another test for ferritin that costs a little bit more but it is more revealing than just your normal iron, [and it measures] all the different components of your blood. So, genetically -- see, I am a potential developer of the same disease that my father had. I have checked. Right after he passed away, I did it [the test]. Oh, gosh, a couple times a year. Genetically, it comes through the father. Ladies don't develop this problem. I don't want to get too personal, but you know, the ladies go through life until they reach the change and they have these monthly menstrual cycles. So, they are giving blood once a month on a regular basis. If they were to have it, that keeps it in control because they start it at a very young age when they start reaching that degree of maturity. I don't know when all that stuff happens. That is for women to know and I don't know have time to find out. That was like my Dad, at the stockholders' meeting, [when] somebody from New York [had] come down. He was a stock holder. Boy, Dad was up there running the meeting, see? And this guy was, he was, oh, I would say he was in his late seventies. And he was wanting to know more about citrus, you know. Why are you in citrus? You know, why aren't you here? How long does it take citrus groves to start maturing and developing? Well, he was just digging in and digging in and digging in. I am getting back to why I don't need to know about all of these women things. Dad finally told him, he said, sir, in all due respect, he says, something to the effect, I don't have time to bring you from where you are up to a knowledgeable level of citrus. That would take me a long time for me to educate you about everything I have learned about the citrus industry for the last sixty years of my life. And you know what, you don't have time enough to give me the opportunity to teach you. Next question. That man sat down and he never heard from him again. That happened.

P: How large was the Ben Hill Griffin Enterprises when you took it over? I mean, this...

G: It was pretty sizable. Pretty sizable. With Dad's leadership and (this is rather confidential) but, all my life, since I was very young, he was bringing me along and teaching the business. I didn't know what he was doing. But, many years ago I knew what he was doing. But to begin with, I didn't.... [When] I was ten years old and nine years old and I wanted something, [he would say,] here is the way you are going to get it. Here is a nursery. You get out there and work in that nursery. I will pay you a fair wage for your week's work. Have you ever been "bear caught"? "Bear caught" in Florida -- [we are] not talking about the brown bear or the black bear -- in the ag [agricultural] community, if you get "bear caught," [it] generally always happens in the summer. The sun is high; it is hot, hot, hot. And you are doing some degree of manual labor. And all of a sudden you get "bear caught". You get fuzzy-headed and you are sick at your stomach. I think [dehydration] is what causes it. And the only way to turn that bear loose

is to lay down, drink some water -- back then, they didn't have Gatorade. Then, in two or three hours, you (most of the time) will be back and ready to go to work the next day. I got "bear caught" in a grove right across from where I, now, live. And I was hoeing trees. We don't hoe trees, anymore. That is that little thing where you spade up under there and cuts the roots off of all of the weeds just about that far -- that is about an inch or half inch -- under where they come out of the ground. And I was hoeing and that is pretty good work because every now and then, you hit a root that is hard and you pop it through. Well, I got "bear caught" that afternoon, about two o'clock. I guess, to a degree, some people might say you pass out. I did not pass out. But the men -- the workers that I was working with, you know, more mature men -- they knew exactly what had happened. They had seen it, maybe they had experienced it, themselves. We had what we call a pipe trailer and a tractor. Pipe trailer is kind of a long trailer with some poles that stick up on the side. And you lay your pipe in there, pile it up and that is why you call it a pipe trailer. It is not just a flat trailer. If you put your pipe on there and haul that, it would roll off. So, they have these little six-foot poles or four-foot poles, spaced about every ten feet. They knew what I needed. The boss man, the foreman wasn't there. We didn't have radios and all these hand held.... I can call the President of the United States from right here. He won't answer me, but I can call him. But, they loaded me up; they got my little lunch box. When you are working in the groves, you got your lunch box, you always put your lunch box inside the trees [where it was] shady. And if you want a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, you go ahead and put the mayonnaise on the bread and put your bacon in there, but your lettuce - you probably don't put lettuce in there at all, you just forget the lettuce. You got your tomato. You put your whole tomato in there because I like tomatoes. I don't like them like I love oranges. But I like a BLT and all those kind of things. Tomato sandwich or whatever and so, at lunch, you take that whole tomato, and you slice it and then you have your bread, your bacon, and your mayonnaise and that fresh tomato that hadn't *sogged* into the bread - if you made that sandwich at home, by the time it was noon, it was ninety degrees, that would be a soggy sandwich. You probably wouldn't eat it. So, they put my lunch box on there [the truck] and me. The tractor went about fifteen or twenty miles an hour. That old trailer was just bump-de-de-bump. Trailers don't ride as smooth as a car. I didn't care. I had breeze. I was laying down. I was conscious. I had already drunk some water. And they took me to my mother and father's house in town. From where my house is to where my mother's house is, must be four miles. So, they brought me up to the house. Of course, my mother -- my mother was home. No way to call, but she was home. I am trying to think how old I was. Ten, twelve, fourteen, I don't think I was older than fourteen. You don't have to get "bear caught" but once. You would never do it again. See, I was young. I was inexperienced. Nobody had told me about getting "bear caught". And I was young and boy, I was trying to outwork everybody else, you know. Just like going to work. I always wanted to go to work. I want to be there at least twenty

