

UFLC 60

Interviewee: John Hardwick Stembler

Interviewer: Samuel Proctor

Date: February 23, 1993

P: [My name is Samuel Proctor, and I am interviewing] John Hardwick Stembler here at the University of Florida's Museum of Natural History. This is February 23, 1993. We are doing this for the University of Florida Oral History Archives. We are working here in my office on the first floor of the museum.

John, let me start off by getting some background information on you. Obviously, a lot of the stuff I am going to ask you I already know the answers for, but we are doing it for the tape. First of all, when were you born?

S: I was born on February 18, 1913, in Miami [pronounced with a final short i], Florida.

P: I notice that you do not pronounce it Miami [with a final long e]. Native Floridians are not supposed to. So you just had a birthday.

S: I just had my eightieth birthday.

P: And I understand you just had a big celebration marking that in Atlanta, Georgia.

S: [It was] last Thursday.

P: Jeff Lewis [dean, UF College of Law] told me that he had come up from the law school and that it was really a gala, that everybody who was anybody in the Atlanta area was there, and everybody had a wonderful time.

Let me ask you about your family background. [What was] your father's name?

S: George C. Stembler. He was my stepfather; I was adopted by him.

P: I see. And your mother's?

S: Harriet Elizabeth Stembler.

P: Your mother's maiden name was Sligh?

S: Harriet Elizabeth Sligh.

P: How did the family get to Miami, to Florida?

S: My mother's father had a small orange grove at Lady Lake near Leesburg, and the freeze of 1895 froze them out. My grandmother was widowed, and she had four daughters--five originally, but one died in her youth. She first came to

Gainesville and ran a boardinghouse.

P: Is this your grandmother or your great-grandmother?

S: This is my grandmother.

P: On your mother's side?

S: Right. She was helped by the Thomases, who had the Thomas Hotel. He was a cousin. [She was] also [helped] by her brother-in-law from Jacksonville. His name was Alexander St. Clair Abrams [founder of Tavares, the seat of Lake County, Florida, in 1875].

P: He was a major Florida politician, too.

S: He was a lawyer for [Henry] Flagler way back in the 1880s. My grandmother's boardinghouse burned down, and Abrams and Thomas staked her to move down to Florida in the late 1800s.

P: Where did your family originally come from? Georgia? The Carolinas?

S: My mother's forebearers were originally from South Carolina. She was actually born in Leesburg, Florida.

P: [This was] your grandmother, so you are third generation.

S: My mother was born in Leesburg. My grandmother was born in South Carolina.

P: So your family really has long Florida roots.

S: We have been here a long while.

P: How about on your father's side?

S: My stepfather or my father?

P: Either one.

S: I was raised by my stepfather, and I was adopted by my stepfather.

P: So that is obviously why you have the Stembler name. Was he a Floridian?

S: My name was **THOMPKINS**--my dad's name whom I never knew. He and my mother separated in my early childhood.

P: Were the Stembler longtime Floridians also?

S: Stembler was from Baltimore, Maryland. [He was from] Catonsville actually, just outside of Baltimore.

P: Where were you born in Miami? What part of the city?

S: I was born at home, by Dr. James M. Jackson of the Jackson Memorial Hospital.

P: You have all kinds of history associated with you. [laughter]

S: I go back a year or two. He was probably the only doctor down there, because--hard as it is to believe--Miami was a community of some 10,000 people.

P: You have sisters?

S: Two sisters.

P: What are their names?

S: One is Elizabeth Nelson, who is a widow [and will be] eighty-four in May, and [the other is] Janice, who is a widow and lives in Washington DC.

P: So were you the middle child?

S: I was the baby before, and I had a brother who died fifteen years ago.

P: Then you went to school in Miami?

S: I went to Coral Gables Elementary, and Ponce de Leon Jr. High School, and Miami [Senior] High School.

P: Miami, as we mentioned earlier, was a much different kind of a community.

S: It was a small town.

P: You remember it as a place that was easy and safe to get around?

S: Extremely so. Of course, the big thing that opened up Miami was when Henry Flagler extended the railroad down to Miami.

P: What are some of your earliest memories of the Miami area? You were living there when the boom burst.

S: I sure was. We had a terrible hurricane in Florida in 1926, so we had three years of depression before the rest of the country did. The stock market crashed in 1929, and things were pretty lean down there at that time.

P: What did your stepfather do for a living?

S: He was in the insurance business, Stembler Insurance Agency. It was later merged into Stembler-**Adams-Frazier**. As far as I know, it is still in existence.

P: Did you grow up in prosperous circumstances?

S: I did. My dad was a self-made man, but he had developed the largest local insurance agency in the earliest stages of Miami. We lived very well.

P: What about the hurricane of 1926? You were thirteen years old then. Do you have memories of it?

S: I have some very vivid memories of it. I lived out in the colonial section, which is out by Riviera. It was the **BACK EIGHTEEN** of the Biltmore Hotel, and it was closed for many years. Then they organized a club and bought the Back Eighteen from the Biltmore. It is known now as the Riviera Country Club, and I lived in one of the original colonial homes of that development.

P: Tell me what you remember about the hurricane, what did it do to your property.

S: It was pretty brutal. The house had large slates on it that weighed about three or four pounds, and those things were flying off of the roof. They would hit a pine tree and go about a third of the way through the pine tree. All of the windows were broken out from slates or debris flying through the air.

P: In those days you did not evacuate anywhere. You stayed right home?

S: You stayed right there.

P: You remember hiding then or doing whatever you needed to do?

S: We were just hibernating. All of the lights and whatnot were knocked out. The windows were blown out. It was a pretty severe storm. I have always thought of it as *the* most severe, but the one they had last year down south of Miami in Homestead might have been worse.

P: There was also one that followed the 1926 hurricane--the 1928 hurricane.

S: That is correct. They have had maybe half a dozen significant hurricanes over the last fifty years.

P: What kinds of things began to have an early influence on you that made you want to go into law, and that made you want to go to the University of Florida, to do the things that have propelled your life?

S: Well, my dad, Stembler, was never educated beyond high school, and he placed no great importance, frankly, in higher education. If I was just going to come into the insurance business with him, he did not think I needed to go to college. I said I would like to practice law, which was an excuse more than an ambition to come up here to school.

P: So he said, "I'll back you"?

S: He sent me through law school.

P: Was your mother encouraging too?

S: She was.

P: So you decided to come to the University of Florida, rather than go out of state?

S: That is correct. I never had any idea of going out of state.

P: Of course, you came here in the 1930s, which was during the Depression period.

S: It was that. I came in 1932.

P: Had that already impacted your family?

S: It had.

P: Severely?

S: We were still living very comfortably.

P: So you arrived in Gainesville in September of 1932?

S: No, I came in February, in the middle of the year. I finished high school in the middle of the year, and I wound up finishing law school in the middle of the year, five years later.

P: Tell me about your first impressions of the campus.

S: [The University of] Florida, as you know, was a very small school then. I think we probably had a couple thousand students. It was a lot more fun then than it is now--at least in my imagination. They [now] have 38,000 students here.

P: How did you get up from Miami to Gainesville?

S: [By] automobile.

P: You had a car?

S: I did not. I rode with somebody else. [I rode] with Jack Beckwith and Bob McGahey, who were two of the few who had automobiles in college at that time.

P: Most kids could not afford an automobile.

S: When I first came here, I was a member of the SAE fraternity [Sigma Alpha Epsilon], and there was only one member of the fraternity, Tommy Shad from Jacksonville, who had an automobile.

P: He must have come from a really wealthy family.

S: From our viewpoint, he was. [laughter]

P: Now, you arrive in Gainesville in February 1932. [John J.] Tigert is president at the time.

S: That is right.

P: Why did you go SAE?

S: SAE had a very strong membership from Miami. It was just a matter of whether I was going to get invited into the fraternity or not, whether I was going to go SAE. I was a little offended initially, because they sent Philip Graham over to rush me instead of the football player **SONNY HENDERSON** here at the University. I thought I should be a more important prospect than that. [laughter] They were not paying very much attention to me. Of course, Phil and I became lifelong friends as a result of that. We roomed together.

P: But this is how you first got to know Phil Graham?

S: I had known him casually in high school, but not well.

P: He was in your high school also? Was he the same age as you?

S: No, he is two years younger than I am. But he lived out in a farm area where his daddy used to run the Pennsylvania Sugar Company trying to grow sugar cane. That did not work out. He grew cabbage and started a dairy. Ernest Graham, his daddy, was elected [in 1937] to the state senate from Dade County just before I got out of school [college], as a matter of fact. At that time he was the only senator from that very large area. I finished [UF] in February and went with him to Tallahassee during his first term and his second term, which was in 1939. I stayed with him up there, and I was pretty much of a gofer for Mr. Graham. He did a lot for me through the years.

P: What kind of a student were you here at the campus?

S: Very mediocre.

P: By that you mean what?

S: Cs, and the first semester there were a few *Ds* thrown in there. I did reasonably well in law school, and I was a member of Phi Delta Phi. I was the president of Phi Delta Phi at one point in college.

P: What were your strengths in school?

S: I do not think I was a strong scholar in any area that I can think of.

P: Was this because you were not very interested in it?

S: That is correct. I was not very interested in studying, and I studied only enough to get by, to my regret, until I got to law school. Then I became a little more interested. I made *Bs* and had a respectable, decent record in law school.

P: Were you a social animal?

S: I was.

P: Gainesville was dry in those years.

S: That is correct.

P: Were the SAEs able to overcome that obstacle?

S: There was such a thing as maybe having a drink occasionally.

P: Occasionally? [It was] either home manufactured or you went down to . . .

S: Home manufactured or wherever you could get it.

P: You went to the county line. [laughter]

S: That is correct.

P: Gainesville stayed dry for a very long time. The SAE house was located where?

S: 13th Street and University Drive.

P: This was really the crossroads of everything that was going on.

- S: That is correct. The law school was almost across the street from us.
- P: That is right, which is now Bryan Hall. It is part of the College of Business Administration. Were you in athletics?
- S: I was not. My freshman year Phil Graham and I were the nonathletes. We had an interesting group that shared one bedroom and a sleeping porch with two double-decker beds. Four of us lived in one room. That was [George] Smathers, Jack Beckwith, Phil Graham, and I.
- P: Who is Jack Beckwith?
- S: Jack Beckwith was an exodontist and a pretty good football player. He and Smathers were our athletes. Smathers went on to be an awful lot of things at the University of Florida. He was the captain of the basketball team and played freshman football, and then he quit playing football at the instigation of his dad. But he did track and basketball, and he was a very versatile fellow. The rest of us were somewhat jealous. He was an honor student. He was president of the [student body of the] University and president of SAE. He succeeded me as president of the SAE fraternity.
- P: Jack Beckwith was from where?
- S: He was from Miami also. He was a very good, close friend of mine. He was my closest friend.
- P: Is he still living?
- S: No. He died about ten years ago.
- P: You said he was an exodontist. What is that?
- S: Tooth extractions and jaw work and that sort of dentistry.
- P: In those years we did not have a dental school in Florida, so he had to go elsewhere [to get his dental training].
- S: He did; he went to Northwestern [University in Evanston, IL].
- P: Anybody who wanted to do graduate work in those areas had to leave the state of Florida.
- S: That is right.
- P: Medicine, veterinary science, dentistry, nursing--whatever.

