

FNP 67

Interviewee: Waldo Proffitt

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

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JP: This is Julian Pleasants. I'm in Sarasota, Florida. It is August 27, 2003, and I'm speaking with Mr. Waldo Proffitt. Give me a little bit about your background. I know you were born in Texas and grew up in Oklahoma.

WP: [That's] true, and attended public schools in Chickasha, Oklahoma. My mother and father were both high school teachers. I went to college at Harvard on a scholarship, which is the only way I could afford it. I was in the class of 1946, which was the most fractured class in the history of the college because of World War II. There were practically no undergraduates in Harvard from 1943 through 1945, and I was among those who were not there. I went off to the Air Force in early 1943 and didn't return until early 1946 and actually graduated in 1948, at which time I went off to work for the *Bangor Daily Commercial*.

JP: Let me ask you a question. How did you get from Oklahoma to Harvard?

WP: By train [laughing]. No. Harvard was the only school I applied to. That's where I had wanted to go for a good many years, and I applied and I was accepted, and they awarded me a scholarship so I could afford it. I couldn't get in now, but this was at a time when Harvard was emphasizing admission of students from outside of Massachusetts and New England and New York City and trying to become the national college, which it indeed became. So, they helped me along with my ambition.

JP: Tell me a little bit about your decision in 1943 to join what was then called the Army Air Corps, later the Air Force.

WP: Right. Well, I was seventeen years old when I went off to college. Then in October, I became eighteen, and from that point on, I was anxious to get in the service, as was practically every member of my generation. I enrolled in June. They encouraged you to come to Cambridge just as soon as you possibly could, which I did. I finished the summer semester and I finished the fall semester, and then I wanted to go into the service. Fortunately, the Army Air Corps had a program which sounded very good to me. They were going to train meteorologists, and you had to have a certain amount of physics and math to get into this program, and I did, so I and quite a few students from Harvard and MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] volunteered for this program. This was the point where you couldn't volunteer and just go in; you had to volunteer to be drafted. So, I wrote my draft board in Chickasha, Oklahoma and said, would you please draft me? They were delighted to do so, and away I went. I never became a meteorologist because they had too many meteorologists by this point. They

offered us some choices, and the choice I picked was communications. After I got my commission as a communications officer, I was offered an opportunity to go into an electronic countermeasures program, which carried flight status and the additional pay. So, I went into that and spent some more time training, actually in B29s. We were expecting to go to the Pacific theater, and suddenly they called for volunteers to go to Europe, to Italy, and I raised my hand and away I went. It was in the spring of 1945 before I got overseas, but I did and had a fine time.

JP: You were stationed in Italy, and I know—from talking with people like George McGovern, who was a pilot stationed in Italy but not at the same base, and Steve Ambrose, who wrote a book called *Wild Blue* which describes the circumstances—that most of the bombing runs were into German industrial areas and Austria. Did you participate in any of that?

WP: I did not. By the time that I got over there, the war was practically over. I flew on a few inconsequential missions up to the Brenner Pass and around, but I did not see any actual combat. I did not get shot at.

JP: That was good.

WP: That was good, absolutely.

JP: So, you decided to come back to Harvard. I know when you went back to Harvard, you got interested in working for the university newspaper, *The Crimson*. How did you happen to get interested in that, and how did that influence your career?

WP: I had a roommate who told me that I should go tryout for *The Crimson*, and I did. That was a turning point in my career because until that point, I had absolutely no interest. Well, the matter of working for newspapers just had never occurred to me. I had assumed, like most of my contemporaries in Chickasha who went off to college at that time, that I would become a petroleum engineer, a geologist, or something associated with the oil industry. In preparation for this, I had taken a good amount of math and physics. But I got involved in *The Crimson*, and this was great fun. I had a great time, and I wound up as chairman of the editorial board. *The Crimson* had several boards which were simply divisions that you have in the newspaper: the business board, the news board, the editorial board, etcetera. I wound up as head of the editorial page at *The Crimson* and had a great time.

JP: What was it like the first time you saw your name in print?

WP: I really can't say that it was a great thrill. I don't remember the first time that I saw

my name in print, truth to tell, which would have been on *The Crimson*.

