

UFLC 59

Interviewee: Warren Cason

Interviewer: Denise Stobbie

Date: February 19, 1992

S: This is Denise Stobbie with Mr. Warren Cason in his office in downtown Tampa. [Today is February 19, 1992.]

Tell me a little bit, if you would, about your parents. [What were] their occupations [and] education?

C: My father was Warren C. Cason. The C was just an initial, not a middle name. He was born in Bradford County, Florida. [He] went to the eighth or ninth grade. They were farmers. My mother was born in Hillsborough County outside of Plant City, where the Cincinnati Reds stadium is. Southeast of Plant City was the Joe Thomas homestead, which was [owned by] her father, Joseph T. Thomas. She graduated from Plant City High School and went to Florida State College for Women [FSCW, now Florida State University (FSU)]. [She] did not graduate.

S: What did your father farm?

C: In Bradford County, mostly strawberries. Then they moved to Plant City and [farmed] strawberries and citrus and tomatoes and peppers and corn.

S: So did you grow up on a farm?

C: Absolutely. Five miles southeast of Plant City, [near] Springhead. My father died when I was eight (in 1933), and there were five children. The oldest was eleven, and the youngest was three. My mother got us all together after the funeral and said, "Each one of you is going to college." And we all did. We ran the farm. At that time, the Springhead school went only to the ninth grade. It was a "strawberry school." You went from April to Christmas so you could be out in the winter to pick strawberries. They stopped that because they thought it was too much to expect the children to pick strawberries and go to school, but I thought it was a heck of a deal, as far as I was concerned. I was sorry to see them stop it.

S: Judge [James D.] Bruton was telling me about that when I interviewed him. [See UFLC56, University of Florida Oral History Archives. Ed.]

C: Of course, he was not born there. He was born in Texas and raised in Plant City and he practiced law there [for] many years.

S: So did you attend the strawberry schools?

C: I attended strawberry school through the ninth grade; I finished the ninth grade at Springhead. My mother ran the lunchroom at the school, and we ran the farm; [we] grew strawberries, citrus, corn, tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables. When I was ten or eleven I was taking the produce to the market in Plant City. You did not have to have a driver's license then, of course.

I had three sisters and a brother, and I was in the middle. [I had] two sisters older than I. My brother was the next one, and my younger sister was the fifth one. Betty was the oldest, then Winifred, then me, then my brother George T. Cason, then Jane (the youngest). So I was sort of the father of the outfit, which was a great thing for me. It really gave me a lot of experience. It was during the middle of the Depression, from 1933 to 1940-1941. People think the Depression was 1929 and 1930, but it was from 1929 to 1941, and this was right in the middle of it. [It was] a great experience.

S: You had a lot of responsibility.

C: I did. My mother was one of the greatest people who ever lived. She was an unbelievable influence on us.

S: Did she have any assistance with raising the kids?

C: No. She had a lot of assistance from the five of us, but she made the decisions. She and I would sit on the back porch at night, and [she would] wonder, "What are we going to do tomorrow, Bud?" (My nickname was Bud.) I would say: "Well, Mom, we are going to do the same thing we did today. We are going to get up in the morning, pick strawberries," [or] tomatoes, or peppers, or whatever it was. I took care of the mules and milked the cows. Tom, my brother, took care of the chickens and hogs. We killed our own hogs and cows. [We butchered] our own beef and pork at home. [It was] the same way with the tomatoes and all the other vegetables. We ate well. It was a tough time, but we owned our farm, and a lot of people did not. My father had paid it off just before he died, as a matter of fact. [It was] a twenty-acre strawberry farm with five acres of citrus.

S: So he was a pretty prosperous farmer.

C: Not prosperous in the sense of wealth, but I would say he was known in the Springhead area as one of the best farmers there.

S: Were you all isolated? Did you live pretty far from anyone else? Was your mother involved with the community?

C: [She was] running the lunchroom. In running a lunchroom, you are always involved in the community. Of course, we went to First Baptist Church in

Springhead. While my father was alive, we went to First Baptist Church in downtown Plant City. [We] sat in the first pew because he was hard of hearing. But after he died, we went to church in [Springhead]. We were active in the church [and] active in the school. Mom would go to PTA. Tom and I belonged to the Boy Scouts [and] 4H. But there was not a lot of other community activity other than the school. School and church was it.

As far as having neighbors, we lived near the Cornet phosphate mines, which was a beautiful little phosphate village. They had houses where all the people that ran the phosphate mines and processing plant lived. It was really a beautiful little town. It was not incorporated, obviously, but it belonged to the phosphate company. They had electric lights, water, streets, [and] sidewalks. Right on the other side of that, about a mile, you would turn off and go down Cason Road, which was just a rut road to our house. We did not have electricity, running water, or a telephone. When I was in the service I sent money back, as my brother did, and when I got home Mom had electricity and water. That was 1945. I finished ninth grade at Springhead in 1940 and graduated from Plant City High School in 1943. [Then] I went in the navy. When I returned from my tour of duty in the Pacific I still was not old enough to buy a beer.

S: So Plant City High School was tenth [grade] through twelfth [grade]?

C: Yes. I guess there were 110 students in the graduating class of 1943. [It was] a small town, but a good place to grow up. [It was] an excellent school. As a matter of fact, last weekend, eight of us who graduated in the 1943 class went fishing together along with our coach and high school principal. It was quite a weekend.

S: That is great.

C: [It was a] good class. We talked about it last weekend. I would say that that class had more college graduates percentagewise than any other class that ever graduated from Plant City High School.

S: So your mother really encouraged that.

C: Not encouraged, just absolutely insisted. We never questioned what we were going to do. Of course, when she told us that, my little sister was three and my brother was six, and I am sure they did not really understand what college was. I did not understand what all was involved, but I did know about college.

S: Why do you think she felt so strongly about that?