minutes before I was supposed to report. I didn't want to be paid for that twenty minutes. I wanted to be there at least twenty [minutes, but] thirty would be all right. [This was to] find out what they wanted me to do that day. Maybe, I had a question that I wanted to ask somebody. You want some more stories about my father?

P: Yeah. Sure.

G: You want them, now?

P: Go ahead.

G: Did I finished my points and all?

P: Yes.

G: Anyway, my mother was there, and well, she took good care of me. She knew that it was heat exhaustion; that is what it was. So, I got a lot of liquids in there and she fixed me a sandwich or something. If we had TV back then, it was snowy. Not like the clarity that we have today. Back then, when TV finally arrived in Frostproof, you had about two channels. Channel thirteen in Tampa and Channel eight in Tampa. We were too far from Orlando. Fort Myers was way, too far. So, long story, short, they punched me out (you know, punched the clock) they gave me the time that I had worked that day until I had gotten "bear caught". That is when they said, you didn't get eight hours that day. You only got five or six hours. That was fair. I mean, when I got "bear caught" I wasn't working. So, why pay somebody when I am not working. Anyway, there are a number of little stories relative to my father. I have got one that is mine. Did I tell you about my father's long range plan?

P: No.

G: I told you about the freeze and the good Lord doesn't know...he hasn't made up his mind, yet, when it is going to freeze. Dad had some bankers and so forth and agriculture. [It is] very difficult to know what you are going to produce. If you produce it, then you put it in the hands of somebody who is going to market it. You don't know, really, what it is going to sell for until it is all gone, if you are staying with that product all the way through. But these New York people, they would loan him the money. One of them, I guess had been to business college or something. He was a sharp man. He asked my father, Mr. Griffin, what is your long range plan? He said, what? You know, what is your five year plan, your ten year plan and so forth? So, all these big companies, they have a five year plan and year plan and all those things [for] projecting profits and etc. Of course, Dad knew what he was talking about. He was just trying to think of how he could answer that guy. Finally, he told him, do you really want to know my

long range plan? He said, yes, sir. He said, my long range plan is to stay in business this year. When Dad wanted to emphasize something, he wouldn't **thump** the table. Stay in business this year. **Thump** it. He said, you know something, young man? I have been doing it for forty years and it has worked out pretty darn good. I am going to stick to that long range plan [laughing]. It was a very, fair question and it was a good question to ask certain businesses, but it just doesn't work in the citrus business. Now, you can have a long range plan like, Oh, I have got x number of acres today. I would like to plant about 3000 acres a year. So, in ten years -- our company will have 3,000 more acres. That would be nice to have. Whatever your preference was [in a long range plan]. So, he had some long range plans. He knew what he wanted to do in citrus. Just like he knew he needed fruit to supply that concentrate plant. He knew....

P: His long range plan was in his head. And it was flexible.