- S: That is right. A lot of them went to Emory, where I live now, in Atlanta.
- P: Did you always live in the fraternity house?
- S: No. Actually, I just lived in the fraternity house for a very few months. Then Phil Graham and I roomed for the remainder of that semester in a boardinghouse. The next year, as I mentioned to you, Beckwith and Smathers came up, and the four of us ended up living in what we call Rab's Roost.
- P: Now, where was it?
- S: Just off one block north of 13th Street, about a block down the street from University Drive.
- P: Rab's **Roof**?
- S: That was our name. It was Mrs. Rab's house. She had a couple of rooms that she rented out.
- P: That was on NW 9th Street then. It had not become 13th Street yet. That was right down from the Varsity Grill. That is where you probably ate.
- S: [It was] right across the street from the Black Cat.
- P: That is right. [laughter] That was a famous hangout in those years. What do you remember about the campus then?
- S: Well, it was a relatively very small school and a very pleasant one.
- P: Everybody knew everybody and said hello to everybody.
- S: You pretty much knew everybody in school at that time--by sight, by name, or by individual.
- P: If you wanted to do anything, you had to hitchhike downtown to do it, for instance, to go to the movies at the Florida Theater.
- S: That is correct.
- P: If you really wanted to celebrate, you went to the Primrose?
- S: The Primrose Grill was a big deal, because it cost you about a \$1.50 to eat.
- P: Maybe even less than that in the Depression days. Did you work on campus?
- S: I did not.

P: So you were not one of the early NYA [National Youth Administration] boys or anything like that.

S: No. I had a lavish allowance of about \$50 a month, so I was a rich kid. I had enough money to live without working.

P: Tell me about Phil Graham. I know you remained a good friend of his for the rest of his life.

S: Very much so. Well, Phil was an interesting fellow, because he grew up out in Pennsuco, which is northwest of Hialeah in "Never-Never Land" in the swamps. As I said, his dad had been the local representative of the Pennsylvania Sugar Company when he came down here. They decided they could not lick the drainage problem out there in the swamps, and they were not successful growing sugar cane. Ernest Graham stayed there and was a very tenacious, hardworking man. He never had anything but a \$30 suit and a Dodge automobile. He was a very unpretentious fellow. He bought that land from the Pennsylvania Sugar Company. They pretty much gave him a sweetheart deal. All they wanted to do was to get out. They placed no great value on it, and he bought a very large chunk of that land--into several thousand acres--that have since become a very important area.

He bought another piece of land up at what is now Miami Lakes. He bought that piece of land to get his cattle out of the swamps during the rainy season in Miami. Phil's younger brother, Bill Graham, who is also a graduate of the University of Florida, has developed a tremendous community down there of about 25,000 to 30,000 people out near the airport. It is known as Miami Lakes. He has been astoundingly successful also in his chosen field, as was Phil with the *Washington Post*.

P: And of course Bob Graham, their half-brother, [went on to become an astute politician in the state of Florida].

S: Bob Graham and I go back a long ways, because Phil and I were extremely close. Ernest Graham had met his wife Hilda [Simmons], who is Bob Graham's mother, on a bus going from Tallahassee to Jacksonville. Ernest told Phil he wanted to bring Hilda by Gainesville to meet him because Ernest wanted to marry her. Phil, in great excitement, told me one day, "Come on! Come with me! The old man has met somebody on the bus that he wants to marry." It was just Ernest Graham, Phil, and me when Phil met Hilda. She was a schoolteacher from DeFuniak Springs, a rural area of Florida. She was a very lovely woman, and the mother of Bob Graham. I only hope that both she and Ernest Graham are aware of what their son Bob has accomplished politically.

P: Now, the first Mrs. Graham, Phil's mother, died.

- S: She died about our freshman year of school, as I recall.
- P: Did you know her?
- S: Yes.
- P: [Was she a] nice lady?
- S: She was a very, very nice lady. Lovely lady. She died of cancer very early on.
- P: I know Phil had a lot of problems later on in life. Were those evident while he was here as a student on campus?
- S: Phil liked to have a good time.
- P: He was a brilliant man.
- S: Phil never worked hard in school. He was the most brilliant fellow I have ever run into. [He was] a little bit erratic, but he would go along and study just enough to get by and make straight As when it came to exam time.
- P: But he did not show this erratic behavior that was so much a part of his later life.
- S: He was emotional, but I would not classify his behavior as erratic.
- P: He was not abnormal in any way then?
- S: No, he was very personable and liked people and was an outgoing person.
- P: He got along well with people?
- S: Extremely.
- P: Did you stay close to Graham after you graduated and he graduated?
- S: I did.
- P: He moved to Washington, so there was a distance between you.
- S: Well, the story on that is W. I. **EVANS**, who had loaned Ernest Graham a little money when he was getting started after the Pennsylvania Sugar Company pulled out, talked to Ernest Graham and said, "Phil is a bright young man." Phil had to quit school one year and go down and drive a milk truck; he dropped out of the University of Florida for one year. Those were pretty tough times for the Graham family, but by that time Graham was doing much better. W. I. Evans told him that he used to be the head of Evans, **MERSHON & SAWYER**, an

outstanding law firm in Miami.

He had a great deal to do with Phil going to Harvard Law School. He said he ought to get an education, and Phil went to Harvard Law School. To his eternal credit, he became president of the *Harvard Law Review*, which is a very high scholastic honor, as you know, with those so-called fancier schools than the University of Florida at that time. It was a very high honor that he deserved, and [he] did well with it. He worked with [Felix] Frankfurter [who was a professor at the Harvard Law School] and became Frankfurter's protégé to some extent. Frankfurter was on the [U.S.] Supreme Court as a law clerk for [Justice] Stanley Reed--by virtue of Frankfurter's selection, largely. **[Reed had been appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court only one year before Frankfurter was.]** Then Frankfurter was made a member of the U.S. Supreme Court [in 1939], and Phil stayed on a second year as his student assistant.

P: It was while he was at Harvard that he met Katharine.

S: He met Katharine Graham because her father, Eugene Meyer--she was Katharine Meyer--had bought the *Washington Post* [at an auction] on the courthouse steps for about \$800,000. Phil met Katharine at a party at either the Frankfurter's or the Meyer's house. Meyer and Frankfurter were close friends.

P: Were you at the wedding?

S: I was not. They had a small wedding. They did not have a fancy wedding. I visited with them in their home and whatnot many times, but I was not at the wedding. It was not any big fancy wedding. They just got married.

P: I notice there is a new book out on Katharine Graham [*Power, Privilege, and the Post: The Katharine Graham Story*, by Carol Felsenthal (1993)], and I read some excerpts from it recently. It does not paint a very lovely picture of Phil Graham.

S: Somebody gave me that book last week, and I was somewhat of a contributor to that book with the author on the Graham side of her life.

P: It paints a very ugly picture. Do you think it is an accurate picture of Phil Graham?

S: I have not read it.

P: It certainly portrays him as a bigot, an anti-Semite, as a womanizer.

S: His daddy was. I do not think Phil was. There is some justification for the other feelings. I am sorry that got that sort of emphasis in the book.

P: There was a lot of emphasis in the book. It makes him an even greater lothario than Jack Kennedy. [laughter]

S: He was not. His nickname was Muscle-bound, and he was a couple years younger than we were and initially a great deal more naive.

P: Well, from this book he seems to have learned quickly and to have been a very adept student. Tell me about your relationship with Ernest Graham.

S: Ernest Graham is my all-time hero. As I said, I went up to Tallahassee with him a couple of months after I got out of law school in February. The legislature met in April every other year at that time, and I spent the whole two months with him then, and I was a close associate with him in Miami, until such time as I went into the military service, which was four and one-half years down the road.

P: How did it happen that you became associated with Ernest Graham and that he became your patron?

S: Because of Phil's and my relationship, more than anything, I guess.

P: And as a result, he liked you?

S: He and I had a great relationship.

P: What was the basis for the relationship?

S: Phil and I being friends, I guess.

P: Mr. Graham liked you as an individual, obviously.

S: As I tell you, we had a very meaningful relationship. I do not know of anyone who I had a higher regard for than Ernest Graham.

P: How good of a politician was Ernest Graham?

S: He was not that much of a politician. He was strong willed. That is the first time he ever ran for office [when he was elected in 1937 to the Florida Senate]. He got elected in Miami, and that was a pretty big job because, as a matter of legislative courtesy, you are not going to pass any local laws that are of local application without the approval of the local delegation. That is a matter of legislative courtesy; I guess it still prevails. So being the necessary hurdle for anyone wanting to change the law relating to local offices that applied only to Dade County, they had to have approval of him as well as a house delegation.

P: Why do you think he lost in his race for the governorship? [In 1944 Ernest

Graham was one of five candidates in the Democratic primary who lost to Millard Caldwell. Caldwell then defeated Bert Acker in the general election for governor. Ed.]

S: Because at that time nobody had ever, to my recollection, been elected to statewide office from Miami and the lower coast. Also, if I am not mistaken, George Smathers was the first one who was ever elected to a statewide office when he was elected to the U.S. Senate. That is all that I can tell you.

[Florida Senator] Bill Shands here in Gainesville was a very close friend of Ernest Graham's. They were close buddies. He [Graham] ran unsuccessfully on his stand because he was maybe too closely identified with the establishment of Florida. Being from Miami was enough to disqualify Graham in west Florida.

P: He was running against Millard Caldwell.

S: That is correct. Millard Caldwell prevailed in that race.

P: And, of course, in 1948, Shands lost also to our great friend, Fuller Warren.

S: Did he lose to Fuller? I lost track of that.

P: Yes. Fuller became governor in 1948. What kind of a man was Graham himself? Was he an honest, decent man?

S: He was extremely honest, hardworking, and a very unassuming, warm fellow.

P: It was not a big deal going to Tallahassee in those years. You went up, the session was on, and then you went back home and got back into the real world. What did you do as a gofer?

S: I was just his male employee. He did not have anything but a secretary and me that were on the payroll for \$6 a day. That looked awfully good to me in 1937. [laughter]

P: You could live well on that in those days.

S: I was a rich fellow. [laughter] As a matter of fact, that is all the members of the state senate got at that time.

P: So you did what needed to be done in a one-man office at that particular moment.