JP: How did that help you train for your later career in journalism?

WP: Well, in several ways. It gave me a lot of practice writing against deadlines and dealing with other departments in the newspaper, in interviewing people, talking to news sources, talking to people who didn't really want to talk to you, like professors who had gotten a bottom score on the popularity [survey] with the students. I found that even the student newspaper could influence the course of events at Harvard because the administration payed attention to student opinion. They usually disagreed with it, but [they listened].

JP: Almost always.

WP: Almost always, but that taught me a valuable lesson there which I may have passed on to some [student] newspapers in Florida universities because during the time I've been here, and this a good many years ago, I have had calls from administrators at the University of Florida [and] Florida State wanting to know, how do you deal with the student newspapers? How do you control it? How do you keep this from tearing apart the campus? And I said, you don't. They have got to be totally independent. They have to have no subsidy from the administration, no quarters supplied by the administration. They are on their own, and you don't meddle with them. They can't embarrass you because you have no responsibility for them. If you want to dismiss them as the irresponsible student press, go right ahead. I think that's the case in every university in Florida at this point.

JP: The *Florida Alligator* became the *Independent Florida Alligator* in 1973. As you probably know, they have done quite a bit in terms of challenging state laws on First Amendment issues.

WP: Right, absolutely.

JP: One of the issues was that the University of Florida would not open any of its committee meetings where they chose vice presidents and [other top-level administrators], and the *Alligator* got that [changed]. An *Alligator* editor posted abortion information and eventually got that law [preventing the dissemination of that material] declared unconstitutional. It's rather remarkable in some ways that a student newspaper would be at the forefront of this kind of activity.

WP: I had not thought of this until you brought up this question, but I may have had a very small amount of influence on that decision because several people consulted me, and I said, cut the strings. Cut the apron strings, cut the purse strings. Let them go.

JP: And after a couple of tough years, they have done quite well and [are] now one of the largest campus newspapers in America. There is this argument over and over again that in order to be a journalist, you need to have a journalism background [or] journalism education. Other people argue that you get better training on a campus newspaper or while you are actually pursuing your profession. What is your view on that?

WP: I am no great fan journalism schools. They do good work, but I think a student is better off to take a broad range of liberal arts courses. Heavy emphasis on economics, politics, literature, history, and pick up the journalism skills as you go along.

JP: What about your first job? You chose to work for the *Bangor Daily Commercial*. Why did you choose that [paper], and, again, what kind of experience did you have there?

WP: I chose that because the advisor on my senior honors thesis had a friend who was the co-publisher of a newspaper in Bangor, Maine. He was familiar with my interest in journalism that had been stirred up by my experience on *The Crimson*. He said, I know a guy in Bangor, Maine who has a newspaper, and you might be interested in contacting him. I did, and that was my first job as a cub reporter on that paper, which was a struggling afternoon newspaper. In fact, it struggled itself right out of existence eventually. I did everything. I covered police, government, general assignment, and before too many months got the job of city editor, which was my first step into administration.

JP: In many ways, people have told me, that is how you really learn the newspaper business, by being a reporter and covering a lot of different beats.

WP: That's my view.

JP: You left the Bangor paper and went back to Harvard?

WP: Yeah. Before you leave that, can I tell you how I got Harry Truman elected in 1948

JP: Great.

WP: . . . when I was on the Bangor paper? I was out on my beat one afternoon when the publisher tracked me down at city hall. He said, go home and pack a bag, and I want you go with me down to Augusta, and I'll tell you why on the way. We headed off for Augusta, and he told me what the situation was. This was in the spring of 1948. I actually finished my requirements for a degree in January of 1948 and immediately went to work. So, I was in Bangor during the time of

Democratic state conventions. The publisher, whose name was Jim Ewing, was the son of Oscar [R.] Ewing, who was a close advisor to Harry Truman. His father called him and said, Jim, I'm sitting here at the president's desk and we have just noted that the Maine state Democratic convention is this weekend. We have not done any work on this at all, but we need to get a vote out of that convention which instructs its delegates to the national convention to vote for Harry Truman. He said, I don't know anything about people up there, but could you go down and see what you can do?