G: Yes, sir. And he didn't really care to share it with anybody [laughing]. Certainly, not that banker from New York. Either loan me the money or not. If you don't, I will go to somebody that will. That was Banker's Trust. It was either Banker's Trust or...anyway, the bank that loaned him the money and stayed with him, when they really could have called that loan, two years from September of 1960 -- you go one year, let's see 1961 -- in 1962, December 7th, the 3rd and 5th of 1962, Florida citrus industry had a very, very, significant freeze. Not as bad as we had in 1998 but when we had that freeze, Dad had his own -- the company had its own single _____, he had his own fresh fruit packing; and he had a concentrate plant. Boy, when you freeze, you go to the groves that you know are hurt the worst and you bring that fruit in, first. If you don't, it won't be there six weeks from now. So, you start from your most damaged to your least damaged. Of course, Dad had been handling freezes ever since he was old enough to know if it got a certain coldness, it was going to burn your trees and hurt your fruit. It was either Banker's Trust or Prudential Insurance Company. Maybe, it was a combination of both. But, in 1962, he made sufficient profit after taxes, to completely wipe out his debt. He was in position. This was very important to my father. He says, always be in position. If you are not in position, you can have the most wonderful thing -- [an] opportunity to do something, but if you don't have the money or if you don't have the reputation with the banks or the insurance companies to loan you the money, then, you will just have to let that opportunity pass you by. So, position.

P: Earlier, when we were interrupted, you were telling about the fire at the little plant....

G: Yeah, little packing house.

P: Little packing house.

G: Fresh fruit packing house.

P: I don't think you got the opportunity to finish that story.

G: I think the conclusion of that story was – I lived about three or four miles from the office. Dad called me that morning – oh, four o'clock. He got the information first, of course. So, he called me and told me that the packing house was on fire. [There was] no way to put it out. You could have a hundred fire trucks out and you are not going to put out [a building made of] heart of pine. [It would be] like throwing a match on some gasoline. But, I dressed and left my house quickly. I went to where he was. I don't recall exactly whether he was in Frostproof or down there. I do remember going down to the packing house and it was still on fire. But when I left my house, looking to the south, straight as the crow flies, it would be ten or twelve miles to Avon Park (maybe, a little less), I could see that red glow in the sky. I knew what that red glow was. Now, it wasn't way up in there, you know. Right on the horizon, I could see this red glow. That was the packing house burning to the ground and everything that [was] in it. All of the records, all of the tokens and mementoes, any plaques or anything like that, they are history. He didn't even peck around in the ashes. It wasn't there; [it had] burned up.

[Tape interruption]

P: Ben Hill, would you go back and comment on the cause of your father's death.

G: It now comes back to me that my father died – of course, if he had lived seven months more, he would have been eighty years old. So, he was seventy-nine and a half when he passed away. He had been searching for [an answer]. He had this ailment and he went to Mayo and all these different hospitals and nobody could diagnose [him]. Oh, there were several diagnoses, [but they were] all wrong. Dad was kind of a doctor, himself. He knew what the doctors had told him about the different medicines and many times he would make the mistake of doctoring himself rather than going to the doctor. But that is another story. He died as a result of a disease known as hemochromatosis. And I can't give you the medical explanation of that disease. Hemo- means blood. Chromatosis, I don't know what that means. But, that is what he died of; as a result of the damage of a disease to the body known as hemochromatosis. It is a blood disease whereby your body, probably through genetics (all of our systems are different) – but his body produced excess iron. Had he found out about this, (see, he had been searching for) [a diagnosis, he could have been treated earlier]. He didn't know what it was; nobody else knew what it was. But he was searching for somebody to find something that would help him because