S: I was his flunkie. That is essentially it.

P: Was Ernest Graham himself a product of this time? Was he a member of the

KKK, for instance?

S: No, I do not think so. In fact, I feel certain that he was not. He was not very tolerant, as you have indicated, about the Jewish situation.

P: Or about the black situation, I would imagine.

S: Well, he managed to get the black vote in Miami, as well as the white vote. Of course, the white vote was 80 or 90 percent of the vote or more at that time.

P: Not many blacks were registering to vote.

S: Not many blacks were registered and voted or cared about voting.

P: That is right, or were allowed to even if they cared about voting.

S: That is correct. It might be a little difficult.

P: That is right. They did not predominate the population of Dade County at the time.

S: [Not the way] they and the Cubans [and] whatnot do at this time.

P: We have Ernest Graham's papers here at the University, given to us by Bob.

S: Oh, do you?

P: No student has yet worked on them, but it would be a fertile field, it would seem to me, in studying the political history of this state.

S: Particularly, with the success that Bob has had, his father and his mother would get an enormous kick out of his having been the governor for a couple of terms.

P: I am in the midst of doing a series of interviews with Bob now. [See FP50, University of Florida Oral History Archives. Ed.] I also recently did one with his aunt [Ina S. Thompson] in Defuniak Springs, his mother's surviving sister, who gave me a lot of background on the family itself. [See FP51, University of Florida Oral History Archives. Ed.]

S: I do not know her.

P: [She is] a very nice lady.

S: I think her dad was a doctor in Defuniak Springs, and she taught school.

P: Yes, she taught school, and the lady I interviewed was also a school teacher and

a school principal. So it was, for the times, a very highly educated family. Let me ask you about your own career. You get out [of the UF law school] in February of 1937?

S: Correct.

P: Then what happened to you?

S: I went to the legislature with Mr. [Ernest] Graham two months later. When I first got out of school, they had what they called the Ford Florida Exposition that came from the old Chicago World's Fair. They had booths that you go around and tell about all of the great characteristics of a Ford automobile. You lecture to groups that go from one stand to the other. I lectured on the Ford automobile for about six weeks before I went to Tallahassee.

P: Where was this?

S: This was right down on Bayfront Park in the center of Miami.

P: Kind of a foreshadowing of Disney World coming to Florida. [laughter]

S: That is right.

P: I bet it brought a lot of interesting people out to see what was going on. Now, you go to Tallahassee with Mr. Graham, and you are there until the end of the session?

S: I was there until the end of the session, and then when I got out, there was a new law firm established in Miami. It just had two people. [One was] Judge Raleigh Petteway, who had been a criminal court judge in Tampa. He ran for governor [in 1936], and he ran high in the first primary. He lost in the run-off [to Fred P. Cone, who went on to win the general election]. [The other was James M.] Jim Carson, who was a distinguished scholar and had a couple of uncles who were U.S. federal district judges in Jacksonville. [They were] Nathan [Philemon] Bryan and William [James] Bryan. I think they were in Jacksonville. Carson was a very bright man. He wrote the book on Florida common law pleadings [*A Treatise on Common Law Pleading, Practice, and Procedure* (1927); revised edition, *Florida Common Law Pleading, Practice, and Procedure* (1940, 1958)] which used to be part of the textbooks of law school. Whether it is still, I do not know. [Carson also wrote *A Practical Treatise on the Law of the Family, Marriage, and Divorce in Florida* (1950). Ed.] Anyway, they formed a firm, and I was the first one they hired. The fact that I worked for State Senator Graham did not hurt me any.

P: Mr. Carson himself ran for governor in 1928.

S: Jim Carson did?

P: Sydney J. Catts was running again in that race [he had also run in the 1924 campaign], and Carson hated Catts. He ran in the race in an effort to curtail any possible support that Catts might have.

S: Oh, did he? I do not know why, but I do not have that recollection.

P: I did not know Judge Carson, but I did know his wife [Ruby Leach] very well. She came up here to school.

S: James M. Carson's wife?

P: That is right. She came up here and took a master's degree in history. She wrote a biography of one of the early governors of Florida [William D. Bloxham. 1881-1885].

S: She was much younger than he.

P: [She was] much younger. I think it may have been the second marriage.

S: It was the second marriage.

P: She was a very able woman too. They shared a common interest in Florida history. Where was that office located?

S: [It was located] in the Congress Building in Miami. We subsequently changed the firm name to Carson, Petteway & Stembler.

P: That was a very distinguished firm, having Carson and Petteway in there. Both of them were statewide figures.

S: It was a good firm. They were both a little hungry.

P: How did Petteway happen to go from Tampa to Miami?

S: That I do not know, but he and Jim Carson were just establishing that firm; it was brand-new. [There was] nobody but themselves and a couple of secretaries when I went to work for them. And I went to work for them on a very lavish deal.

P: I bet. [laughter]

S: They said, "If you want to come in and work for ninety days and see if you like us and we like you, we will pay you \$100 a month." So after my three months was over with no pay, they gave me the \$300, and I went to work for them.

- P: I hope they gave you a desk somewhere along the line.
- S: We did all right.
- P: What kind of law practice was this?
- S: Jim Carson was primarily a trial lawyer, and we were a general law practice. But we did a lot of side work. He is associated by other law firms quite often to try negligence cases. They did probate or anything. Lawyers did not have any specialized field to the degree that they do now.
- P: Does this law firm still survive, even though the major people are obviously gone?
- S: I do not believe it is. I do not know.
- P: Certainly not by that name, then.
- S: No.
- P: Miami is coming out of the Depression by this period of time in 1937, isn't it? Times are getting better?
- S: [They were] a little better. Things were pretty grim as far as trying to get a job practicing law then, or almost anything else. In 1937 the economy was certainly not booming by any means.
- P: We had just started Franklin Roosevelt's second term. There was nothing here at the University in terms of placement and that sort of thing, like we have now.
- S: Well, Ms. [Ila R.] Pridgen, who was Dean [Harry R.] Trusler's secretary at the College of Law, was helpful to me and the dean. [Mrs. Pridgen was the law school librarian. Ed.]
- P: You were one of her "boys"?
- S: I was kind of one of her boys.
- P: [laughter] We have a wonderful interview with her on tape. [See UF56, University of Florida Oral History Archives. Ed.]
- S: Is she still living?
- P: No, she is gone now. Anytime that you decide you want to refresh some of those memories, come around. We have all of their voices right next door on tape. We have got Preacher Gordon [of First Presbyterian Church; see AL9,

AL10, University of Florida Oral History Archives] and Ms. Pridgen and all of those people.

S: I used to play a lot of handball with Preacher, and Billy **READER** and **HARTFORD MUREEN**. They were lawyers in Miami also

P: So you begin the practice of law in 1937. How long does that continue in this firm?

S: I stayed with that firm for the full time that I was in Miami. I had taken ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] at the University of Florida. At that time I was a first lieutenant in the reserves, and I was called to active duty in March 1941. So [I worked for that firm] for just a little over four years.

P: You went to Fort Benning [Georgia], then, in the summer, for training?

S: Well, I went to Starke, right over here.

P: Camp Blanding. No, I mean when you were in school under the ROTC program.

S: Yes, we did that one summer, but I was called into active duty at Camp Blanding.

P: Were you in the infantry or the artillery on campus?

S: I was in the infantry, and I was called to active duty on March 25, 1941. Camp Blanding was a sand pile at that time. We had boards to walk inbetween the tents. It was a pretty rustic proposition. They did not have any basic training for new recruits or anything else. They gave us 170 selectees, I think they called them, from Tennessee, and we went all the way from highly educated to sixth grade draftees. They more or less said, "You all train each other." [There were] five reserve officers who did not know what they were doing anyhow. We were a military police company.

P: Now, when does this U.S. district attorney appointment come along?

S: I came back and worked for Carson and Petteway again, largely because of Mr. Graham, not that he ever lifted his hand. They increased the jurisdiction of the juvenile court in Miami to juvenile and domestic relations; they set up a domestic relations jurisdiction also, and I was named as the attorney for the juvenile domestic relations court, so I handled all of the domestic deals. Most of them [were] settled [by] getting the husband that was not paying to support his children. That was a big part of the deal. I did that largely by stipulation and then getting the judge to approve it. I got that job at about the time I went to work for Carson Petteway, shortly after that.

- P: You could do both of those at the same time, private practice and [this public job]?
- S: They let me do that job, so my \$100 a month was not quite as pitiful as I told you, because they paid me the huge sum of \$300 a month from the State Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.
- P: Three hundred dollars a month was a very generous salary for the state to be paying then.
- S: That is correct. I was rich [from] what I made practicing law and then [this state job].
- P: I do not know that the governor got any more than that.
- S: The governor only made about \$8,000-\$10,000 a year at that time.
- P: I know that is all that the president of the University of Florida made.
- S: That is correct.
- P: You were in high cotton.
- S: I was rich, living at home. Then George Smathers replaced a fellow by the name of Hayford Enwall. I think he came up here. Is that right?
- P: Hayford was from Gainesville.
- S: [He was] the assistant U.S. attorney from Miami, and he left for the military.
- P: He was called into service.
- S: That is right, and Smathers replaced him. Then they created a second assistant's job in Miami that I wanted more than anything I have ever wanted. There were three or four of us that were approved. Of course, Claude Pepper made those decisions at that time because he was liberal and very close to Roosevelt on any federal appointments in Florida. He called the shots.
- P: He was the patronage chief in this state.
- S: There was no question about it.
- P: He and Smathers were good friends then?
- S: Extremely so. I know all of that story. I wanted that second job worse than I wanted anything. It finally came down to the fact that Pepper had recommended

to the justice department--the FBI had cleared three of us--Billy **READER**, a good friend of mine from Miami (I cannot recall his name at the moment, [and me]. We were the competitors for that job. Finally, George helped me then because the U.S. attorney in Tampa, who was our boss, asked George who of the three he would like to see appointed, and George put in a plug for me. Anyway, I finally got it, largely because of my relationship with Graham.

P: Now, in addition to your continuing relationship with Philip Graham, you are also still very good friends with George Smathers.

S: That is correct.

P: Did you both graduate at the same time, or was Smathers ahead of you?

S: I finished in February, and he finished in June.

P: So you were a little bit ahead of him.

S: Not really, but he stayed seven years for both degrees.

P: But you took the one degree in 1937?

S: I just got one; I got it under the wire for the two years of prelaw and the three years of law.

P: You did not have to take the bar in those years, did you?

S: I did not, thank goodness.

P: But you have had a continuing relationship with George Smathers over the years.

S: That is correct.

P: We will get back to him in a little bit. I want to maintain this chronology of your career. So you go to work for Mr. Graham. You finish with the session in the spring of 1937. [Then] you get a job, and you work in a law firm.