There was considerable competition within the party amongst would-be presidents. Truman was not a shoe-in by any means. We went down to Augusta [and] registered at the Augusta House. Jim got a suite with a reception room and a bedroom and got a bar set up in the reception room and a typewriter in the bedroom. We went down to the bar and started chatting with people around the bar, who were practically all Democratic delegates to the state convention. Jim talked to these people about what they hoped to get from the convention: the labor industry, the Maine power company, the bankers, everybody, and he made a deal with as many people as he could. Oh, and he asked them, do you have a state platform? [They said], no, there's no platform. [He said] well, you need one. The deal was, you come see us and we will put whatever you want in the platform. You tell us what you want, and it goes in the platform. In return, you vote for an instructed delegation, instructed to vote for Harry Truman. This came in two parts: first, should it be instructed, and second, for whom? He set himself up behind the bar, and I set myself up behind the typewriter in the bedroom, and these people wandered in during the course of the evening, you know, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, one, and had a drink or two, and then he would send them in to see me. They would tell me what they wanted in the platform, and I would put it in, and I wrote a very fine platform.

JP: This is the Maine Democratic platform?

WP: Right, this is the Maine Democratic platform. Totally inconsistent. Anybody who looked at this would say, well, the labor plank doesn't quite fit with the banking plank, etcetera, etcetera. And they didn't. Everybody got what they wanted, and I wrote a preamble, wrapped it up, and we went to bed. Got up late. The convention started sometime after noon on Saturday. We submitted our proposal to the platform committee, which they accepted. Then after an hour or two, they came around to discussing the matter of the national convention and what should they do? Some labor union leader from Lewiston was supposed to make the key motion on this. He stood up and he started out, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, I'll move that we send, uh . . . He was really hung over, and he couldn't remember what he was supposed to say. Ewing and I were at the back of the hall, and he nudged me. I crouched over and went down the aisle as quickly as I could and edged over towards this guy, and I said, instructed. He said, Mr.

Chairman, I move we send an instructed delegation. And the motion passed. Then, there was no real problem about having it instructed to vote for Harry Truman. My contention is that if I had not tripped down that aisle and gotten the word to this union official, Truman might not have gotten the support of the Maine Democratic party, and that would have been a very serious blow to his chances for reelection. How's that?

JP: Good.

WP: You can edit that all out.

JP: Now, let me sort of quickly follow your career. By the way, just as a minor point, what did you do at the Harvard news office?

WP: I wrote news releases. I had the grand title of associate director, but basically I wrote news releases and interviewed professors who had won important prizes like Nobels and what have you.

JP: Then you go on to the *Charlotte News*?

WP: No, I went back to the Air Force immediately. Two months after I got back to Harvard, I was recalled to active duty in what was then the Air Force. I was sent down to Carswell Air Force Base in Ft. Worth, where I was part of a crew of a B-36, which was the largest bomber ever built [with] six pusher engines and two jet-assisted pods on the wings and a cruising range which I can't remember but is not important because it was refueled in midair anyway. I spent two or three months cruising around the United States in a B-36 and dropping dummy atomic bombs on targets. Then the Air Force got around to giving me a physical, and they told me that my eyesight was not good enough for flight duty so I would be reassigned. I was reassigned to the Pentagon to the office of a deputy chief of staff for research and development where, because I now had extensive newspaper experience, I was assigned to write and publish a classified magazine for Air Force research and development explaining what's coming down the pipeline to the commanders in the field. Which I did for about a year and a half. I didn't think I would ever say this, but this experience was really eye-opening because in World War II, I had been a smart-ass second lieutenant who didn't think very much of the phrase "military intelligence". I wasn't sure that the Army really know what it was doing, and in some respects it did not, I might say. In any case, on the second go-around, I was in an office of really brilliant, dedicated, knowledgeable, responsible officers working literally around the clock. I came away from this with a very high degree of respect for professional military people.

JP: Let me get back to your newspaper career. You go in 1954 to the *Charlotte News* as city editor. Why did you happen to choose that position? At this time, I guess it

was a Knight newspaper?