- C: Because she had gone to college, and she knew what it meant. If Mom had gone one more year, she would have been teaching at Springhead strawberry school instead of running the lunchroom, and that made a big impression on her and us, because that was a tough job in tough times. She knew how important it was to have a college education.
- S: While you were busy on the farm, did you have any time to pursue other interests [while you were] growing up?
- C: Boy Scouts and the 4H Club. [I] learned how to smoke and chew tobacco in the Boy Scouts.
- S: Were the Boy Scouts important [or] influential in your life?
- C: No, not really. It was just something we did because there was nothing else to do. I never was a big Eagle Scout or anything like that. I just did not have the time or the inclination. We just had so much to do. Both my brother and I played football, but we missed so much of the practice because of the strawberry farm. You had to get the land ready in September [and] plant them in the latter part of September and October, and, of course, that is when football season is going on. So we both had to drop out of football, although I would have loved to have been able to play. I was not that good of an athlete, so it did not make that much difference as far as the team was concerned.
- S: What about any other influences growing up? Did you have other family around?
- C: My mother's father and mother lived in the middle of an orange grove right outside of Plant City where Mom was raised. They had sold the homestead and moved to another place outside of Plant City with a big grove. We would go over there every Sunday and have dinner. Sunday dinner was a big thing. After church, we would go there for Sunday dinner. Every Saturday our grandfather would come out and walk all the fields and the groves with my mother and me. So he was quite an influence. He and his brother used to take me fishing, but I finally realized the reason they took me fishing [was] so I could paddle the boat. But it was really a thrill to be able to go with them.
- S: So your grandfather was a farmer, too.
- C: He was a farmer early on, and then he became the biggest produce and citrus buyer and shipper in Plant City. That is what he was doing when I knew him. He had a large orange grove, too, and I learned to fire his orange grove when I was nine years old. From then on, whenever it would freeze, we would get the smudge pots out and we would fire the grove night after night. So he was quite

an influence.

In a little place like that, the important thing socially is Saturday afternoon and evening, when you have everything done, [all the] chores--feeding the hogs and the mules, milking the cows and so forth--everybody would get in the car and go to Plant City. Rogers and Middlebrooks was the big department store in Plant City. Basically everybody just gathered and walked and talked, and you saw everybody you knew every Saturday night. It was a big affair just to go to town on Saturday night. You did not see them otherwise. You did not have a telephone, so you did not talk to them. When you saw them at the market when you would take produce, why, you would not see them, but not for very long. Saturday night was a big night.

S: All the kids would go.

C: All the parents and kids and everybody else. The kids never went without parents. Everybody would get in the car and go. You would stay until midnight, because at midnight they had a drawing and gave away five dollars. So everybody would wait until midnight. Five dollars then was a hell of a bunch of money. We never won it, but we always stayed to wait and see if we did.

S: You just met at this department store.

C: The department store just happened to be located there. That was the place where everybody [gathered]. Of course, the railroad track came right through the middle of town. The department store was on one side, and the other part of town was on the other side. There was not much difference. You did not think of that as the "other side of the railroad tracks." But then there was another railroad track that was the "other side of the track." Plant City had two railroads going through, the Seaboard [Air Line Railroad] and the [Atlantic] Coast Line, which was unusual for a small town.

S: So everybody met in town Saturday night.

C: That was a big thing. And then, of course, the strawberry festival started when we were eight or nine.

S: So even when your father was alive, did the kids that were old enough help out?

C: Oh, yes. We picked strawberries.

S: Did you have hired help, too?

C: We had seven black sharecropping families that sharecropped on the farm with

us at the time my father died. Each one of them had an acre or half or three-quarters of an acre, depending on how many kids they had to pick. They would help do everything else. One of the boys that grew up with me on the farm (his name is Willie Thomas, Jr.) is black, but he was the closest to me. As a matter of fact, he was up fishing with us. He did the cooking. He is a heck of a cook. He is retired from Cornet Phosphate Company, which is right near where we lived. [He] worked there until retirement. Now he comes to our house and works over here in Tampa three or four days a week. Good person.

S: So you knew him from on the farm.

C: Yes. He put three children through school, one of them through law school. [He is] quite a guy.

S: But none of the black families went to the same schools back then, right? They had their own schools.

C: The Cornet Phosphate Company, the one that I was talking about where the little town was, had one that was for the whites, and then a little less than half a mile north of our house was the quarters, the colored quarters, where the people lived. A lot of the people who sharecropped our farm lived there. [They] worked at the mines and sharecropped on the side. As a matter of fact, my father worked at the mine when he and my mother first moved out there.

S: So what about your schooling, then, at Springhead? Were you a serious student?

C: I think I was a good student. I was not number one in the class. There were not that many in the school. [It was] a very small school. When we finished the ninth grade, I was selected the one most likely to succeed. Obviously that turned out wrong. [laughter] We had some good people in that class. Several others went to college, too.

S: Why do you think you were selected most likely to succeed? What were you doing then?

C: I guess I wanted to succeed. I knew one thing: when I got big enough, I was going to leave that farm. The second thing I knew [was that] I was not going back. I did not like farming. [I did not plan to return to the farm,] although it would have been very interesting to know what would have happened if my father had lived. I would have gone to college, but would I have come back and farmed with him? Probably so, because he and I were very close. If he ever cranked up that car, I was in it.

S: What did he die of?

C: Flu.

S: Was it a sudden death?

C: Yes, I guess. It was not a prolonged thing. I do not think it went into pneumonia. It could have. I do not know. Mom has always said, "We kept it from going into pneumonia, but he died anyway." It was not the influenza epidemic during the First World War, when so many people died. This was in the 1930s. I remember we had all the kids in the back bedroom when the hearse came out and picked him up. Those kinds of things make an impression on you.

S: Yes.

C: But it was a good life on the farm. We felt like we were not second class to anybody. We owned our farm. Even though we did not have electricity or water or a telephone, it did not make any difference to us.

S: At home, then, did your mom make sure you kept up with your studies?

C: Yes. Many nights we studied by the kerosene lamp. That was through high school, too. It was not that much of a problem. I did not consider it to be a problem. I did not know anything else, though. It was not a problem. We did not have a telephone. We certainly did not have a TV to watch. We did not have a radio until later on. I think when we were probably in high school, Mom got a battery radio.

S: So you did a lot of reading in your spare time.

C: [I read] history. I never read any fiction. I read all nonfiction, and that is true today. There is a lot of fiction in these law books. [laughter]

S: Do you do a lot of reading?

C: I read until 12:00 or 1:00 every night.

S: History or biography or . . . ?