none of them had. Finally, at Shands Hospital at the University of Florida, they came up with a very firm conclusion that my father had hemochromatosis, heavy iron in the blood. Treatment, very simply. [There was] no medications that I remember that he had to have. But when you have high iron in your blood, you give a pint of blood. And as you give blood, then your body, out of the bone marrow, remakes the blood and that lowers the percent of iron that you have got in your body. Then you monitor it and if it is not at the right level, you give another pint of blood. You can give a pint of blood, I don't know, maybe once a month. I don't know. I know one man, very close, he gave a pint of blood every month. Didn't hurt him a bit. You know, he didn't have to have a coke or anything. He would just go give a pint of blood and tell those pretty nurses goodbye and he went back to work. So, had they found it early enough, [to make a] long story, short, – had he have had several years, and I don't know how many months he needed, but they didn't diagnose it fast enough. He [began] giving blood but it was already pretty heavy damage to the liver by that time. So, it was, at that point, I guess you would say, it was non-reversible. So, he was on a short term risk. He was wanting me to tell people, hemochromatosis. Maybe that will help somebody else.

P: Let's go back to when you took over the management of the Ben Hill Griffin Enterprises. What were the most difficult problems that you were confronted with once the decision-making was yours?

G: Quite frankly, those people like my secretary and top executives in the organization like the vice presidents, etc. it was such an easy transition. Don't think I don't miss my father, you know, because I want to live to be 105 or 110 or however long. I want to live a long time. But you see, he had trained me. Trained me, trained me, trained me, all through my life to be prepared to take over. I was fifteen years old and he took me to New York to the Minute Maid Board Meeting. I don't even know whether it was legal for me to be in there, but he got me in there. You know, he took me on sales trips. We went to Montreal or Québec when I was -- gosh, I couldn't drive, legally. I could drive. I learned to drive when I was nine years old. I drove a truck on our ranches so the men on the back, could throw out the grass. I had a thousand acres out there [with] no trees on it so I couldn't get in too bad trouble.

P: So, you had the same management team that he had?

G: Oh, yes. Yes, sir. And they all knew me. See, I was Dad's right hand man. He never bought anything [without my input] – now, he may have bought it even though I might be against it. He never bought anything without me knowing as much as he did and either agreeing, or if I disagreed, [I would] tell him, even though it might make him mad. But that was kind of the relationship we had. If he wanted something, I kind of knew why he wanted it. [For example,] when he

ran for governor. The night before -- it was getting close to the last filing date -- he gathered all of his political confidants together -- I was there -- he went around the room. What do you think about me running? What do you think about me running? And they would tell him. Of course, the guy that was the campaign manager said, let's go for it. You can do it. You can win. Well, if he had won, that man would have been in strong position in the governor's office doing something. I don't know what. But by him doing that, even as late as 1985, he made a very, very large acquisition of some ranch land which, oh, my gosh, it swamped. It is a number of acres, that in that acquisition [became] swamped; [these were] acres that were in the company that he had been building up over his business career. I saw it the same time he did. He called me and he said, (it was a Thursday or a Friday) and he says, I am looking at this particular ranch.... He didn't say, can you go? or anything else. He says, I want you to be with me Saturday. You be at my house at seven o'clock or a little earlier, if you want to. We have to wait until we get some light. I went to his house. I got there at a quarter to seven or something like that. Come on with me. [We] went down to the Clock Restaurant in Avon Park. The Clock Restaurant, I think, stays open twenty four hours a day. So, we had breakfast there and read the paper and noted anything significant to our business. Then we met...we went on down to this big ranch and met up with this guy who was going to show us this ranch. He had a brand new Wagoneer. And he started showing us the ranch. And this is the ranch that if you spent all day, you didn't see it all. It was a little bit wet in places. The guy, the realtor that showing it to us, he didn't really know the ranch very well. He had hunted it. He kind of got a little bit disoriented.

[End of side A2]

G: So this man is going to show us the property. He had his real estate license and we had known him a long time. As a matter of fact, this man -- oh, gosh, ten years ago he was in his late forties. My father hired him to work on his Peace River Ranch and I remember him. He is a fine man because we cow hunted together. He worked for us a couple of years. His name was Roland Skipper. He lived just south of Zolfo Springs about three miles. You turn left and his house is to the east down there about two and half miles. He is very talented in the cattle business. Anyway, we spent all day on that ranch. One place we got to, it was so wet, (he had a brand new Wagoneer [with] just the three of us in there), he and dad and I.... My Dad always said, you know how to keep from getting stuck? You know that, don't you? The secret to not getting stuck is, don't ever stop. If you keep it moving, you won't ever get stuck. Well, this water was about, I'd say a foot to a half a foot, all out in the palmettos. Palmettos were low. Palmettos -- this was prairie land. Palmettos weren't a foot and half high.