S: Carson Petteway.

P: At almost the same time you are drafted. All of this [was] in 1937.

S: That is correct; [it was] 1937 or early 1938, because I was gone in 1941.

P: Obviously, you have a busy professional life, then, maintaining two jobs.

S: I worked as assistant United States attorney for only a very short period, because

I was called into service. I started to get a waiver, but I was not married and I thought I might as well get my year of active duty over. That [year] stretched to about five.

P: You did not know that the Japanese had other plans for you.

S: That is right.

P: Now, when you say only a very short time, [do you mean] a couple of years?

S: No. I was appointed in 1940 and went into the service in 1941.

P: What happened to you from the time you joined the law firm in the summer of 1937 until you received this appointment?

S: I practiced law, and I worked mainly with the juvenile domestic relations court and our practice. On occasion, Smathers and I would have each other as masters in our divorce cases for \$25 or \$50 if it was a rich fellow). Hayford Enwall went into the service in about 1939, I guess; he went in early. George had been in his job for about a year, as I recall. Then they decided to have a second one. Stuart Patton is the name of the fellow that succeeded me, the one whose name I could not recall before. Stuart had been a very outstanding fellow at the University of Miami. He was president of the student body and whatnot, and Claude Pepper, frankly, was leaning towards giving him the job because of that. Ernest Graham had a very close relationship with a fellow by the name of Dan Mahoney, who was the publisher of the *Miami Daily News* and the son-in-law of [James M.] Cox, the owner of the paper. He called Claude Pepper in my presence--that scared me to death--to recommend me.

P: This is Mahoney that is doing this?

S: Yes. He was very fond of Ernest Graham, and I benefitted by that too.

P: So you got in to Mahoney through Ernest Graham.

S: Mahoney helped me, that is right. He was Governor Cox's son-in-law. [Cox was governor of Ohio from 1913-1915, 1917-1921. Ed.]

P: And you did not know Mahoney until Graham opened the door?

S: No. I had gotten to know him through Ernest Graham while I was working for Graham.

P: I see. Working with Graham obviously opened a lot of doors for you.

- S: That is why I told you I am indebted to him more than any one person I can think of.
- P: He was a politically important person who knew lots of people.
- S: In Miami. That is correct.
- P: So he could open a lot of these various important doors for you.
- S: Well, indirectly. He was not direct about my being appointed to the court job, but it did not hurt that I was his stooge in Tallahassee.
- P: Were you involved at all with Claude Pepper at this early stage?
- S: I got my appointment through Claude Pepper; I had to. If you did not ultimately get his nod, you did not get a federal appointment.
- P: I mean, was this something where he just knew your name?
- S: He knew my name, and I think that is about all.
- P: You had not worked with him?
- S: I knew him a little better than that. Incidentally, he was very instrumental with Phil's getting into Harvard. He had gone to Harvard Law School. He was close to the Grahams and the Meyers. He was close to Kay's dad. **[WHO IS KAY ?]** He was an important figure in the Roosevelt administration.
- P: Sure. He was one of the young men who came in along with Lyndon Johnson and others who began to support the liberal part of it. They made up the liberal wing of the Democratic party.
- S: Very much so, he more so than Lyndon Johnson as far as the liberal wing of the Democratic party.
- P: Now, of course, Ernest Graham was a conservative, was he not?
- S: Basically, but he was very friendly with Claude Pepper.
- P: And he was able to use that on your behalf to some degree.
- S: Well, Dan Mahoney [helped me along] more than any one thing with Claude Pepper. Who got appointed assistant United States attorney is not all that big of a deal, except to me or the ones that are involved in this. From Claude Pepper's standpoint, it was not any astronomical deal.

P: What was George Smathers doing in the meantime from the time that he leaves Gainesville in June of 1937, before he gets this appointment?

S: He was practicing law at his dad's firm: Smathers, Thompson, **MAXWELL & DIRE**.

P: That was a major firm in Miami?

S: It was. His daddy, Judge Smathers, was a very successful lawyer.

P: What was his father's name?

S: Frank Smathers. He was a judge of a state court in New Jersey. That is where he got the judge part. He was appointed by Woodrow Wilson [the former governor of New Jersey]. It was not a major court, but Judge Smathers was a judge. Then his health [forced him to] go to Miami. He was in sort of an independent practice for many years, and he later merged into a larger firm. That could have happened after George came in--the Thompson, **Maxwell & Dire** part of the deal. I think the judge pretty much practiced on his own and was a very successful, independent lawyer.

P: Weren't there also some banking connections to the Smathers family in Miami?

S: George's brother, Frank Smathers, Jr., was married to a girl named Maribel . . . I cannot recall [her name] at the moment. They had founded and pretty much owned the First National Bank of Miami Beach, which was the only bank over there. Later, it became a very significant bank in Florida. It became Flagship Banks. Frank came along, and he ultimately was president of the Miami Beach First National. He was involved in making Flagship Banks and moving over on the mainland. He bought smaller banks there and [made] some mergers. They finally merged into Billy Dial's bank, the Sun Bank.

P: In addition to being a very bright man with the right kind of personality, George Smathers also had excellent connections.

S: Very much so.

P: Through his father and his brother.

S: His father and his brother were never close, but his father virtually relived his life through George. He had a tremendous influence on George. He had George taking debate in high school and that sort of deal. He did not want him to play football at the University of Florida because he said, "You do not have the physique for that game." George [consequently] wound up concentrating on basketball and track.

- P: And Stephen C. O'Connell concentrated on boxing.
- S: That is right.
- P: Was he a buddy also?
- S: Yes, Stephen is a good friend of mine. Stephen and John McCarty. [O'Connell was later chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court and president of the University of Florida, and McCarty served as a municipal and circuit court judge in Fort Pierce, a state senator, and president of the Florida Bar Association. Ed.]
- P: You almost had a little mafia back then, didn't you, with that group. They have kind of stayed close over the years. I know Steve and John McCarty are very good friends, right down to the present time.
- S: I see a lot of John McCarty still. We are good friends. And I knew [John's brothers] Brian and Dan as well. [McCarty Hall on the UF campus is named for former Florida governor Dan McCarty. Ed.]
- P: I had Dan's son, Dan, Jr., in class once. So once again, you get called into service when?
- S: March 25, 1941.
- P: And you get called up to Camp Blanding?
- S: Camp Blanding. I wanted to go to flying school; I wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to get the hell out of Blanding because I had just married, after I went into the military. I went [into the service] in March and was married in July.
- P: Now, the war is already on, of course.
- S: No. When I went in, it was not on.
- P: We were not in it, but the war was on in Europe, because it begins in 1939.
- S: Yes.
- P: And things are beginning to heat up considerably in 1941.
- S: That is correct.
- P: We had already begun the draft the previous fall.
- S: They called in reserve officers in March, and we did not get in until December.

We were getting ready, and I decided to go ahead and get my year in back of me while I was just getting started, and I had a job to come back to.

P: And you figured you would get it [military service] out of the way and not have to worry with it anymore.

S: That is correct, but it stretched to five years. I had wanted to go to flying school.

P: Now, you get to Camp Blanding. What is there?

S: Nothing [was there]. It was just getting started. It was a sand patch that was not the most pleasant place in the world to be assigned [to], and I wanted to go to flying school. I even got Phil Graham to get Claude Pepper to go see Undersecretary of Air--I think his name was **LOVETT**--to try to get me a waiver of age. I never got it, and I finally went to an observer school that was open to ground officers. It was sort of navigation training and aerial photography and that sort of dean, and I went to that. That was about a two-or three-month school out at San Antonio at **BROOKS** Field. I got rated as an observer and got flight pay. That was important to me.

I stayed in the military after I got out, and then we used to do submarine patrol off the coast of Florida. We did antisub patrol first out of Miami, then Jacksonville, and then Savannah. We patrolled this whole coast. The book *Operation Drumbeat* [: *The Dramatic True Story of Germany's First U-Boat Attacks along the American Coast in World War II* (1990)] was written here.

P: That was written by [UF professor of history] Mike Gannon.

S: I got a kick out of reading that. I have not finished it yet, but I was one of those fellows that they were talking about in those **JACK-LEG** airplanes flying up and down the coast.

P: Do you know Gannon?

S: I do not, but [Robert R.] Bob Lindgren [vice-president, UF Development and Alumni] said I ought to meet him and talk to him because of that wrinkle.

P: You would enjoy meeting him. I want to make sure I get this organized right. You come in in March of 1941. It is not yet Pearl Harbor. You are called in because of this reserve status. You got first lieutenant as a result of your ROTC program at the University of Florida.

S: Correct.

P: Before we leave your life at the University of Florida, I want to do something.

You say you were a Phi Delta Phi?

S: I was a Phi Delta Phi in law school.

P: And you were active in that fraternal organization?

S: I was.

P: Were you on the *Law Review*?

S: I was not.

P: Now, you were [Florida] Blue Key.

S: I was Blue Key.

P: How did you get into the Florida Blue Key?

S: I was captain of the **PIRATE'S** Club, which is a social club, and I was president of the **COLONEL'S** Club. I had been a little active in politics on campus. I was [also] our SAE representative with the political party--I think we called it the Florida Party. We were very much irritated because they did not include us in a meeting where I thought Smathers ought to be the candidate for president of the student body. They kind of pulled a fast one and slipped in somebody else. But they gave it to us the next year, and George was president of the student body the next year.

P: Were you particularly close to any of the faculty people in the law school? I noticed you were a donor to the [Clarence J.] TeSelle [professorship].

S: We were all scared to death of Judge [Robert S.] Cockrell. Of course, I made a donation for the TeSelle thing, and I have given the University a little money.

P: Were you particularly close to TeSelle? Is that the reason you selected that?

S: It just happened to be the program they were hustling, and I thought I would give the money to the law school. I enjoyed TeSelle and had pleasant memories of him. He loved to needle folks.

P: Did you take work with [Harry R.] Trusler?

S: Oh, Lord, yes. Everybody took torts from Trusler. That was a joke, because he would get so carried away with what he was telling you while he was teaching that he would look up to the ceiling and chortle. I remember on one occasion he called on George Leaird, who was later a state senator from Ft. Lauderdale. He

was a clown, he and another guy named Paul Dye [who was also from Ft. Lauderdale]. Trusler would call one or the other, and I think Paul Dye was not there. Trusler would talk, and you would just have to stand there [to answer the question]. [George] would get up and answer for Paul Dye. Trusler did not even recognize [who was talking]. Then he would call on George Leaird later, and he got up a second time in the same class. [laughter]

P: And Trusler never knew the difference? [laughter]

S: Trusler was not even aware of it, and everyone was about to laugh.

P: Those were the days when law school students wore coats and ties and looked respectable?

S: I do not recall going to class in a coat and tie.