C: I have almost every book that has been written about the Second World War. New ones come out all the time. I am reading one now about Lyndon Johnson. [I am also reading about] the great lawyer who just died, Edward Bennett Williams. [That is an] interesting one. I have read most of the presidents'

biographies or autobiographies. [I read about] all the battles of the Civil War, too. Somebody gave me some books on that, and I have read all those. Next time, we are going to beat them. [laughter]

S: I hope it is not anytime soon. [laughter]

C: Obviously we are all glad now that the South did not win and that we got it out of the way, because what is happening to Russia now would have happened to us back then.

S: What about up through high school? Did you continue to be a good student?

C: I would say I was an average student in high school. It is easy to blame that on many things. I had to go home and work. I was a solid B student. I was not the valedictorian or salutatorian by a long shot.

S: But you knew you were going to go somewhere.

C: Yes. I knew I was going to get off that farm.

S: At these social gatherings in Plant City, did anything stand out to you then? Were you impressed by certain people?

C: I would say that one of the things that made my mind up fairly early on about what I wanted to do was [that] when we would go to town on Saturday night, we would see Judge Bruton leaving his office about 5:00 or 6:00. He worked a full day in the office then and still did when I started practicing law in 1950. Saturday was just another workday. I would see him leaving his office, walking down the steps (he was on the second floor). I asked Mom one day, "What does that man do?" She said: "That is Judge Bruton. He is a lawyer." He had on a suit and a cigar and a fedora. I saw him almost every Saturday. I told Mom: "That is what I want to be. I want to be a lawyer."

S: Did you know what lawyers did?

C: Oh, yes.

S: How? Through a newspaper or . . . ?

C: Mom was well read, and she would take me to the library at Springhead, and then in high school [she would take me to] the library in Plant City. She would help me check out books on different things. I read about all the great lawyers and the people who were in the Continental Congress who were lawyers. [I also read about] Congress and senators.

Of course, we got what was then called the *Tampa Daily Times*. They would deliver it six days a week. You did not get it on Sunday. Of course, I would read every word in that thing. It was not a big paper, but it was a good paper. They closed it only about ten or twelve years ago. It was out of Tampa, but they had people who delivered them in Model T's every day. You did not get the morning newspaper because they did not deliver those. They just delivered the afternoon newspaper.

S: So did you read about cases in there?

C: Anything having to do with government or the law I read several times, and sports. Murders, divorces, social affairs, and things like that I did not read about. That was not interesting to me.

S: You probably still read those same things now.

C: I read the business page first and then the sports page.

S: So you saw Judge Bruton back then. That is when you were first impressed by him. You saw him leaving his office.

C: Yes, in the middle to late 1930s.

S: Would they attend the social function afterwards? Did the Brutons go to that, or did he just go on home?

C: I never saw him other than walking down from his office, not at that time. When I was in high school I got to know him, just casually. But I knew who he was. Once in a while I would see him on the corner and strike up a conversation, but he was not one to make a lot of idle conversation, [and] neither was I. He was an important factor [in my decision to become a lawyer]. There were some other lawyers there, too, [such as] John Trinkle.

S: Did you used to watch Judge Bruton outside the office?

C: No. He was a municipal judge ever since I can remember. It [the courtroom] was up on the second floor of the old city hall, and once in a while I would slip up there. The problem was that his court was at night. If I happened to be in town for something, I would slip up there while he was having [court]. But it just was not convenient because I lived way out in the country and that was in town and it was at night. Very seldom was I in town at night, other than Saturday night. Of course, when you start to high school, you are in town. You ride the school bus to town.

S: So your interest in law was laid early. And it never changed? You never considered anything else?

C: Never.

S: Tell me a little bit about your undergraduate days at UF.

C: I graduated from high school in 1943, went in the service, and came back. [I] came back too late to register for the spring class of 1946. All of us had to wait and register for the September class. Every one of us that was up there last weekend--all eight of us--started [at the] University of Florida in September of 1946.

S: So you served three years in the military?

C: Yes.

S: [Did you see] combat?

C: Some, in the Pacific.

S: How did you decide to attend the University of Florida?

C: I never considered any other school. Never ever. When we got that battery radio, my brother and I would listen [to their football games]. We would pick up just a little bit of the game. They played on Saturday afternoon then. We would pick up a little bit of the game. It would come and go. I always knew where I wanted to go to school. So did Tom. I have told all my children and grandchildren, "You can go to school anywhere you want to, but if you want go to the University of Florida, I will pay for it."

S: How many of your siblings went to UF?

C: Three. When my brother and I were there, we were KAs [Kappa Alpha]. We ran the fraternity house and the dining room. We also waited tables at the fraternity house. We also had another business.

S: You ran the dining room? What did you do exactly?

C: I did not run it. We had cooks and so forth, but students waited tables. Then it was my brother's idea to buy Irish potatoes. They would come in on a train about five miles north of the University, and [a crew] unloaded them on a dock out at the railhead. You had to sort them out, because some of them would be

rotten. We would deliver them to all the restaurants and the cafeteria. If you think about a college town, what do you eat most? Probably french fries. So we had a good business. We would get up at 4:00 every morning, go out, separate those potatoes, deliver them, come back, wait tables for breakfast at the dining room, clean up, and go to class. We would do the same thing at lunch and supper.

Tom, my brother, was two years younger than I but only one year behind me in school, or maybe it was half a year. He came back from Europe with rheumatic fever, and he was in the hospital for a good while. He has had open heart surgery three times now from it--the first time when he was thirty-five. He came home one night. He and I lived on the third story of the fraternity house, way in the back, which was the nicest room there because we were running it. He was crazed and cussing, saying, "I will never date her again. I will never see her again." He called her some names I told him he should not call her. I asked him, "What are you talking about?" He told me it was the dietician in the cafeteria. I said: "Tom, come over here and sit down. Let me talk to you a minute. Half of our potatoes go to the cafeteria. That is half our business, and we will go bankrupt [if we lose that account]. I do not care whether you like her or do not like her or whatever. You go back over to her house right now. You fall back in love with her. I am going to wait up for you." In about two hours, he came back. He said, "We are in love again." So we kept that business the rest of the time we were in school. [laughter]

S: Did you prepare the potatoes at all, or did you just deliver them?