WP: No, it was an independent newspaper. The publisher was Tom Robinson, who was sort of an entrepreneur and a Harvard man, and I knew him, and he was looking for a city editor.

JP: We might mention the *News* was the afternoon paper.

WP: Yes, the *News* was the afternoon paper. This was the one that Charles Kuralt worked on. So, I went there as city editor and thoroughly enjoyed that experience. You know about Kuralt?

JP: Mention that for the tape. What was your relationship with him?

WP: His job as a reporter on the *News* was his first job on a commercial newspaper. Charlotte was his home. His father was a public health officer in Mecklenburg County. Charlie essentially came back to work for his hometown newspaper. He was a general assignment reporter until he started submitting columns, two or three a week, columns called "Charlie's People", and it was just beautiful work. These were ordinary guys, girls he met and interviewed and just wrote beautiful stuff.

JP: Sort of a precursor of his "On the Road" series.

WP: Absolutely, only this was "on the street".

JP: I have talked to several people who say that city editor was at the same time the most interesting job they've had and the most challenging job. Would you agree with that?

WP: I wouldn't dispute it. [It] could be. It's at the heart of the operation. You don't have enough responsibility that you lose any sleep worrying about things, and yet you really shape the daily report.

JP: You came to the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* in 1961 as the managing editor. Is that correct?

WP: True.

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

WP: I had left the *Charlotte News* and gone to the *Lorain, Ohio Journal*. I don't know if I mentioned that in there or not. I'd be happy to omit it because it was the worst decision I ever made to go up there. I went up at the behest of a friend of mine

who had been dean of the journalism school at the University of Maine and was now editor of the *Lorain Journal*, and he wanted me to come up there as managing editor. He didn't tell me that he was holding a little contest between me and another guy to see who would get the job of managing editor, but eventually I did. Lorain was a distant suburb of Cleveland. It's about thirty, thirty-five miles west of Cleveland and at that time was a really messy, dirty, industrial city. It was not a really happy place to live. This was in 1958 when I went up there. By 1961, I was ready to get back to the South where it was warm. David [B.] Lindsay [Jr.], who was the publisher, was looking for a managing editor. He advertised in *Editor and Publisher*, and I responded to the ad. He flew up to Cleveland in his converted P-51. The true love of his life was aviation, not newspapers. He flew up and interviewed me at the Cleveland Airport, and I came down to Sarasota and looked around. I thought this would be a great place to live, and here I am.

JP: When you first took over, you were managing editor. Was that for the *Journal*?

WP: No, that was for the *Herald-Tribune*. You are aware that at that point we had two papers? The *Journal* was the afternoon. The *Journal* had its managing editor, and the *Herald-Tribune* had its managing editor. At the same time he hired me, Dave Lindsay hired an editorial page editor so that for the first year I was here, I was strictly concerned with news coverage. The person he hired as editorial page editor was temperamentally incapable of working with the Lindsays, and he left. So, I got both jobs, managing editor and editorial page editor on the *Herald-Tribune*, which eventually got a title of editorial director. The *Journal* lasted until 1982, which was the year that the *New York Times* bought the paper. We had a very spirited competition. The executive editor of the *Journal* was Roy Cook, who had come here from Wilmington, North Carolina and was a very savvy old-time newspaper man. He had no polish, but he was a very solid newspaper operator with a feeling for news, and he and I got along fine. He died in the mid 1970s, and then I became editorial director of both papers.

JP: What caused the demise of the afternoon newspapers in America?

WP: The morning newspapers got much better, and the afternoon papers did not adapt. As you know, the news cycle is such that everything is in favor of the morning papers. Eighty percent of the significant news that you're interested in breaks on the time of the morning papers. The afternoon papers responded in a not-very-effective fashion by dumbing down, becoming tabloids, almost throwing in the towel on the serious coverage. The most egregious example I can think of was the *Cleveland Press*, which when I was in Lorain was the dominant paper in that whole part of the state. The [*Cleveland*] *Plain Dealer* improved to the point where the *Press* just gave up trying to compete with it, and Scripps Howard [news corporation] didn't want to put the money into it that it would have had to.

JP: And obviously, subscriptions were way down and it became a real problem [to maintain financially].