P: I thought that was one of the things they made you do. And you stomped on the floor and shuffled your feet when you did not like something.

S: I have no recollection of that.

P: Let me get back to your brilliant military career.

S: I do not know how brilliant it was. [laughter]

P: You said you did not like Camp Blanding at all, that sand spot?

S: I wanted to go to flying school, and I did not care a thing about Camp Blanding because my new wife was over at the George Washington Hotel. That was about fifty or sixty miles away. It was not an assignment that I cared for. Plus, I wanted to go to flying school.

P: Tell me about your wife, [Kathrine] Kate Jenkins.

S: My wife was born in Atlanta. She was a very lovely girl, naturally, I would say. She went to S.M.U. [Southern Methodist University]. Her dad was in the theater business. Things got awfully tough, and they had a little circuit of theaters called Lucas and Jenkins. Her father was Jenkins.

P: We will get into your business career later. Tell me a little bit more about Kate.

S: Kate went to S.M.U.

P: Did she graduate?

S: She did not graduate; she quit her senior year.

P: When was she born?

S: She is a month and a day younger than I am, so she will be eighty on March 19, 1993.

P: Is she living?

S: No. She died six years ago.

P: She was not mentioned on your video there. [Stembler's family made a video of his career to celebrate his eightieth birthday. Ed.]

S: Well, her picture is everywhere.

P: Now, you have two sons. Tell me about them. What are their names?

S: John, Jr., went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He graduated and went to the University of Georgia Law School for one year. He flunked out. My other son, Bill Stembler, went to the University of Florida. He graduated from here and then completed law school at the University of Georgia.

P: Now, tell me about your older son. What does he do?

S: He went into business with me. I sold the business in December of 1986.

P: Are both boys married?

S: The older boy is not married. The younger boy is married, and I have three grandchildren. They are all very prominent in the video.

P: Those good-looking pictures.

S: I have three lovely granddaughters. They were in there.

P: So you are a Floridian, and your wife was a Georgian?

S: That is correct.

P: Is she from a long-time Georgia family?

S: That is right.

P: Jenkins. And you say she was born in Atlanta. So your two boys live in Atlanta today?

S: They still live in Atlanta. And as I told you, I still would have a job with the

company they have. We were a Paramount partner in Georgia, just like the United States was down here over in **Barksitters**. They owned half, and Paramount owned half. He owned a quarter, Lucas owned a quarter, and Paramount owned half of their company. The theater business was not a tremendously stable or prosperous business, but they managed to do very well.

The government brought a trust suit against the film companies Paramount [owned] back when I first went to work there. They ultimately entered into a consent judgment known as the Paramount Decree that they would vest themselves from being in the exhibition business and in the production/distribution business, where they were selling to their own theaters. Of course, [there were] sparks in Florida state. [Paramount] pretty much had locks on the theater business in Florida, and we did too in Georgia, through that association. So they opened up competition--they made them form two separate companies. One of them is Paramount Pictures, which later merged with a Houston outfit. They are now Paramount Communications, a very substantial company. The other company that they established [that was] completely separate from Paramount Pictures was United Paramount Theaters. That was 1950 when it was finally settled.

In the course of that we had to either sell or buy and then create competition in every principal town that we were in. We were in Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, Columbus, and the larger towns in Georgia. We were in some smaller ones too, [like] Waycross, Brunswick, and Valdosta. It was a disaster from my father-in-law's standpoint because he had reached a point where he was pretty comfortable, from nothing. He had gone to Georgia Tech on a football scholarship--he was a pretty good end. He had gone from that into the theater business after working for the telephone company for seven or eight years. By 1950 he had a pretty good business. He was comfortable and was getting a nice salary. He had gone to Florida, thank goodness, and more or less turned it over to me from the time that I went there.

The Paramount representative [was] a good friend of mine and was the right hand man to Leonard Goldenson. Incidentally, the theater company became a very important company too, because Leonard Goldenson was the head of it. They bought the American Broadcasting Company, which at that time was the third network and was not doing very well. They had the ABC network and developed it mostly under the deal. Of course, Goldenson just died two or three years ago. They have a substantial company now in ABC. They have sold their theaters; they are out of the theater business now, but that was their sole nucleus initially, the exhibition business in motion picture theaters.

P: Let me go back and talk to you a little bit about the military time. You never get into the air corps?

S: I got in as an observer.

P: But [you] never [got] in to do what you wanted to do--fly a plane?

S: Well, I flew. We did submarine patrol, and I flew. I had an aeronautical rating. I had a very lucky career in the air force. I got out, and my friend said, "You are crazy not to stay in the reserves." He was the head of the reserve unit in Atlanta, and a good friend of mine, **ACER KANDLER**. So I got reinstated and went to those pretty dull meetings once a week. I got to the point where I was a lieutenant colonel, and I was eligible, with my twenty years of retirement, that when I became sixty I would get about \$2,800 a year. I figured that I might need that to send my kids to college. [laughter] So I stayed in the reserves.

Through good fortune, I got to know Stuart Symington through Smathers. Stuart had been the first secretary of the air force when they spun the air force off from the Army Air Corps, making it a separate force. I mentioned it to him once when he was visiting me at **SEA ISLAND**. He knew I was in the reserves, and I said, "I am going to get out now, unless I can find something a lot more interesting to do than going to these meetings." He put me in touch with the secretary of the air force, who was Eugene **ZUCKERT** at that time. He had been [Stuart's] campaign manager when he tried to run for president against Kennedy in 1960. I had been a delegate out there from Georgia, and I had known him pleasantly. Through that I went to see Zuchert. He had Zuchert contact me. I went to see him in Washington, and he said "What would you like to do?" I said, "Well, I can't command," because you had to be a pilot to command a unit. [I said] "Maybe a legislative liaison." He said, "Well, instead of doing that, why don't you just come into my office?" So I was the executive assistant to the secretary of the air force. Of course, that put me into the position where you can at least be considered for a promotion. That is how I got to be a major general.

P: You never went overseas during the war?

S: Yes. I was in Honolulu, and I was with the Air Transport Command. I was with **LOPER LOWRY**. They had the Gulf Life Insurance company from Jacksonville. Well, Loper was one of the top people, and I had known him. Loper had a brother [named] Sumter Lowry, who used to be the head of the National Guard of the State of Florida.

P: In Tampa.

S: Yes. Loper was from Tampa too.

P: Loper Lowry was Sumter's brother?

S: Incidentally, they had both gone through West Point. But neither one of them

stayed in the army as a career.

P: Sumter Lowry did not like the University of Florida. He thought it was too liberal over here. [laughter]

S: I never knew Sumter Lowry. I knew Loper very well. Loper was a very good friend of mine, and to me.

So I was overseas for about a year and a half in the Pacific with the Air Transport Command.

P: Why did you stay in such a long time? You were one of the earliest people brought in. You had enough points to get out.

S: The reason I stayed in was that thing I told you about: if I could get an interesting assignment in the reserves I would stay in. So through Stuart Simington and Gene Zuchert, I went to work there [in Washington, DC].

P: Where were you based when you worked with them? In Washington?

S: At the Pentagon. This was as a reservist. Of course, I was in the Pentagon a couple of times in the service.

P: Now, this comes after the war, or during the war?

S: This is after the war.

P: From 1941 to 1945, tell me what you were doing.

S: In 1941 I was called into [Camp] Blanding. I went to observer school, and I could not get into flying school. I became an aircraft observer, and I was assigned to a national guard squadron in Birmingham, Alabama, the 106th Observation Squadron. I stayed in that for two or three years. After I got out, ultimately as a reserve assignment, I got assigned to the office of the secretary of the air force.

P: So when the war ends in 1945 you are in Birmingham?

S: When I got out of the service in October of 1945 I was in Birmingham, and we were newly back. They used us for maneuvers, submarine patrol, and one thing and another. I had enough points to get out, so I got out. I did not even fool with the reserve originally. Then my friend **ACER KANDLER** said, "You ought to stay in here and get your twenty years in, because you get \$2,800 a year."

P: So when you got out of service at the end of 1945 what was your rank?

Lieutenant colonel? You went in as a first lieutenant.

S: I was a lieutenant colonel when I got out.

P: As a result of the reserves, you now hold the rank of major general?

S: That is correct. That is as high as the reserves go.

P: And you stayed in the reserves until 1973.

S: That is correct.

P: Do you get your \$2,800 a year.

S: I get a little bit more than that now. I get about \$25,000.

P: Well, that is not bad. [laughter] President [Bill] Clinton will take care of people like you.

S: He will fix me. He ought to.

P: That is right. He is looking for people just like you. Between that and your Social Security, you are "rich."

S: I do better than I ought to do with Social Security and air force retirement.

P: Where is your family all of this time during the war years, your wife and two boys?

S: They were living with her father and her mother in Atlanta most of the time.

P: They did not follow you to Birmingham all that time?

S: They could not follow me. Well, my wife did not have any children then.

P: All right. You get out in 1945, and you are in the active reserves until 1973. Now you get into the real world; you have to make a living for yourself and your family. Your father-in-law, as you told me, was already in the theater business.

S: He had no sons.

P: How did he get into the theater business?

S: It was a nickel-and-dime deal with him. He got into distributing.

P: He was working for the telephone company, you said.

- S: That is right. Then he had a little suburban theater in Atlanta that he had built on the side. Then he got one in Macon, and he and another fellow [named] Lucas became partners. Then Paramount offered them a partnership. They had two or three little theaters.
- P: This is all before you arrive on the scene?
- S: That is right.
- P: When did he go into this theater business? In the 1930s?
- S: He went to Georgia Tech and finished in about 1910 or 1911. My wife was born a year or two later. He worked at the telephone company in Atlanta for about seven years. That would get him up to 1920. He went into the theater business when it was a very pioneering, small [business].
- P: I was going to say, he is one of the early pioneers in it.
- S: [I would say] the 1920s.
- P: Of course, Atlanta is small, and it could not have had very many theaters.
- S: No. The Paramount affiliation was good for them, and they expanded.
- P: Does this Paramount affiliation begin in the 1920s and 1930s?
- S: Yes, it began in the late 1920s. When I got out of the service in 1945 they were a substantial theater circuit in Georgia, relatively speaking, like Florida State's was in Florida.
- P: So this means that he starts out in the 1920s with a single theater and then begins to expand in the greater Atlanta area and the outlying district?
- S: And in other towns. Macon was one of the first theaters he owned.
- P: I know that motion pictures take over and become very popular throughout the United States, even in the rural areas.
- S: Television about put us out of business.
- P: But we are still long before television. We are still back in the 1920s and 1930s.
- S: Oh, sure.
- P: Does this mean that they owned the theater?