C: All we did was take them out of the big croker sacks and take the bad ones out. We would pack them. Each place would buy different amounts. Some of them would buy fifty pounds; some of them [would buy] twenty-five pounds; some of them [would buy] two hundred pounds. It depended on how many Irish potatoes they would use a day. We would deliver those and then go back, clean up, and serve breakfast. There was not that much area because [our territory was] all right along University Avenue and the cafeteria on campus. At that time we only had about ten thousand students at the University. By the time we graduated it was probably thirteen or fourteen [thousand].

S: You must have had a car to pick those up.

C: We had a second-hand truck, as a matter of fact.

S: Did you pay your own way through school?

C: Of course, we were on the GI Bill, which gave us tuition and books.

S: Did your mother continue operating the farm during that time?

C: [Yes,] and kept running the lunchroom. But she had to cut down on the farm because she just did not have anybody to run it. So basically it was a couple of sharecroppers, but not too much. But she still ran the lunchroom.

I guess we continued that [potato] route until we finished school. But then you had the seventy-five dollars and, of course, you had your tuition and books paid. We made money on the potatoes, but we also made money other ways. We would save our money. Tom would go up to the chapter room in the fraternity house on Saturday night. He was a great card player, and he would make enough money for us to have a pretty good week. [laughter] They were a bunch of young kids who had not been in the service [and were] just out of high school. Some of them were pretty well-off. I did not feel too bad about taking their money.

S: What is your brother's full name?

C: George Thomas Cason, better known as Tommy or Tom.

S: So the two of you went through school together. How many years younger is he?

C: Eighteen months. One sister is younger. She went to what was then Florida State College for Women.

S: OK. But your brother was younger than you.

C: He was younger than me, and he and I went to [the University of] Florida together.

S: By how many years?

C: I was born December of 1924, and he was born in August of 1926. What is that, a year and a half?

S: It is close. What did he study at the University?

C: Agriculture. He ended up in the grove business, the farming business, and also the fertilizer business. Before he sold out four years ago, he was the biggest independent fertilizer company in the Southeast, [including] Florida, Georgia, Alabama.

S: What was the name of his company?

C: Florida Favorite Fertilizer.

S: What did you study as an undergraduate? Did you pursue general studies and then enter law?

C: At that time I thought the thing to study was political science, which turned out to be a stupid thing to study. If you go into law school you [should] study as much English and grammar as you can and as much having to do with business as you can. If I had to do it again, I think I would get a double degree in English and accounting. But at that time you did not have to have a degree [to enter law school]; you had to have two years of college. Everyone was coming back from the service. When I got back, I CLEP'ed probably at least a semester. I have forgotten how many hours [it was]. So I started to law school about a year and a half after I had been up there. I graduated in 1950. I would say that 75 percent of our class did not have college degrees. They were people who had come back [from the war]. At their age and at my age, you did not have time to go and get two more years of college and then three years of law school. I think you are obviously much better off if you get as much undergraduate work as you can get. It cannot hurt you. Particularly [you should get as much as you can of] English grammar--expressing yourself in writing--and then, of course, business. The practice of law today is business, basically, to a great extent.

S: So you feel that is true of students today who have law in mind?

C: They come to see me all the time about going to law school. My advice to them is exactly that. If they want to get [a degree] in government or political science or history, [I tell them] none of that helps you practice law. The thing that helps you practice law is being able to express yourself properly and write. And whatever business you can get in the way of accounting and so forth [is also helpful].

S: Well, I can write. Maybe I should go to law school. I have thought about it.

C: Law school?

S: Yes.

C: I guess about half of them in law school are women now.

S: Yes. I have the English and journalism background.

C: Journalism would certainly help, because you at least know something about writing. Expressing yourself either orally (articulating) or writing is very, very important in the practice of law.

S: Unfortunately, today so many of the writing skills of people are so weak.

C: Yes. When they get to college they do not know what a noun or pronoun or adverb is.

S: Right. Part of that is people just do not read like they used to.

When did you meet Mrs. Cason?

C: Dot was born and raised in Plant City, about five miles on the other side of town. We were five miles southeast of town, and Dot was five miles northeast of town. Her family were farmers and in the dairy business. Her father and mother ran a big dairy. Dot was two or three years behind me in school. Ever since I have known her, from the first day I saw her, I was in love with her. She was a beautiful girl. After she got through all her love affairs with everybody else, she decided I was OK. [laughter]

S: So you knew each other growing up.

C: As a matter of fact, my brother used to date her all the time. They never were serious because Tom was fickle, she said. Then she went off to the University of Georgia. That is when I was in the service. When I got back, the first time [we dated] we went to a Florida-Georgia game together. She was a Bulldog. She came home with a bloody nose, and she has been a great Gator ever since. That is what I tease her about.

S: I cannot believe that a big Gator [fan] like you married a Georgia woman.

C: I was going to marry her before she went to Georgia. She was not a Georgia woman. She just went to [the University of] Georgia, as a lot of her friends did.

S: What did she study?

C: English and business.

S: Did she graduate from there?

C: No.

S: So you knew her growing up. Did you see her at the Saturday night socials?

C: I do not think I ever saw her there, but her family had a restaurant downtown called Cone's Dairy Products in the hotel. I worked for her brother. Before school he would pick me up [while he was] making his route delivering milk. We

would ride from my house in Springhead into town, and we would deliver milk all the way. Then he would drop me off at school. Then I would work for him in the restaurant jerking sodas for a while. That is when I really met Dot.

S: Did that cause some tension between you and your brother?

C: No. I was not dating Dot when Tom was.

S: OK. Tell me a little bit about law school. What did you think about the University of Florida's law school?

C: I think it was a good law school for the time. It was number one in the state. The story was if you flunked out of the University of Florida law school, you went to Stetson. When you flunked out of there, you went to the University of Miami. That is pretty much the truth. I have some friends who flunked out of Florida and Stetson and ended up at Miami [and] graduated. [laughter] Miami was not much of a law school at the time. Stetson was a pretty good school. But the University of Florida right after the [Second World] War was [the best in the state].

I will never forget the first class. Frank Maloney, who later became the dean, was teaching Torts, and the first class I had was Torts. The class was so big we had it in the auditorium. I think there were two hundred in the class. He said: "Now, look on both sides of you. One of those people is not going to be here next semester." He was right. They busted out 50 percent of the class.