WP: That's right, absolutely. You asked what did them in, and it's money.

JP: When you took over as executive editor, what kind of problems did you face from the newspaper? Did you have any problems in terms of economic issues or editorial issues?

WP: I never actually had the title of executive editor at the *Herald-Tribune*. I was editorial director. Most newspapers had managing editors.

JP: What was your specific job?

WP: It was to supervise news coverage and opinion on both papers.

JP: In a sense, you combined editorial page editor and managing editor?

WP: Yes. I guess the biggest problem is getting good people, attracting and keeping good people, which is still a big problem in this community on these papers. The Lindsays were interesting and difficult people to work for, and not everybody has the temperament to put up with that. I did, I guess. I think that Dave Lindsay is one of the unappreciated geniuses of Florida journalism. As I said earlier, his main interest was in airplanes. He had a small factory out here at the airport in which he converted old P-51s into two-seater private airplanes. Which for a few years, before the widespread advent of jets, were the fastest means of transportation in the United States, put yourself into the backseat of a P-51 and hire a pilot to fly you from coast to coast. He did that, and he renovated P-51s for sale to Central American nations. This was what he really liked to do. He'd rather spend time with airplanes than with newspapers.

JP: Did he interfere with your editorial page?

WP: Almost never. We had a couple of real go-arounds, which he won, but not very much.

JP: What policies did you change when you took over as editorial director?

WP: None, really. I guess the *Herald-Tribune* made a name for itself as a champion for environmental causes. While I get a certain amount of credit for that, actually the inspiration came from Dave Lindsay, who had a very sensitive nose and whose father suffered from throat cancer as a result of many years of cigarette smoking. Dave could not stand polluted air, and he could sniff it out. He could sniff it out over Tampa, and he could trace it to the phosphate plants, and he

wanted to go after them. I got interested in this, and we went after them. He banned cigarette advertising the day after the now famous surgeon general's report on cigarette smoking came out. He said, we will not accept cigarette advertising, and we didn't. The Sunday supplement, *Family Weekly* which was pretty widely distributed, put out a special edition for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, and they took out all the cigarette ads and ran the rest of them.

JP: When you look at your career as a newspaper man, what do you see as the most important functions of a newspaper?

WP: To provide information to citizens that they need in order to make intelligent decisions. That's the only justification for the First Amendment.

JP: When you look at that as a function of the paper, how did your audience change during the time you were at the paper?

WP: Well, of course television came into its own and eventually became the primary source of news and information, which meant that newspapers had to shift emphasis to background and interpretation. The Sarasota papers have been very fortunate in that they have the oldest subscriber group in the United States. I say that pretty categorically, but I think it's true. Our subscribers in Manatee, Sarasota, and Charlotte counties would turn out to have the highest average age of the subscribers of any daily newspaper, and so they are readers. They grew up as readers.

JP: One would assume they would be a little better educated and a little more sophisticated?

WP: Yes, I think so.

JP: How, then, do you attract younger readers?

WP: I think just by doing the things that we do best, and that is to report local news. I'm of a school of thought which thinks that every time a commissioner sneezes at a meeting, it should be reported. Now, nobody is doing that, not even the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, but I think detailed reporting on local news is the most important function of a newspaper. I think in many places, including to some degree here, this function is being taken over by weeklies, neighborhood weeklies, town weeklies.

JP: Sort of like the Venice paper?

WP: Yes, and the Long Boat Key *Observer* and the Siesta Key *Pelican*. I think that they are taking a slice of our market.

JP: In that context, how have reporters changed during your time at the *Herald-Tribune*?

WP: They have become younger and smarter and more transient.

JP: Some newspaper men told me that if you would look at, say, the 1950s, reporters would turn out eight or ten stories a day, whereas now, even with computers, the current reporters tend to have more access to information and tend to do a more thorough job, but turn out less work. Would you agree with that?

WP: Yes and no. They have more time for a takeout on a major story. If a reporter wants to take two weeks on a special project, fine. Thirty years ago, they didn't have that luxury. But they do not do as good a job of reporting on the nitty-gritty of local government. Who asks for the zoning change? Who owns the property? What city official is responsible for that decision?