Of course, Roland Skipper knew, as well as Dad that if you ever slowed down, that gravity would ultimately stick him. He would get stuck. So, he had to gun that Jeep strong enough to keep it moving because if he ever slowed down that mud and all would drag him down and then if he slowed too much, if he **shouted** down on the accelerator, he would spin down and be stuck. I mean, he had to keep it moving. We will laugh about this. He and I have laughed about it many times. But while he was doing this, all of sudden right in front of us, like twenty feet or something, here jumps up a dad-gummed ten point buck – beautiful, beautiful buck – and he just kind of looked off from us. Then, he got out there and gave a side view. He just kind of looked. He never just got down and ran. Well, Roland Skipper knew my father real well. He knew he loved the land and he knew he loved deer and turkey and all those things, [including] quail, dove. Dad always fed the game, year round. Hunting season is what, two and a half months long? But he would feed the game all year around because he enjoyed nature and that sort of thing. So, when that big, old ten point buck jumped up, Roland Skipper just kind of smiled inside. He said, man, that right there, was worth fifty thousand dollars, to have that buck jump up. So, we ended up at noon on the southeast end of this ranch on a well known creek that is called Fish Eating Creek. This ranch is kind of pretty much in the area of the head waters, if you will. That goes on down, binds itself to Palmdale, north of LaBelle and turns farther to the east and ends up in Lake Okeechobee and we know where Lake Okeechobee drains. It helps thousands and thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people, you might say. So, we were riding along there. And of course, Dad was asking questions. He knew the answers before he ever asked them. So, we ended up on Fish Eating Creek for lunch. Roland had prepared a little cooler. He pulled out three of the most beautiful new York strips [steaks] I have ever seen. They were an inch and a quarter thick. He had the charcoal and the lighter and the little grill. There was an old picnic table down there, which he knew was there. I didn't. I know Daddy didn't know it was there. So, we had lunch right there. Steak and I forget what, potato chips and he maybe had some – Dad loved greens. There are a couple of names for those greens, turnip greens, collard greens – doesn't matter. There is another one. Mustard greens. Mustard greens were his favorite. They are a little bit sweeter and a little bit easier to eat. He might have had that. I don't remember. It was 1985. [To make a] Long story, short, we had a nice little lunch there. Dad, at that age, he always liked to take a little – what I call – a power nap. So, he lay down on the ground; he had some kind of a little blanket or something. He lay down. He found some oak tree that had a nice trunk to put his head on. He was asleep in about three minutes. That is a talent I wish I had. He had it. So, Roland and I walked up and down the creek, looked at the gators, alligators, fish and whatever else, squirrels -- I don't remember if we saw a turkey. I really don't. But we could have. And we reminisced some about he and I cow hunting down there on Peace River Ranch -- that time that he and I went in the swamp. It was about six inches of water and Peace River had gotten out of its banks, just a little