So compared to the University of Florida today, it was [a] night-and-day difference. But compared to the law schools of its day, [like] the Georgias and other schools that would be similar to it--not the Virginias, the Harvards, and the Michigans--it was as good as any of them or better. Of course, over the years it has improved. It is an excellent, excellent law school now. It is as good as any in the South. The only that might outright rank it would be the University of Virginia.

S: How did you do in law school?

C: [I] graduated. I do not remember what my average was. I think it was within a point or a point and a half of a B average. I do not want you to go see and print it, because I do not know.

S: Did you continue to work outside jobs through law school?

C: Yes. I started school September 2, 1946, and I graduated exactly four years later with a law degree, September 2, 1950. I went around the clock--every

summer. I would not want my children to do that, because you were just trying to cram too much. But after you have been in the service, you are a little behind and are just trying to catch up. Everybody else did it; that was not anything unusual. Practically everybody did it.

S: You must have also done with very little sleep.

C: Yes, I did not have to have very much sleep. I can [take short naps]. At lunch today I just locked the door, turned off the telephone and lights, and took a nap right there. I get up in fifteen, twenty, or thirty minutes and I am ready to go. I sleep maybe four or five hours a night.

S: You are fortunate.

C: Yes. I can just sleep anytime, anywhere, for a few minutes. That relaxes you and makes you feel great. That is not to say that there have not been times when I would have liked to stay in the bed a little bit longer. The best grade I ever made on an exam [was on one for which] I [almost] overslept. My clock did not go off. I did not even have a clock. My clock up here [in my head] did not go off. So I jumped up, put on my clothes, ran over, and took the exam. I made an A. [It was] the best A I have made. I did not miss very many of them. That is not the way to take an exam. I do not know what happened. It just happened to fall in place.

S: [Are there] any other experiences in law school that stand out in your mind?

C: I would say one of the most important ones was [when] the legislature was talking about doing away with the diploma privilege. If you had a diploma from law school, you did not have to take a bar exam. There was no bar exam. They were going to pass a law that everybody had to take a bar exam. I went to Tallahassee the Saturday before last for a dinner that Chesterfield Smith [class of 1948] gave for Tom Barkdull [class of 1949], who is the senior appellate judge in all of the district courts of appeal. Tom Barkdull was a fraternity brother of mine at Florida. We were talking about it at the time. Mallory Horne [class of 1950], Roy Rhodes [class of 1952], Bill Chappell [class of 1949], and a couple more of us [were there]. They all turned out to be politicians. We went to Tallahassee and lobbied the legislature to accept us, to grandfather us in, and make everybody else take the bar exam. As a matter of fact, that is what happened. They wrote it so that everybody who was enrolled in law school did not have to take the exam, but any future enrollees would have to take the bar exam. That was important. I know damn well I could not even get into law school today, let alone pass that bar exam.

S: So you went up to Tallahassee?

C: We all jumped in a Model-A Ford or an old V-8 Ford, ran up there, [and] spent two nights lobbying the people. Of course, Mallory is from up there, so he knew a lot of people already.

S: Did you speak to anyone?

C: Yes, I talked to all of the committee members and others. All of us did. [I spoke to] most of] my legislative delegation from Hillsborough County. It was important to us not to have to take that bar exam.

S: You graduated in 1950. Then what? I saw something in the file that you went to Orlando.

C: I went to Orlando. I got a job with Pleus, Edwards & Rush. Robert Pleus was an excellent lawyer. [He was] the best lawyer I ever worked with. He had been an assistant attorney general. Fletcher Rush was an excellent lawyer, too. Warren Edwards was not much of a lawyer. [They hired me] at \$150 a month, and [I] worked there thirteen months. I think I left there in October of 1951 and came to Tampa, [where] I went to work for the probate judge as his legal assistant.

At that time there was a county court and a county judges court. The county judges court was a probate guardianship court. Probate was [an] interesting practice of law. I got a job with him [William C. Brooker]. The guy that preceded me had graduated the year before I did, George Harrison [class of 1951] from Bradenton, who is practicing down there now. I followed him for about a year. I got a concentrated dose of probate practice. I went out [to establish a practice] with a guy at that time was the state attorney ["Red" McEwen]. He and I became partners on September 2, 1952.

S: Who was the probate judge you worked for?

C: William C. Brooker. He is dead now, but he did an awful lot of writing about the probate code.

S: Then who did you [enter into the partnership with]?

C: James "Red" McEwen. His brother is sports editor of the *Tampa Tribune*. He is from Wakulla. He was second-string quarterback on the 1928 football team that--up until last year--was probably the best team we ever had. [The Gators] would have gone to the Rose Bowl had we not gone to Tennessee and played. They wet the field down, and they beat us by one touchdown.

S: Why did you leave Orlando?

C: Basically I wanted to get back to this area.

S: You did want to come back here.

C: And I had an opportunity to go to work for this probate judge and get a real education on probate. Probate law and probate practice is a good, clean practice. [There is] not a great deal of litigation, but it is a very lucrative practice. It was a lot more lucrative than it is now. They do not pay as big a fee as they used to, and I do not disagree with that. I just wanted to learn about probate law, and [I] did. Then Red and I formed a partnership in September. That lasted until the end of 1960.

In 1960 I ran Farris Bryant's campaign for governor here and became a member of the State Road Board in January 1961. I had an opportunity there, of course, to meet an awful lot of people I would have never met before. At that time the Road Board was a very powerful board, because I had fourteen counties from Hernando down to Fort Myers and Lake [Okeechobee], the whole west coast, and we said where the roads were going to be built and when they were going to be built. So that gave me an opportunity to meet a lot of people who have been very helpful to me later.

In 1960 I filed an application for a bank, and it was granted. On the day after I was sworn in as a member of the Road Board I opened a bank, and I chartered several banks after that. [Then] I merged them into Sun Bank. That is why I am involved with Sun Trust Banks. Most of the time I was in the grove business. I love the grove business. I do not like truck farming. Groves and cattle [are] great.

S: You had been in cattle, too?

C: Yes.

S: So you opened several banks, and eventually all of those merged?

C: No. I only merged one of those into Sun Bank. That was the very first one.

S: What was that?

C: Brandon State Bank in Brandon. As a matter of fact, it was the first bank in Brandon and the only bank for years out there.

S: How was it you came to run the Farris Bryant campaign?