JP: Do you do less investigative journalism than the paper used to do?

WP: No, they do more investigative journalism but less reporting.

JP: The cost of investigative journalism is often high because sometimes you can work on a story for a couple months and not really get anything. A lot of editors and publishers tell me that they have cut back on that activity, for example the *Miami Herald*, because it's really not "cost effective". Do you see that as a trend in American newspapers?

WP: No, I do not. Maybe I'm just not reading the right newspapers.

JP: How do you assess your competition? You talked about some of the local papers, but I know you put out editions of the *Herald* in Bradenton and in general in this area. Do you see competition from the *St. Pete Times* or the *Tampa Tribune* or the Ft. Myers paper?

WP: No. I think they are negligible. When I came here, the *St. Pete Times* and the *Tampa Tribune* together had more circulation in Sarasota County than the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, but we have increasingly become a fringe area for them and neither St. Pete nor Tampa really competes in Sarasota or even in Manatee County.

JP: In this state, then, newspapers are pretty much regional. I know, for example, in Gainesville, we no longer get the *St. Pete Times*, and the *Miami Herald*, they in a sense served regional areas. Is that what you are trying to do with your paper?

WP: Yeah.

JP: What was the circulation when you retired?

WP: I don't really recall. I would think it was year-round 110,000, maybe.

JP: Of course, it's always more in the winter than in the summer.

WP: Oh, yeah, lots more.

JP: Talking about competition, when I was talking to Diane McFarlin [publisher of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*] and asked her how significant competition was through television, she said it was not so much the medium as it was time and convenience. It's easier for people to click on the TV and get short-term information than it is for them to sit down and read the newspaper. Do you think that's becoming more true?

WP: Yeah, probably so.

JP: Is that a negative impact on society?

WP: Yes, it is, very much so.

JP: Do you think they're less informed?

WP: Yes.

JP: How would you rate your paper against papers of comparable size in the state of Florida?

WP: It's the best.

JP: Would the Tallahassee *Democrat* or Pensacola paper or Gainesville paper be similar circulation?

WP: I think they're smaller, but they're in the same category. Lakeland, Daytona.

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JP: When you were working with the editorial page, how would you go about deciding what editorials to write? What process did you go through?

WP: We had an editorial staff meeting every morning, and we would discuss possible topics, who should write them and what we should say. We generally reached a consensus. There were very few times when I would say, this is what we're going to do.

JP: In writing editorials, would you always take a position in political races? Presidential contests, governors' races?

WP: Yes, every race. Our intention was to take a position in every race. There would, in any election, be a couple of races in which we would say, you've got two really good candidates here and we can't make up our minds, or, you've got two really unqualified candidates here and we don't want to be responsible for either one of them.

JP: Would you go through the process of interviewing each of the candidates if you had time?

WP: Oh, we did, every candidate, every race. Well, I say every race. Sometimes we wouldn't be able to get to things like the charter review board or what have you.

JP: How important would an editorial endorsement from the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* have on voters?

WP: People from the *Tampa Tribune* have said that we could swing 15% of the vote, which if you figure it out is a 30% swing.

JP: And that was probably more true in local races than presidential races?

WP: Absolutely. I don't think voters paid any attention to what we said in presidential races, and shouldn't because we don't know any more about the national candidates than they do, really. I think that this was true to a certain extent, a lesser extent, in state races. But in local races, I think that the voters followed our recommendations in large numbers, and rightly so because we took it very seriously.

JP: And particularly, I would think, in judicial contests like judges where they would have virtually no information about them.

WP: Yeah, right.

JP: How have letters to the editor changed, and how important are they for inclusion on the editorial page?

WP: They are vital, and they have increased over the years. They have increased dramatically with email. Readers of today's paper can sit down and tap out an email and send it to the editor, and if it's really timely and well-written, it can be in tomorrow's paper.

JP: How did you choose the letters?

WP: We tried to pick the ones on the most pertinent topics on a given day and to have a rough balance between what appeared in print and what was sent in. I never felt an obligation in editorials to be balanced. You know, you've got an opinion, stick with it and pound the hell out of it. But when you are purporting to represent readers' opinion, you should include a number of letters proportionate to what was sent in.