bit, not much. Rattlesnakes -- they don't like water. So, if you are in the water, you don't have to worry about rattlesnakes. You get up there on the hill where the Palmettos are, you better keep that in the back of your mind. He and I were riding side by side, horseback, about that far apart. We were back riding. Back riding is when you gather a pasture -- all of the cows and calves and so forth -- and you know how many are in there, and there are ten of them missing. Well, you send one or two men back to back-ride. Well, I was young but I been on that ranch and I had my own horse and saddles and I did a lot of riding then. If I got on a horse today, if I rode that horse, even with soft saddle; if I rode that horse for an hour and a half, man, I will tell you what, I would be so sore where that saddle had been bumping my rear end and so forth, your thighs and all...because I am not in condition for that. We were riding side by side in the river swamp -- beautiful, big oak trees. The river is just a little ways over there and you see squirrels jumping around. All of a sudden -- Roland saw him first -- there was a seven foot rattlesnake, twenty one rattles and a button. That is a monster rattlesnake. He had some little turf, I guess he had there. I guess. I don't know. But that snake was all wrapped up in a circle or -- about if you join your hands together and lap it over a little bit -- he was pretty tight. He never rattled. I don't know -- I guess his rattler was wet. Like whistling when you don't have enough wet to whistle. Anyway, he never rattled. So, Roland Skipper saw him first. So, he rears his horse to the left. You know, he just did his thing instinctively. I saw where he was looking and I turned my horse and hit him with my spurs to make him turn right as quick as possible. If he struck, maybe we had our back to him or something. If he struck, we never saw it. He never hit our horses which was number one. We had darn good horses. You know, they weren't something that you would put a picture on the wall but they were good at what they were known to be, good cow horses. They would watch a calf and know which way that calf was going to move before that calf even knew where he was going to go. Roland had a pistol, I think it was a thirty two colt in the saddle bag. So, after he calmed down and I calmed down, the snake didn't run off or swim off. He just stayed there, coiled. Roland shot him three times. Bam, bam, bam. Never hit him. He was full of adrenalin. He couldn't hit the back side of a barn with a base fiddle. So I guess that calmed him down a little bit. I don't think he had any extra shells so he had about three shots left and weren't going to leave there until that snake was dead. So, rather than getting out a getting a big old stick and beating him to death and getting fearful that he might charge you or something. We needed to kill that thing with the pistol. So, next shot, he got him, pretty darn good, not in his head but just in the back of the head maybe, oh, six inches. Isn't it amazing? I am telling this story and that was forty four years ago. And I remember just like it was yesterday, or today. Anyway, he hit the snake pretty hard, enough to disable him, so the snake was not as effective as he would be otherwise. At that point, Roland either got off his horse or got his horse closer and you know, it wasn't his first rodeo. He knew how to shoot. He wasn't a marksman or anything but he could

shoot that pistol. He had a thirty eight colt, which is normally a short barrel but his was a longer barrel so that you can aim at something on out there. [With a] Short barrel you can't aim very far and have much accuracy. Anyway, he got up there close enough and he killed the snake. We pulled our horses aside and watched to make sure that he was dead. You don't want to mess around with a half dead snake. Do you all know that rattlesnakes can redevelop their fangs in a very short period of time? If you look at their fangs, it is actually a tooth and there is a fang on each side and they curl down. And it is like you had cut diagonally across the end of it, the fang. There is a tube that runs up inside that fang. And that is where the venom is. See, the venom is on up in the cheek area. So, when he strikes, he can actually cut you and if he does it fast enough, that venom hasn't got down there and you are all right. You have been struck by a rattlesnake but you are all right. But, don't count on that. But behind those fangs – if he breaks on off – if you ever get a chance to look at a rattlesnake that has been preserved or something – look at it and right behind the one that is already out, you can see at least two more. So, if he break one of those off, then the other ones starts emerging. I don't know how long that takes. I would guess maybe a week. That is to rearm him; that is the way Mother Nature made him. So, the snake was dead. He cut the rattlers off. If you are a rancher or a cattleman, you always cut the rattlers off, to prove that you killed the snake. Do you know how to tell the difference between a male and a female rattlesnake? Good gracious. You all are missing education. Very simple. Not that you are worried about the sex of the rattlesnake. My father always said if you catch a rattlesnake, don't put him in the box. Kill that rattlesnake right then. If you don't, you are giving that rascal another opportunity to get you. So, if you get hold of a rattlesnake, kill him. He used that argument in the legislature one time. It was a bill that he wanted to kill, dead. And somebody else said, well, maybe we ought to consider tabling it or let's think about it and bring it up next year. And I forget which bill it was, Vernon. But he got up on the floor – I think he was in the senate. He was arguing real hard to defeat this bill. And he referred to that bill as a rattlesnake. If you get a rattlesnake, don't mess around and put him in a box. Go ahead and kill him. You know what he is. [If] You kill him, you don't have to fear him, anymore. But a female rattlesnake has got even rattlers except right at the end, there may be one small rattler and then a button. When you talk to somebody how many rattlers you say, well, he had twenty-one rattlers and a button. That means that he is producing another one. So, the female is equal sided on the rattlers before they get to the snake. The male is in darn near a perfect "V", rattler, rattler, rattler and a button. So, if somebody ever shows you a rattlesnake, you can say, huh, by golly, that is a male. And this other one here is a female. Remember that. Let me mention a couple of stories about my father and then we will move on to whatever you want to talk about. Okay? I told you about his long range plans. When I was about twenty-two or twenty-three years old – so, of course, you never just went in to my father's office. He said, I don't necessarily mind you coming in. That isn't the