- C: Through people I had met during the years: The Cone Brothers Contracting Company, and John Hammer, who I had gotten to know. Well, the Cones were my wife's first cousins; she was Dorothy Cone. I had gotten to know John Hammer because I drew a lot of wills and trusts for him because he sold more life insurance than anybody in town. He planned people's estates, and I got to know him that way. They were supporting Bryant, so it seemed like a natural thing to get involved. I took six or eight months off from the law practice and just ran the campaign. I practiced law at night and other times, but I would be out of the office all day almost every day all day. But I did a lot of work at night. I met a lot of people then, too.
- S: OK. Was your firm Cason & McEwen?
- C: McEwen & Cason.
- S: OK. When did you found Cason & Henderson?
- C: After Red and I dissolved that partnership, December 31, 1960, I opened my own office. From that, I added people, but it was still only Warren Cason Associates or Warren Cason law offices. At one time I had as many as eight or ten people with only my name on there. Basically it was a second firm, beginning in 1961. We had one guy with us [at McEwen & Cason] at the time that went with me when we separated, when we dissolved the McEwen & Cason firm. So it was only my name, and they worked for me. From that, later on he became a partner. That is where it came from.
- S: Did you stick with probate all that time?
- C: For many years I did. For the first fifteen or twenty years I did a great deal of probate. The first ten or fifteen years [I also did] a lot of litigation, a lot of trial practice. Then you get to where you just cannot do it all, particularly if you are running campaigns and things, or [if you are] on the Road Board.
- S: So your first ten or fifteen years in practice you did a lot of trial work?
- C: Yes, particularly the first ten years. After that, when I formed my own firm, I was on the Road Board for the first four years, [and] I did not have time to do trial practice then. I did some, but not very much. Then after that I did some. But then I just gave it up. I had heart trouble in 1957, and the doctor told me I ought to quit trying cases. So I eventually did quit, but not immediately.
- S: Did you have a probate practice during that time as well?

C: Yes. During the first ten years when Red and I were together (until about December of 1960) we did a great deal of probate practice. I had drawn an awful lot of wills for people, and subsequently we ended up probating those wills. I would say for the first twenty or twenty-five years I did a great deal of probate work. [I did] guardianship [and] trustees.

S: Nowadays you are more into financial interests?

C: Yes. That changed probably in 1975. I started the first bank in 1961. I got involved in financial institutions, and I started a savings and loan association. [I was] doing a lot of financial institution work and got away from most of the other work. Basically, since that time, I do not really have time to do much practice itself. I do not here. I run the RTC [Resolution Trust Corporation] and the FDIC [Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation] and the financial institutions practice area. I do more managing, administering, and supervising than I do practicing. I very seldom read the law anymore.

S: And what practice is it?

C: The Resolution Trust Corporation. That is the one that was formed to take over all these S & Ls [savings and loans] that are going down the tubes.

S: Why did you join Holland & Knight in 1989?

C: Chesterfield [Smith] and I had been friends for years. He was two years ahead of me in law school. I was a freshman and he was a senior. I got to know him then, and he has been a friend of mine ever since. [U.S.] Senator [Spessard] Holland [from Florida, 1946-1971] was a friend of mine. That is who he was with. I supported Holland every time he ran, and I got to know Chesterfield very well. In 1968, when they put together the Holland law firm and the Knight firm here in Tampa, Chesterfield asked me then if I would join them. My practice was doing great; I was really very successful. I had no desire to join a big firm. When I first got out of law school in Orlando--although it was a small law firm--they were handling the Crummer/Du Pont antitrust case. We had a law firm from Texas that was associated, and they brought in fifteen [or] twenty lawyers, so there were lawyers running all over the office. I said then I never wanted to be a big firm. But Chesterfield and Bill McBride (managing partner of Holland Knight) continued to talk to me about joining the firm. I did not really need to. I was making more money than their senior partners.

In 1988, I had a good practice that I had built up over the years. Everybody worked for me, because they did not have any clients of their own. All the clients were mine. Several of them got to where they wanted the biggest share of the revenue. I just said: "I will tell you what you all can do. You all go out

and get your own. Start your own practice. Then you can have it all. But these are my clients, and I am going to run it the way I want to. I am going to pay you what I want you to have, and I am going to take the rest." As a result, about five or six of them left--at my request. I said then, "Do I want to go back out and hire six or seven more lawyers and in effect, start over with a group of new lawyers?"

About the same time, Chesterfield and Bill came back to see me, not knowing what had happened. And it just happened to be the right time. We negotiated for about five or six months. On February 20, 1989, it came about. I have been very happy. They do not bother me, and I do not bother them. [It is] a great law firm. It is a very good law firm. [It has branches in] eight cities throughout the state and one in Washington [DC], so there are nine offices. [There are] three hundred lawyers. That is a hell of a job of managing.

S: So you are still managing.

C: No. I manage my practice area, but I do not manage the firm at all. But I do manage the RTC/FDIC financial institutions practice area.

S: How many lawyers are in your area?

C: The lawyers throughout the state that are doing RTC/FDIC work [number] probably twenty-five, but I do not manage them. A lot of them are in other offices. So from the standpoint of actually managing, I do not manage anybody. I just see that the department runs properly. I assign the cases and [decide] where they go and that sort of thing and see that they are handled. But as far as going to the offices and running it, I do not do that. I run it out of here. We do all the billing and all the collections and so forth for the whole practice of the RTC/FDIC work.

S: We need to move on to your UF involvement. Whenever I have mentioned your name to anyone--to alumni or anyone around the University--the response is always the same. They say, "He loves the University of Florida!"

C: It is true.

S: I just wondered, how did you become so enamored of the University?

C: If you look at it, the University of Florida gave me the opportunity to be a lawyer and to be successful in what I am doing. As I said earlier, I always I knew where I wanted to go to school. There was not any other place. The Florida Gators were the only team. There just was not anywhere else, especially at that girls' school [FSCW, now FSU]. [laughter] Then you get out and get to the point

where you can do some things, and I think it is important that you give back to the University something that it gave you. I do love the University, and I credit it, along with my mother and my wife, for everything I have. I have a great first wife. I tell her that, and she says, "I would like to see your second wife."

S: You have also not only given back financially through support, but also through your time [and] your involvement by serving on the [Florida] Foundation board and the Alumni Association and all that. So you have been willing to give of your time.