- S: Owned or leased. They did not necessarily own the land, by any means. We had the Fox Theater in Atlanta, which is a very large theater. It had gone through bankruptcy a couple of times. It was built by the Shriners, and they had a lot of quarters and whatnot in there. They bought bonds--\$500, \$1,000, whatever they could buy--to finance it. They leased it to 20th Century Fox, which was supposedly a big company. Of course, the 20th Century Fox film company went into bankruptcy in California, so they were stuck with this theater. It finally sold for a small percentage on the dollar. The Coca-Cola Company rehabilitated it at one time. They finally bought the Fox Theater for one dollar and picked up Coca-Cola's \$75,000 or \$100,000 that they got paid back out of rent. So we ultimately owned the Fox--free and clear--finally. I sold the Fox after he had died.
- P: To begin with, the people like your father-in-law who owned or leased the theater contracted with the film company to show the pictures. And they did this on a contract basis? They would get the film for a certain amount of money and agree to show it for seven days?
- S: That is right. [It cost] an arm and a leg, and a percentage. It is very high. A guarantee against a percentage.
- P: The movie industry controls the film. They own the film, so they could call the tune.
- S: They called the shots pretty much; that is right. They still do.
- P: Without the film, the movie theater is, of course, useless.
- S: Now, you asked me about my son. Both of them are involved. One of the ventures they have gotten into is he has about ten towns, like Waycross, Brunswick, Valdosta.
- P: Is this your oldest boy?
- S: No, this is mainly my youngest, [but] they are both involved in it, along with my grandchildren. They have bought back about \$7 of \$8 million worth of theaters. They have a pretty good little chain of smaller towns. They just built a tenplex in Charleston, South Carolina.
- P: You have a whole new vocabulary--"tenplex." [laughter]
- S: That is right.
- P: In those early years--the 1920s and 1930s--wasn't vaudeville also a part of the movie industry?

S: Sure they were.

P: Was your father-in-law booking vaudeville acts too?

S: They had one theater in Atlanta where they had live [acts], at the old Roxy Theater.

P: So I presume he was responsible, then, for booking those people in.

S: Essentially, that is it.

P: When you come aboard in 1946 when you get out of the service, why did you not go back into law practice?

S: Well, my father-in-law had no sons. He was getting less interested in punching the clock on a day-to-day basis. He invited me to come into business with him.

P: Did you think it would be more interesting or lucrative?

S: I thought that was a better deal than going back and starting to practice law, so I did not.

P: Was this something that had an exotic appeal to you also?

S: Not particularly. It is an interesting business, and it is kind of fun. He had a good situation, did not have any sons, and he wanted to sort of get away.

P: So it was made to order for you, then.

S: It was made to order for me. We had a lot of luck with it. As I told you, I sold it in December of 1986.

P: For a good sum?

S: For about fifty times more than he had involved in it when they split in 1950.

P: You do not want to give a dollar amount?

S: I do not particularly like to throw that around.

P: All right. I will not ask you that. [laughter] I was just trying to get it for the historical record.

Let us go back to the 1940s, because that is what I want to talk about. What did you, John Stembler, do when you first came aboard in the theater business?

S: Mr. Lucas and Mr. Jenkins had not gotten along well personally for a number of years. Mr. Lucas had been dead for seven or eight years. He was the head man of the company at Paramount. He had a management contract that paid him \$50,000 a year. That was the only thing he was interested in was to continue to get that \$50,000 a year. He invited Mr. Lucas, his son-in-law, to come into the business the same day I did, on January 1, 1946. We did not get along well either. We had to split with Paramount, as I said, in 1950-1951 as a result of the consent judgement that Paramount had entered into with the Justice Department.

In effect, what we wound up doing was, [since] Lucas's interest was sold out, we split our assets with Paramount. We were forced to go into business for ourselves, and we owned 100 percent of whatever it was. It was not all that astounding an amount of money, but we had gotten to the point where they, Paramount, had three years to divest themselves from interest with other theaters. **SIDNEY MARK** was a good friend of mine, a smart Harvard lawyer. He was Goldenson's righthand man. We were both in New York, and he said: "You all cannot agree on the time of day or where you want to go and what you want to do. We were under a court order to complete this divestiture. We have done it in Texas, Florida, and all over the country. You are one of the last two or three. I'll tell what we will do. We think the business is worth \$4.5 million, and we will give you each \$1.25 million, provided you give us a ninety-day option to try to work it out with other arrangements with our partners in Augusta and other towns." **STORY** said he thought that was preferable to us trying to sell it and that he would be inclined to take the \$1.25 million. To my father-in-law, that looked like more money than he had ever heard of. It kind of suited him all right. He was kind enough to tell me, "I am not going to endorse any papers. I will take a chance with what we have in it." I made a deal with Paramount to own the theaters--we split, and we went into business for ourselves. That was a decision that you did not want to make. Sometimes the best decisions you make are forced on you. That was the best single decision that we ever made.

P: A blessing in disguise.

S: That is right.

P: Why did the courts rule as they did in the Paramount case?

S: Well, obviously Paramount, for example, which controlled a very significant amount of the product that was made, motion pictures, was also the dominant exhibitor company. Where you were competing with Claude Lee [who was the manager] at the Florida Theater, you would have a hell of a time doing it. They were a Paramount partner, of course. Gainesville was owned out of Florida State Theaters. It really was oppressive competition. You certainly got a leg up

with Paramount. They did have an unfair trade advantage with other exhibitors by virtue of the fact that they were in business with a company that represented maybe a third of the pictures being made.

P: They were a great power.

S: Extremely. That is why the Justice Department brought suit against them.

P: How about the other movie producers, like 20th Century Fox and RKO?

S: They had a big chain of theaters on the west coast and in New York. Paramount had them all over the country too. Paramount was the largest. They were heavily concentrated in the South--North and South Carolina--more so than some other sections of the country.

P: Would your organization be comparable to Wometco, for instance, or Florida State Theaters?

S: Well, Wometco started as an independent, and they had a hard time. I knew Mitch Wilson very well. He is in that video. Mitch started Wometco with nothing. He had a little dry goods store down on South Miami Avenue in the poorest section of downtown. The best thing that ever happened to him was when he got into the television business. Smathers was involved in that. He had gotten it for somebody else who could not do it. Finally Mitch was in a position to take it over. He lost money for a few years. Now the television station in a market like that is worth a fortune. Phil [Graham] got him in the television business in Washington, Jacksonville, and several other places.

P: They owned the television station [WJKT] in Jacksonville.

S: Channel Four. Kay and Phil stayed with me at **SEA ISLAND** the weekend he bought Channel Four. Mitch Wilson said he was crazy to pay that much for it; he paid about \$2.25 million. He let an option for \$1.5 million go by on the same property.

P: Now, according to the records, you become president of the company in 1954. Your father-in-law decides that he has had enough? He retires to Florida?

S: That is right. he is in Florida. He never got off of the payroll, but he was in Florida.

P: So almost immediately you really assume an executive position within the firm.

S: Within a year or two, sure.

- P: By that time you are really running the show, and he wants you to run the show.
- S: Under his direction, with his approval, or mainly acquiescence. I ran it pretty much from a year or two after I was there.
- P: Did you and your father-in-law get along well?
- S: We got along very well. My wife's mother said I was the son he never had. We had a good relationship.
- P: He is gone now?
- S: Yes.
- P: Where did he live in Florida?
- S: He lived in Ft. Lauderdale.
- P: He enjoyed life--boating and fishing.
- S: He had a boat, and he had a pleasant life.
- P: You sold to United Artists in 1986, and you continued on, then, as a consultant to United Artists?
- S: I had a contract. I was on their payroll as a consultant for about three years.
- P: Have you moved completely out of it now?
- S: Completely.
- P: And you have turned it over to your family.
- S: Well, I am out. I do not have any interest. My sons, independently of me, have bought some of the [theaters in the] smaller towns from United Artists that we sold them. We sold them Brunswick, Waycross, Moultrie, Thomasville, and Gainesville. They bought back United Artists's interest in mainly the big metropolitan areas--Atlanta, most specifically as far as our little show is concerned. They now have a substantial chunk of theaters in small towns.
- P: When you were part of the firm, had you already begun to go outside of the state of Georgia?
- S: Very little. We had a theater in South Carolina. We pretty much stayed in Georgia. South Carolina was just across from Augusta.

- P: Your son has now moved beyond those.
- S: He moved beyond those. He is there in South Carolina and there in Florida. He has two theaters, one in North Lauderdale and one at Lantana.
- P: Tell me again so that somebody who does not know much about this theater operation how it differs today than it operated before this court decision in the Paramount case.
- S: Well, all of the affiliated circuits have broken down. They are now all independent, so to speak, on a level playing field. A little town like Valdosta is an important little town to my son's operation, because they have two multiplex theaters, and they are the only theaters in town. The same thing is in Brunswick, the same thing is in Moultrie, and the same thing is in several smaller towns.
- P: Can a theater operator or owner determine today what motion pictures are going to play, or is he still a slave to Hollywood?
- S: Well, he is a slave to Hollywood. You do not have any control over what is made.
- P: Good, bad, or otherwise.
- S: They scrap each other for pictures, sure. If you own all of the theaters in a little town, you get all of the pictures.
- P: But you cannot decide, "I am just going to take this one." They say, "You take one, you also have to take these dogs."
- S: They are not supposed to do it, but they do it. Their pressure is on you, naturally: "You scratch my back, and I will scratch yours."
- P: You have to take the good with the bad.
- S: You move these pictures too.
- P: They have to be able to peddle them out. Does a theater owner also come into the operation of having to pay for the cost of advertising and promoting and all of those kinds of things?
- S: Of course, they do a lot of it on a lavish basis when they are launching a picture nationally.
- P: But Hollywood pays for that.

- S: That is Hollywood; that is the studio that pays for that. You do your local promotion and selling of the picture.
- P: When an ad appears in a big national periodical, that is Hollywood paying for it.
- S: That is. They get it out of your hide one way or another on the terms.
- P: They do not lose money.
- S: It is not easy; it is a mean business from that standpoint. It is not easy or automatic from their point either.
- P: I remember in the old days the stars of these pictures used to go around the country to help promote them at openings and so one. You do not hear much of that anymore.
- S: They still do that to a degree.
- P: In the big cities, though, I suspect.
- S: That is right.
- P: They are not coming to Valdosta, Georgia, or Gainesville, Florida. [laughter]
- S: No, I am afraid not. Neither one.
- P: I do not think we are going to get Madonna down here for the next opening. She may appear in Cleveland, but not in Gainesville.
- S: That is right.
- P: You enjoyed those years working in that.
- S: I had a good time.
- P: Did you miss being a lawyer?
- S: Well, I think my legal training was helpful to me in business. You always have some second guessing: What if I had gone back and practiced law? I have no regrets.
- P: Where was your office in Atlanta?
- S: My office in Atlanta was in the Fox Theater building.
- P: Well, you picked an architectural gem.