point. But I might be talking to some important people and you come blowing in that door and I am in the middle of something, concentrating on and you mess me up. So, before you come, you call. I'll tell you if it is time to come in or wait five minutes and come on in. I have been looking for you. Why didn't you call me earlier? But this one [time], there was some very bad news, I thought in the Florida citrus industry and I called him. I said, Dad, I [have] got something. I have got to see you right now. Come on up. So I zipped up those steps and I knew what I was talking about. I came in that office and I said, boy, I have got some bad news' Dad said, stop. Right there. Don't say another word. You give me the news and I'll tell you whether it is good or bad. I said, all right, sir. I have got some news. And I told him. He said, boy, that is bad [laughing]. So, I have always remembered that. You know, something might be bad for me but it might be good for you. So, give them the new and they will tell you whether it is good or bad. It might be bad on one side but might be something real good as a result of that. So, the bad news may be about this high but the good news is over here and all you are looking are is the bad. But that is another story. One that I came on, I don't how I came up with it – I think maybe, it was a takeoff on the good-news-bad-news. A lot of times, I will have my executives and people that I depend on to help me, I will ask them, what do you know about that property that you went to see yesterday? Well, sir, I think that is a good deal and I think this and I think that. I think this is kind of a negative and And I am listening to all of this. I said, no, no, stop. You did not hear me. You did not understand. I asked you what you knew. I didn't ask what you think. If I wanted to ask you what you think, I would have asked you what you think about that property? But I asked you what you knew about that. What do you know about that property? All right, sir. I know it is this variety. Let's talk about oranges. I know it is this variety of oranges. I know that it is x number of trees per acre. I know it is a thirteen-inch well. I know it is x number of acres. I know it is on a certain **root stock**. And in my mind, it has a pretty good crop of fruit. That is what I know about it. Then, I might say, well, what do you think about that deal? Boss, I think it is a darn good deal. I think we ought to get on it. I don't know what the price is because you know, you have always handled the price. But if you can get the price in something that you feel right....

When I do that I have a little bit of regret, later on because I don't mean to beat up on somebody but when I ask you.... Now, they know. When I ask them what they know about it, they tell me what they know. And then, sometimes I say, what do you know and what do you think? But, anyhow, that was one of mine. If I ask somebody to tell me what know about a particular subject or a property, I don't want them to start telling me well, I think this and I think that. I want to know what you know. I don't tell them that. What do you know about it? It is just a little quirk of mine. We are kind of getting to the short, here. We have got about fifteen minutes, I guess.

P: Let me ask you one question before I forget it. Did you hunt every hunting

season and did you usually hunt with your father?

G: I hunted every hunting season.

P: Did you hunt with your father and what did you generally hunt for?