C: It really is a pleasure to do it, particularly when you are dealing with the people that you like to work with. The Foundation work was great; the Athletic Association work was great. [I was also involved in] the law school. I do not contribute as much time now as I did, but at one time (I would say from 1974 to 1984 or 1985) I was spending at least 25 percent of my time [on the University], maybe more.

S: What do you feel have been some of your major contributions to or things that you have been involved with regarding the University? We have a big one sitting outside of Holland Hall, now Bruton-Geer Hall.

C: That was an effort on the part of a lot of people that I would stand [with and be] proud of the fact that Judge Bruton did what he did. I am proud of him. I did have a part in that. I am helping them try to figure out a way build that new library building.

There are so many things. The two years that I was president of the Foundation, each year we raised more money than had ever been raised before. I think that has almost been historically true of everybody that has been [president of] the Foundation. Obviously, with this giving campaign we just finished [we did quite well]. That is an awful lot of money for a state university. But I do not know of any one thing. It is anything and everything that I can do.

S: How do you feel about the importance of private support to a state university?

C: I think that is the most important thing that can go on with a state university. I do not think there is any way in the world that you are ever going to get the state legislature to appropriate the money to make it a great university. Therefore, it is incumbent upon those people that want to see it happen that we raise the money to make it a great university. We are not there yet, but we are getting there. But with the cutbacks that the [State] University System is going through now--not only the system, but everything else--[money from the state legislature is tighter than ever].

I think they made a big mistake years ago--and they are making another one--when they created nine state universities. Now we are going to put [another] one down on the lower west coast. But [we are] not providing for one great university. I do not think it is a question in anybody's mind that the University of Florida is the number-one university in the state of Florida, and I think by a wide margin. But they have not given to it what they should in order to make it a [University of] Michigan or something of that nature. We just need that extra effort on the part of the [Florida] legislature. But that will never happen now, with the way the legislature is run with the big city and county [interests dominating; the] populous areas [are] running it. I do not think there is any chance of them ever funding the University of Florida the way it should be funded.

So it is up to us to be sure that we attract and keep the professors and instructors that we need. I think we will get, by and large, most of the brick and mortar that we need, but I do not think we will ever get to the point where we can attract great teachers, the ones that do the research [and] get the fellowships. We get a lot of fellowships [and] a lot of endowments and so forth from the government and other places. But you have to have those top-notch professors, and you have to be able to keep them. That is the reason I think it was very important that the legislature did create the [eminent scholar] chairs and contribute the other \$400,000-plus. That does not help the law school as much as endowing a professorship so that you can keep a good professor you have there that someone else is going to steal from you. The chair is just one [way to keep a good professor here]. There are some great teachers there that [are getting] offers from other places, and they are going.

S: Yes. Florida now has a lot of those [endowed chairs].

C: We have to. I was going to endow a chair, but I think it is more important now, and Dean [Jeffrey] Lewis thinks so, too, that we have as many endowed professorships as possible so that we can keep the ones we have or attract others and keep them. Obviously we need to raise the money for the library. I do not think we will get that out of the legislature. We can get some matching funds out of the legislature, but we need to raise the dollars that are necessary to get a match.

S: So you are really a behind-the-scenes laborer for the law school.

C: Yes. I do not like to be out front. These people who want to be chairman of this committee and chairman of this one and chairman of the Law Center--I do not want that. I just want them to tell me where they need something and then let me see if I can help them do it. I think Dean Lewis is a heck of a guy. I am glad that they promoted from within somebody who is qualified. Most times we

think we have to go to Washington state to get somebody that is far away. We do not know anything bad about him [because] he is so far away, but if you have somebody right up close you can see the pimples on his face, and that is unfortunate. But why do we not have as good of people as anybody else? So I was very proud of the fact that they promoted him.

S: Yes. We are very fortunate to have him in there now, especially with the budget situation, because he is terrific with budgeting.

C: [Frank] Tom Read [dean, University of Florida College of Law, 1981-1988] was a crackerjack. I think the two of them probably have been the best from the standpoint of fundraising of any we have had. The one we had before him, [Joseph R.] Dick Julin [1971-1980], was not a fundraiser. He was a nice guy [and a] good professor. He is still there, is he not?

S: Yes.

C: Then you had Dean [Frank T.] Maloney before him [1958-1970], who is not the kind of guy to go out and get the money. Then you had Ichabod Crane. What was the dean's name, the big, tall, skinny guy?

S: Dean Henry Fenn [1948-1958].

C: Henry Fenn came when I was a junior in law school, I guess. [He] taught Future Interests. It was very difficult [for me] to understand what a future interest was. Then before that was [acting] Dean [Clifford W.] Crandall, who was there the first year I went to law school. He had been there a hundred years before. So it has evolved. The last three, but the last two basically, are the ones that I think have helped put us on the map.

S: Yes. I think Julin had the foresight and kind of laid the foundation for the move to greatness.

C: Yes. He did a good job.

S: But the last two have been the ones that increased the funds.

C: He [Julin] improved the faculty tremendously, and that was important.

S: You were also a member of the original [College of Law] Alumni Council of the law school. Is that right? I know you served as a class representative.

C: Yes, I was the class representative for the first one they had. I think [M.] Craig Massey is now [the representative for] the Class of 1950.

- S: I wondered if you were involved in any of the planning that went on with that organization and what they wanted to do for the school and to get the alumni involved.
- C: I was not very involved in the Law Center [Association,] Inc., which is the foundation [to raise private money for the law school,] until I became involved directly with [Frank T.] Read and [UF President Robert Q.] Marston in trying to raise the money for Bruton-Geer Hall. That was ten or twelve years ago.
- S: And now you continue to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Law Center.
- C: Yes.
- S: You talked a little bit about what you are doing for the law school, and you also said you plan to continue supporting Gator Boosters. I wondered, are you just involved in football boosters, or [are you also interested in] other sports?
- C: I guess if you are a Gator Booster [you are] a Gator Booster. But I am not as interested in baseball, basketball, [and] golf as I am [interested in] football. I think football is the thing that brings everybody together on a Saturday afternoon. [There are] 85,000 people. As Bear Bryant used to say, "I do not think you will ever get 85,000 people in a chemistry class." [laughter] But I hope the people that run the University--[UF President John] Lombardi and on down--understand how important it is that athletics creates so much interest. An awful lot of people come to the University their very first time to see a football game. Or it could be a basketball game. Guy Bostick never went a day to school at the University of Florida, yet he is one of our much better supporters now. He started going to football games because he and [former football coach] Ray Graves were friends, and he loved football. He got to be so involved in the University, and he has done tremendous things for the University. He is just one of many [like him]. So I hope the administration does not lose sight of the fact that you can have a great university, but you can also have a great athletic program, and it lends so much to making the University great. It leads you to people who will make contributions to the University either in money or in work that we need for the University to be what it can be. [We need private money to] support what it will not get from the legislature. I just hope that they do not lose sight of that.
- S: So you really see it [athletics] as an integrated part [of the whole University program], rather than [a dichotomy of] athletics and academics.
- C: Absolutely. I do not think you can separate them. If you separate them, then obviously you are going the wrong way. I have forgotten how much the Athletic Association and Gator Boosters have contributed to the general University this