S: For thirty-five years, yes.

P: Was it a good building? Did you enjoy working there?

S: It was the old Fox Theater. Are you familiar with it?

P: Oh, I am familiar with it. I have been in it many times. I spent my wedding night in the hotel across the street.

S: The Georgian Terrace?

P: The Georgian Terrace, that is right.

S: My father-in-law lived there.

P: Well, we stayed there the first night after our wedding, before we left the next day for New York City on our honeymoon. I married an Atlanta girl too.

S: You are a Floridian?

P: I am from Jacksonville.

S: Born in Jacksonville?

P: Yes, [I was] born and raised in Jacksonville. I am from the northern part of the state, and you are from the southern part of the state.

S: Did you know Sam Dunlap, Davison's younger brother?

P: Yes. Davison Dunlap and I knew each other pretty well.

S: Sam was a good friend of mine.

P: Yes, I grew up in Jacksonville, and I have a big family living in Jacksonville today. My wife has a big family living in Atlanta today. They are in the floor-covering business--the Rubin brothers.

S: Well, [Alexander] St.Clair Abrams was from Jacksonville. He was married to my mother's sister.

P: I did not realize that you had that family connection to that historic personality in Florida.

S: St. Clair Abrams was considerably older than my aunt was. I think he was probably ten or fifteen years older than she was.

P: He figures very actively in Florida political history at the turn of the century.

S: I understand he was a very prominent lawyer.

P: He was a very prominent lawyer and a political personality. He was a leader in the conservative wing of the Florida Democratic Party and was very active in that. The man I was working with, [Napoleon Bonaparte] Broward, and he were on the opposite sides. [Proctor's master's thesis topic was [Napoleon Bonaparte] Broward. Ed.] They were both democrats, but they were at opposite ends of political philosophy. So that is an interesting background.

Now, you say that both of your boys are in the theater business.

S: That is their principal business.

P: What does John do?

S: Well, John and Bill just work together in the thing. Both of them are fine, nice boys. I am lucky to have them. Bill is kind of the ramrod of the two of them, as far as running the business [goes]. He is a lot more ambitious and an entrepreneur than I am. He has a subdivision that he is putting together just out of Atlanta.

P: Where is that?

S: It is in the least affluent section of Atlanta. It is on the road to Birmingham, out on I-20. It is about twenty-five miles down. It is a little town called Douglasville. Initially, I had bought 635 five acres for the company from a fellow who worked for us. He was about to sell them off to somebody else and came and asked me what I thought about the deal. They wanted to buy a third now and then an option for another third. I said, "If you put it all together and give me your net figure, I will buy it from you." I bought 635 acres for \$90,000. That was a pretty good deal.

P: That was a pretty good deal.

S: They have since bought another 200 acres at \$10,000 an acre.

P: Bill is now developing that?

S: That built a golf course that they just started last year, a pretty nice golf course that they do not own. They gave the land and \$1 million to the guy to developed the golf club and run it, so it is his. But they get the benefit of the golf course as far as the frontage of lots and whatnot on their property.

P: Tell me about your grandchildren.

S: I have three grandchildren. One is newly eighteen and is going to college next year.

P: Is she going to be a Gator?

S: No, she is not. She is the least best student. But she did all right. She made a 1250 on her last [SAT] exams. The other two are better students. Anyway, I think she wants to go out to the University of Arizona or something. I do not know. But she has been accepted at Georgia and at the University of Texas. She is thinking about Texas. She wants to go someplace a little farther out. I am going to let her go wherever she wants to. The other two are at Westminster School, which is a good school. They are [aged] 18, 15, and 12.

P: So they have a while yet to decide, to come to their senses, and come to Gainesville.

S: That is right.

P: So you have one bachelor son and one married son.

S: That is right.

P: Well, maybe you can get your bachelor son moving in the right direction before it is too late. [laughter]

Now, what about you? What have you been doing since 1986?

S: Gosh, that is an embarrassing question. I have not been doing anything particularly productive. I am just retired. I am eighty years old, and I spend some time in Florida. I spend three months a year down here.

P: Are you a legal resident of the state?

S: I am not. I never have been, [although] I probably should.

P: Taxwise.

S: I would save tax-wise. [That is] right.

P: I know from the record also that you have had a very active civic life in and around Atlanta. You were particularly interested in the boy scouts.

S: I have been the head of the boy scouts for a number of years. I am still the chairman of the endowment committee. They get you, and they will never let

you go completely. But I did a lot of boy scout work.

P: Was that always a special interest of yours?

S: I never got beyond tenderfoot rank myself, as a boy.

P: What intrigued you to work with them so actively as an adult?

S: Well, [it was] through the Rotary Club. We hustled everybody in the Rotary Club to get involved with some civic activities and try to get everybody to participate in some. Somehow or another, I knew the girl scout thing, and then I thought, This is pretty silly. I have two boys, and I ought to be in the boy scouts." I got to be very good friends of the boy scout people, the administrators, and whatnot. I have given them a little bit of money.

P: Has your interest been solely a financial interest?

S: No. I was the president of the council.

P: So you get dressed up and do things with them?

S: I do not know about the dressing-up part. There are boy scout councils everywhere. You have got them here. **S. T. DELL** was the head of this one at one time. And I have done some work with the cancer society. I was chairman of the drive, and I am a past president of the cancer society. They wanted to promote me on up. I do not want any promotions; I just want out now.

P: And the Rotary Club has been a special interest of yours?

S: I have been president of the Rotary Club.

P: Have you been a Rotarian for a long, long time?

S: Almost since I have been in Atlanta.

P: Those have been your three major [interests]?

S: My brother and my dad were both in Rotary, and my father-in-law was in Rotary.

P: So it was kind of a family tradition, then.

S: Those were three things. I have been involved in others too.

P: But those have been your three main nonbusiness interests?

S: And I went all the way. Yes.

P: You have enjoyed them because of the social contacts and the fact that you have been doing something worthwhile for the community?

S: I am not going to make a career out of it, but I think you ought to do something [for your community].

P: Now, you do have other business interests, I gather.

S: I am pretty much out of business except for a cable television company in Waycross, Georgia.

P: That is it? What about that national bank? Are you out of the banking business?

S: I am out of that. I got into the cable business because I used to be the president of the theater association. After television, we survived that. Then cable was a big threat to the theater business, and I wanted to see what it looked like. We had three theaters in that little town [of] Waycross. So I built a cable system, thank goodness, because that is the best investment that I ever got involved in.

P: By the way, what was the name of your company?

S: [It was] the Georgia Theatre Company.

P: So you were at one time on the board of the National Bank of Georgia?

S: I was on the board, and I was chairman.

P: And also on the Home Federal Savings and Loan?

S: I was.

P: I hope you got out of that before the [savings and loan scandal].

S: I did--a long time ago.

P: So you were not tainted in any way?

S: No.

P: What about the La Grange [Georgia] Broadcasting Company?

S: I do not know where you get all of that, but we used to have four or five little radio stations.

P: Have you disposed of those?

- S: [We had] one in Brunswick, one in La Grange, one in Charleston, and one in Savannah. That is the only one we ever got a television affiliate. We were WSAV. We owned about 20 percent of it; my father-in-law did.
- P: Tell me about your golf. I know that has also been an enthusiastic interest [of yours].
- S: I am a lousy golfer.
- P: I thought you were getting ready to tell me that you had been to Augusta and you won, that you got a green coat.
- S: That is right. They are trying to give me one, but I have not called on it yet. [laughter]
- P: They have not gotten the right size? [laughter]
- S: I enjoyed golf. I have quit [playing]. I had an infected ear before Christmas, and it still has not gotten squared away completely. I have not been too active in pursuing golf. I have not felt like it in the last couple of months.
- P: Was the acquisition of the property at Sea Island and the acquisition of the property in Florida because of your golf enthusiasm?
- S: No, it was because I like Florida and I like the coast. I love the ocean.
- P: When you say you are not a good golfer, how good of a golfer are you?
- S: I am lousy. I have about twenty or twenty-five handicap. I am terrible. I had a brother who won the Florida amateur and all the local tournaments in Miami, but it did not rub off. I did not inherit that characteristic.
- P: I heard you say that you had two sisters, but you also had a brother who died ten or fifteen years ago?
- S: That is right. I think it has been sixteen years that he has been dead.
- P: But he was a great golfer?
- S: He was very good. He won all of the local tournaments. He even played in the national amateur for one round one year. But locally he was one of the better golfers in the Miami area.
- P: So you inherited a little bit of that enthusiasm.
- S: I am afraid that I did not inherit any of it. But I enjoyed golf.

- P: Before you had your ear infection, did you get out frequently on the course?
- S: [It was] usually two or three times a week, if the weather permitted.
- P: What else do you do for fun? Do you travel?
- S: Some. My wife liked to travel, and she had me going on cruises before she passed away.
- P: Around the world?
- S: I have been [to] most places.
- P: Both Asia and Europe?
- S: I have been to Japan and Canada and all over Europe. I have travelled about as much as I want to. I have gone on cruises and that sort of thing.
- P: But at eighty years old you figure it is time to stay home?
- S: Well, I am not wild about staying home. I move around a little bit.
- P: Obviously. With three different homes, you do move around a lot. Where are you politically?
- S: Politically I am more liberal than most of my closer friends. But I am not a liberal by any means. I still classify myself as a Democrat, but I voted for Eisenhower. Other than Jimmy Carter, I have not voted Democratic. I voted for [George] Bush this time. But I still classify myself as a Democrat. Locally, in Florida and Georgia, there was no such thing until recent years as a Republican contender. Of course, Florida has gone Republican for the last six or eight general elections.
- P: Well, since 1948 it has gone [Republican] every time except for Kennedy, Carter, and Lyndon Johnson in 1964.
- S: "Light Bulb" Johnson.
- P: That is right. Have you been close to the political hierarchy in Georgia?
- S: [Former Georgia governor] Carl Sanders is in that one picture; I am friendly with Carl Sanders. I was friendly with [former Georgia governor] Herman Talmadge; I was friendly with Herman.
- P: But you were not [associated with them] for political reasons? They were just social friends?