G: I hunted with my father. We would have just a small group, five or six. Or we would have sixteen. That is how many we could sleep on a weekend, Friday and Saturday. We would have dove shoots where we would bring in, maybe twenty customers and friends. Dad mainly wrapped friendship and business together, you know. And he might get you on the hunting rig and you all would be hunting quail and you would be shooting quail, however, between coveys, he might be talking to you about what should the education budget – what do you think about the education budget, Vernon? And you all would just talk back and forth. And, you know, he would have an opportunity to get more familiar with what you tell him and he would probably take the opportunity to inform you of what he was thinking. So, there was a lot of that. So, I hunted with him – like be on the same jeep, hunting jeep. There would be myself and he and maybe two others and a driver. Most of the time when we had more than just four or five, I was next in command. Any of our guests that I saw that needed something...come on over here. Help the representative. Help the senator. Help the governor. Help this man; he is from New York. Don't talk to him about money because he has more money than you can afford, [he is a] banker. I was just jumping into it myself, you know. The drive in and I would be outside, meeting them. Dad would be in the house – later in life, the cartilage in his ankles started giving way and rather than getting them fixed, he just suffered it out. So, his ankles would get...he didn't like to walk too far because it hurt him. So, I would be out there and if you were coming in, I would meet you and hey, Representative. Let me grab that bag. Welcome to Peace River Ranch. You don't need your gun. Just leave your gun in your vehicle, there. In the morning when we leave, you can just take your gun and get ready and let's go deer hunting, turkey hunting, whatever hunting we are going to do. You don't need to bring it in the house. [The new visitor doesn't know the routine.] See. The first time he has been there. Or maybe he has been there and had forgotten it is best just to leave your weapons out there. You might say, well, wait a minute. I have got some work to do on this. Fine. Bring it on in the house. [We will] see if we can't get that thing in top shape. Bring it in. I have got a suitcase and you have got a suitcase or a bag...I always tried to get the biggest and bulkiest things to be a help to you. Hopefully, before I got to the house one of our men out of the kitchen, generally we had two of them, two good – we have had Caucasians and the two we have had the longest, they are black – boy, they are good. They love people. They love to make people happy. They love to cook for you. We would get in the house and you would probably stop off and Dad

sitting there – he is standing by now. He doesn't want you know that his ankles are hurting him. How are you doing? Come on over here. If it is Friday evening, you know, six o'clock. Would you like to have something to drink? No, sir, I am fine. Fine. You don't mind me having one, do you? No, sir, you go ahead. I would say, Vernon, you see this long hall here, you are in bedroom number 3. It has got a number on it. We are going to put all of your bags in there. Okay? You and Dad can visit. Maybe there are a couple of other guys, there. You all can visit and when you get ready to -- if you want to change or whatever, you know exactly where your room is. You know all your baggage is there. And your shotgun that you want to repair -- it is in there, too. If you want to, then you can do it. If you didn't want to do it, it is your decision. So, that is the way that he and I operated. I always cooked. Early on, we always had a steak on Saturday night. He loved stewed chicken over rice and gravy and a peach or a pear to go along with that. And some string beans and homemade biscuits. Oooh, I could eat it every Friday night. As much as I love steak, that stewed chicken is good. But that would be the routine. Some men would come. We had some ladies [who] would come, [and] some bankers representing their bank. We always made sure they got in a bedroom with their own private bathroom, etc. Some of our other rooms, you have to share a bath, you know. There wasn't a lot of ladies.

P: Most of the hunting was at the Peace River Ranch?

G: Then, it was. Yes, then it was. He had a ranch – he ran cattle in Polk County but we didn't have the game up here. Nor did we have the ranch house facilities to take care of ourselves and our guests. So, down there we have got the original old house. It has about four original bedrooms. It will sleep three, four, five, sleep ten people. Then we had a bunkhouse that will sleep four men or one couple and a child. They take the double and then we had a nice single side if they had a whatever, sibling, age, if they wanted to be in the other room, you know. Then, he had his own house, twenty yards away from the front house.

P: Your hunting was not just for hunting but for social and business purposes?

G: Yeah. [We] had a ball. Still do. Love for you all to go down there. We ought to go down and tape some of this, right down there. Now, I could tell you some stories down there. I don't have air conditioning so don't come dressed like that. You will need to wear a light clothing, shorts or something like there. Now, if the wind is blowing, you know, it would be comfortable without it [air conditioning] but it is just a tin roof. It would be okay, don't you think? I think I have touched the stories that I have thought of. There are so many more. I have given you about six.

P: There is additional ground that we need to cover but there is no need to try to get

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into that, today, because we are running close. We can do it next time. Well, the main things yet to be covered is of course, Florida Gulf Coast University.

G: Oh, yeah. We are going to need –

[End of interview]