year because of the cutbacks by the legislature. I think that is important.

S: It is. But what about before that? Do they do that typically?

C: Whenever they had excess funds, [they contributed,] but there have never been [excess funds before]. Until about 1979 we were not really on the map. When [football coach] Charley Pell came to the University in December of 1978, that is when things started happening from the standpoint of building up the program: the [expansion of the] south end zone, the [construction of the] sky boxes, and the impetus [for further development of the facilities and program]. Now, what came out of that also--the football program being put on probation--was damaging. But it did not stop the big emphasis that he had given to it. As a result, you see the north end zone today, and you see the finest stadium in the South. From that finest stadium in the South--we put 85,000 people in there--we are able to contribute to the University.

And it carries all of the other sports. None of the other sports, including basketball, carries its own weight. I think basketball will shortly carry its own weight shortly. But it is not [currently doing so], and it never has. They have always been dependent on football.

Now, football should not run the University. There is no question about that. But football in conjunction with all of the other phases of the University can make it a great university. Penn State is a great university. They also have a great football program. I would say that Notre Dame is a great university, and they have a great football program. Some of them live only for the great football program--Alabama and those people--and they do not worry very much about academics. They are being required to [worry about academics] now simply because they [at the behest of the NCAA] are upgrading the requirements [for student athletes] to get in the school to play at a university. As a matter of fact, in a couple of years, a player on scholarship is going to have to have a better grade point average than a regular student, which does not make any sense at all. But that is what the presidents have done. I think they will finally realize they have made a hell of a mistake and go back and change it, but until they do

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S: It is good to hear you say that, because I know a lot of people feel like there is too strong an emphasis on [football].

C: If you go too far, you hurt the university.

S: So it is a balance.

C: You use it [athletics]. It is just one more tool to help attract all the help and

assistance and contributions that the universities need today to be great, because you are not going to get it out of the legislature. They have enough problems like it is.

S: It is also a lot of fun, right?

C: Oh, yes. Last year was a great year. Those people come up there [to Florida Field for a football game], and they feel so good about the University. [They feel good about] the football program even more so than the basketball program because it involves so many more people. [Athletics] can be the emphasis that a great university needs to get the contributions. Without the athletic program, that \$392,000,000 would probably be \$192,000,000, if that much.

S: Where do you sit on football Saturdays?

C: In a box.

S: Do you bring a group of friends with you?

C: I started out with a box with my brother. We did not really need sixteen seats. Our cousin was president of Florida Coca-Cola, and the three of us shared the box. Next door was Sun Bank's box, and I put a sliding door in between because I am on the Sun Bank holding company board. We just make one big box out of it unless [one or the other is entertaining. For instance,] Coca-Cola was in there (they are no longer in there) was entertaining Publix one Saturday and Sun Bank was entertaining Winn-Dixie. Then we closed the door.

S: But it was two boxes; it was yours and Sun Bank's.

C: Yes, and it is still two boxes with a sliding door in between. I was very active in the original planning of the boxes in 1979 and 1980.

S: I would like to get a picture of you up there some time. Are you going to be in Gainesville any time soon?

C: I am going to fly up with Guy Bostick next Monday, go to that meeting, and come right back. I have a high school photograph I will send you.

S: Is that at the Athletic Association?

C: It is going to be in the Bull Gator box, above the President's box. The Gator Boosters are putting it on.

S: Well, I could be there a little early or catch you right after. Would you agree to

that? I could get your picture right there.

C: Yes, if I can find a tie to wear. I think I will wear my overalls.

S: I brought my camera today, but it would be nice to have [a picture of you] there at the stadium.

C: I will be there.

I hope they do not make a mistake in selecting an athletic director [from the outside] and overlook Jeremy [Foley], because he has been there [for] seventeen years and is absolutely familiar with every facet of the Athletic Association and athletics in general. I know you have to run a search all over the country, I guess by law now, and they are doing that. That is fine, but they have the very best man in the country [already here]. I look at this as I did when Jeff Lewis was made the dean. [It is] the same situation.

S: What other interests do you have besides reading and Gator football? Are you interested in other football as well?

C: I have twenty seats for the [Tampa Bay] Buccaneers games. I have had that ever since they have been there. I have not been to a Bucs game in years, though I think probably Sam Wyche is going to put a lot of people in the stadium. But I cannot get close to professional football like I do with college football, especially the University of Florida. I used to be very close to high school football, but not anymore.

The other thing I am interested in and spend more of my time with is my family.

S: Does Mrs. Cason share your interest in football?

C: Oh, yes.

S: That is a good thing.

C: Yes, and my children do, too. All of them, with the exception of the one that is in Boston, went to the Sugar Bowl with us. Their husbands and wives [came]. We took a whole crew. I believe there were fourteen of us. And that is what is fun. If I cannot be with them, then I do not want be [with anyone]. I would not have gone to the Sugar Bowl without my family.

S: Are your other children in the area?

C: Three out of four are here. Six out of nine grandchildren are here. And I figure

three out of the next four will be here.

S: Who is in Boston?

C: Carey Janett. She is the second daughter and the third child.

S: [Do you have] any other interests?

C: Not really.

S: Fishing?

C: No. I used to fish and play golf a lot, but I do not do much of either one anymore.

S: Thank you very much for your time. If I have any other questions, can I call?

C: Sure.

[End of the interview]