- S: They were just social friends. I had been sort of politically inclined. I was a delegate to the 1960 [Democratic] Convention, and I was a delegate at the Democratic Convention in 1964.
- P: So I presume you supported Lyndon Johnson in 1964?
- S: That I did.
- P: In 1960 who were you working for?
- S: Smathers was a favorite-son candidate.
- P: Oh, yes, but that did not last very long.
- S: No, that only lasted about fifteen minutes. But I supported Lyndon [Johnson]. George [Smathers] was pretty close to Lyndon and to Stuart Simington and to Jack Kennedy. He and Jack Kennedy have gotten credit for a lot of running around.
- P: Well, of course, Smathers was in Kennedy's wedding party.
- S: That is right.
- P: I think they stayed good friends.
- S: He was the only one in the Senate that was [in the wedding party]. [It was] most of his old friends back in Massachusetts.
- P: I think that they remained good, close personal friends. They had great respect for each other.
- S: They were. They were extremely close. There was some speculation that Kennedy was going to drop Hubert Humphrey and have George as a vice-presidential nominee. That was just speculation.
- P: But nothing happened. Dallas came along before and changed everything as far as life was concerned for a lot of people.
- S: That is right.
- P: Are you a reader?
- S: Not a whole lot. I am trying to read Kate Graham's new book. I got a copy of it for my birthday.
- P: But you are not really a voracious reader.

- S: I wish I were. I would go to sleep. I try to read when I go to bed. When I wake up a lot of times in the middle of the night I will read for an hour or two.
- P: Has the fact that you have been so closely involved in the industry turned you off as far as movies are concerned?
- S: I still have got good friends. Some of them were on that deal too in the movie industry. I stay in touch to a degree, but not a whole lot. I do not go to very many theaters anymore. It is kind of boring to me now.
- P: Were you close to well-known celebrities in Hollywood?
- S: I mingled there with Gregory Peck and John Wayne and so on because I was president of the National Trade Association. I was giving them an award.
- P: So these were professional [associations]. You were not going out to Hollywood to visit them, and they were not coming to Atlanta? [laughter]
- S: No. They were not ringing my doorbell either.
- P: So you do not have a special guest suite waiting for these people to come visit you.
- S: That does not charge my batteries.
- P: You are still living in the same house that you have been living in for forty years.
- S: Yes, since 1949.
- P: Did you build that house?
- S: No. I guess my house was built in the 1930s.
- P: It is near Buckhead, isn't it?
- S: Yes, it is right off of Peachtree Street about three blocks. Everything is Peachtree in Atlanta.
- P: Is that near the governor's [mansion]?
- S: It is about three or four miles from the governor's home, on Paces Ferry.
- P: I know where it is.
- S: I am probably just two miles from that.

- P: Were you at all close to the Carter administration, with him coming in as governor?
- S: [I was] reasonably close to them. I knew Jimmy Carter. I was never an avid fan of his, but I had some friends who were. And [I knew] his finance chairman, Bert Lance, who is still a good friend of mine. He was his number-one appointee, and then he got into all of that trouble up in Washington. Some of it was justified and some was a little abusive. He has always been a friend of mine. And whatever happens to him, he will keep on being a friend.
- P: And you said Griffin Bell was a good friend of yours too.
- S: Griffin was the attorney general for Jimmy Carter. He, or his firm, is also my lawyer. If you have them do anything, they will call in six other lawyers.
- P: As you look back on your eighty years, how would you classify them? Have you had a successful, happy, contented life?
- S: I have gotten way more than I am entitled to out of it in most every way that I can think of. I consider myself very fortunate.
- P: You had a successful marriage, obviously.
- S: Very successful. We were married forty-seven years.
- P: And your wife died about three years ago.
- S: No, she died five years ago.
- P: Did you lead a very social life?
- S: We did.
- P: You enjoyed travelling and doing things with other people?
- S: Yes.
- P: What kind of world do you think you are living in now?
- S: It is pretty hectic, and I think it is going to stay pretty hectic for a good while. I think Clinton has made a lot of promises that he cannot deliver on. I wish him well, even though he was not my choice. I did not vote for him, but I am all for him now because he is the only show in town.
- P: And the only show at your theater. You may have ten theaters, but he is the only one playing in all ten of them.

S: That is right.

P: But you pick up the papers and read about drugs and crime.

S: I am glad that they did not have those when I was coming along. I might have been one of the ones who stepped out of bounds. [laughter]

P: Do you recall the days when you did not even have to lock your car when you parked it on the street?

S: That is right. It is now pretty hectic. We have a lot of violence in Atlanta. It is one of the more violent towns. We are a black-controlled city, politically. Our mayor, our chairman, and most members of the county commission as well as city council are black, and our Congressman is black. And it will continue to be that way.

P: Does that bother you?

S: No. Atlanta is about 65 or 70 percent black.

P: I gather from what you said in passing a little bit ago that you are not as conservative as some of your associates and friends. What do you mean by that?

S: Most of them are Republicans.

P: But you have acted like a Republican for the last twenty-five years.

S: I live like one, as I have been fortunate to have made a little money and to have been able to live pretty much like I want to.

P: Of course, that does not necessarily make you a Republican.

S: No. I am still a Democrat.

P: That is right, at least where your party affiliation is concerned.

S: Sure. I am a little more tolerant.

P: That is what I wanted to explore for just a minute. I noticed that some of the clubs that you belong to in Atlanta do have a reputation of being restrictive clubs to blacks and Jews and anybody who is not a WASP.

S: That is finally having to break down, because Atlanta is too big of a town to get away with that. We have too many national conventions and things of that nature where they cannot exclude blacks or Jews. They are breaking ground.

My son is the new president of the **CAPTAIN CITY CLUB**, which is one of our nicer clubs. My younger boy is president of that this year and will be for a couple of years. They have broken ground, and now they have women, Jews, and a couple black members. That is just tokenism, but at least it is a step in the right direction. And I think that is right; I think it is smart to do it. The other clubs catch hell. They are after the **DRIVING CLUB** now. I think they ought to gracefully do what the **Captain City Club** has done.

P: Have you taken a leadership role in any of these things?

S: No, I am not going to make a career out of it.

P: So you have gone along with what is there, but personally you have been opposed to it.

S: Well, **PEACHTREE GOLF CLUB** was put together by **BOBBY JONES**. Peachtree and Atlanta are two. It is a unique club because we only have 225 members, and we are not going to have any more than that. It is very lovely. It is still in the old house. It is on a landscape company grounds, and Bobby Jones built that course. It is a great luxury. As far as our membership, most of them would not be quite as tolerant as I am about Jewish people or black people.

P: They would not welcome you bringing one of them as a guest?

S: And I do that. Jewish people, yes.

P: What brought you back to your interest in the University of Florida?

S: S[am] T. Dell [Jr.] was a close friend of mine. [He was a fraternity brother of mine.] I have come back from time to time. I came back for my fiftieth law class reunion in 1987. I let Bob Lindgren hustle me into coming back on the board of the foundation with the stipulation that I am not going to do anything, that he is not going to get any work out of me. But he said he did not have anybody from Atlanta and would like to have somebody. Anyway, I have always been interested in the University. It meant a lot for me to come here. It has helped me a lot through the years.

P: But you were not closely associated with it as an alumnus until the 1960s and the 1970s?

S: Not terribly.

P: And it was S. T. Dell that was probably the first to draw you back into the orbit?

S: Not necessarily. We were close friends--fraternity brothers, and that sort of

thing. We were not terribly close.

P: S. T. was part of that mafia of the 1930s?

S: SAE. Yes. He was a "sleep and eater."

P: [laughter] I had forgotten that. I heard it before, but I have not heard it for a long, long, long time.

S: I understand they [fraternities] are in a little trouble on the campus now.

P: All of them are in trouble because they keep a more-observant eye on their activities. So what are you doing here this week?

S: Well, I am on my way back from going to Atlanta for my birthday party that my boys put on last Thursday, and I am headed toward **JOHN'S ISLAND**. But then we have the foundation meeting on Friday, so I am just going to stay here for three or four days.

P: Visiting old friends and perhaps taking a nostalgic walk around things?

S: I am not sure about that.

P: This is an obvious question, but has the campus changed giantly since you were here? The answer is yes, yes, yes.

S: Unbelievable.

P: It has grown a great deal.

S: What are we now? 35,000 [students]?

P: About 35,000 [students], yes. When you and I were here it was a little bit more than [2,000]. On the eve of World War II we had reached 3,000.

S: Had we?

P: Yes, and there were a couple hundred women.

S: That was a good while after I left.

P: Well, you left in 1937, and by 1941 we were nearly 3,000. And we had just a handful of women walking around the campus.

S: Practically none.

P: But there were a few in the law school and a few in some of the sciences and agriculture. But [there were] not very many at all.

S: That is right. There were a handful.

P: You did not get trapped into the General College, which was inaugurated in 1935?

S: I did not. I just missed that, I guess.

P: Did you know people like [UF president John J.] Tigert? As a student you had no contact with him?

S: I knew him very slightly. A guy who worked for Smathers married his daughter. I do not know what the hell happened to him--Thompson.

P: He is still around. I think he is still living down in Miami.

S: Is he? No, he is dead.

P: Did he die? Well, I think one of the Tigert daughters is still living down in Miami. I have Mrs. Tigert on tape. [See UF 42, University of Florida Oral History Archives. Ed.]

S: Oh, do you? Good.

P: If you were sitting down here today talking to your granddaughters, what kind of advice would you give them?

S: Stay out of trouble would be close to number one.

P: And do not spend too much money. [laughter] What else have I not asked you?

S: We have just about covered it.

P: You said "just about." Does that leave room for some of the things I forgot to ask you?

S: You are a pretty thorough inquisitor. I think you have covered all the hatches.

P: Well, I hope you have enjoyed this.

S: I have. It has been very pleasant.

P: I hope it has brought back many pleasant memories for you.

S: It did that.

P: Do you still stay in touch with members of Phil Graham's family? Are you in touch with Katharine Graham and her son Donald?

S: Yes. I had a very nice note from Donald and a very nice note from Kay.

P: What about Bob Graham? Is he a good friend?

S: Bob Graham is my favorite politician, naturally, being Ernest Graham's son. I do not care whether he is a liberal or a conservative or whatnot.

P: Well, he would classify himself as a conservative.

S: A lot of people I know do not classify him as a conservative.

P: I understand that.

S: But you have to stay in the real world.

P: I think he is classified as Florida's most popular politician. He owns property in Georgia. He has the pecan grove.

S: Near Albany, yes. He has had that for years. His daddy had that property.

P: It is a very substantial property.

S: His half-brother Bill has done a magnificent job with the development of Miami Lakes. There are 25,000-30,000 people. That is a city.

P: Well, I had Bill as a student also in class. I had Bob first, and I have had Bill as a student.

S: Bill has done extremely well. He has done a hell of a job.

P: In fact, Bill wrote as a term paper for me the story of his father's involvement in the sugar operation.

S: That would be interesting to read. I would like to read that.

P: He made copies of it. I think I can get a copy of it for you. While the tape is still on, give me your Atlanta address.

S: My current address is 309 Peachtree Battle Avenue. Atlanta, 30305.

P: And what is your telephone number?

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S: My telephone number is 355-4196. That is area code 404. My office number is 264-4542.

P: Well, maybe our paths will cross sometime in Atlanta.

S: I look forward to it.

[End of the interview]