JP: There might be some pro-Bush letters and some anti-Bush letters?

WP: Yes.

JP: Did you always allow for op ed pieces?

WP: Oh, yes.

JP: To balance the editorial view?

WP: No. I didn't. I think that's what they're doing now. I think the *Herald-Tribune* is consciously seeking out people who disagree with it for op ed pieces. I didn't. Once again, I say if you've got a point of view and you think you're right and you think you're serving the public well, push it.

JP: That's what the editorial page is for.

WP: That's right.

JP: What about editorial cartoonists? Did you use them fairly frequently?

WP: Oh, yeah. Editorial cartoonists probably influence more people than editorial writers. An editorial cartoon is a potent device precisely because it is not balanced. It is a point of view.

JP: Who did you use in particular? Did you have one that you had permanently, or did you just choose on a daily basis?

WP: We picked on a daily basis. We were fortunate both in editorial cartoons and editorial page columns that we were pretty much able to buy all of the best in the country and pick the best on any given day. I think that's still the case.

JP: I noticed today the paper featured columnists Tom Teepen, Cal Thomas, Maureen Dowd. Cal Thomas is very conservative and Maureen Dowd is rather liberal, so you get sort of a balance from the columnists you use. Do you use

many from the *New York Times*?

WP: Oh, yeah, simply because they have some of the best in the business, but there's no requirement [for using them].

JP: Do you get a break on the cost?

WP: No.

JP: It seems like you ought to get a slight economic advantage.

WP: That's my view, but I don't think so. I know I never did.

JP: Another element that's really not very important in the overall scheme of things but people get very exercised about, is the comics. If you change one comic strip, people can get more angry about something like that than an editorial. How important are comics as part of the "entertainment package?"

WP: I think they're pretty important. I think they're probably more important to my generation than they are to my grandchildren. I always spent a great deal of time selecting the comics. I can tell you that the biggest furor I was ever involved with in Sarasota was over a crossword puzzle. When I first came here, I got several phone calls and letters from people who said, why don't you get an honest-to-God crossword puzzle in your paper? This one is so simple that I don't even mess with it. I said okay. As you know, all of the syndicates offer puzzles of various degrees of difficulty, so I picked a more difficult one and put it in, and all hell broke loose. I mean, the roof caved in with people saying, you can't do this to me. I start my day with the crossword puzzle, and I'm usually able to sit down and do it in a few minutes, and it gives me a good feeling that sets the tone for my whole day. I tried to hold on, but I couldn't. I just said okay, and we went back to the old puzzle.

JP: I think most people don't want to try the *New York Times* crossword. For most people, that's a little too difficult.

WP: That's right, and this wasn't even the daily news puzzle.

JP: When you were on the paper, what did you get the most complaints about? Wet papers? Editorials? Late delivery? What really bothered the readers of the paper so that they would complain?

WP: All of the above. The ones that I got most were accusations that we were a member of the eastern liberal establishment and were not treating conservatives fairly, which is balderdash.

JP: Part of that is the fact that you're owned by the *New York Times*.

WP: Yeah, but this was before we were bought by the *Times*.

JP: Okay, but since that time I would imagine

WP: It has increased, yes.

JP: How much impact has the *New York Times*, both good and bad, had on the paper?

WP: I never had a conversation with anybody from the *New York Times* about editorial policies. Zilch. I had conversations about budgets, but it did not try, and I'm confident does not try, to influence editorial policy or news coverage. I think as long as the paper stays within what you would broadly define as the mainstream of American journalism, the *Times* will keep strictly hands off.

JP: One good thing from the *Times* when they came in here, they really upgraded the equipment and made some improvements

WP: Absolutely, and [it was] high time.

JP: . . . which was rather costly.

WP: Oh, yeah.

JP: Now, the down side that I hear from a lot of people in the corporate world of newspapers today, the New York Times [Company], Knight Ridder and on and on, is that the bottom line has become the dominant issue. Carl Hiaasen of the *Miami Herald* said that Knight Ridder wants a 22 to 25 percent profit, and to get that, the *Herald* has had to cut back on some local news coverage and has had to fire some of the reporters and other workers at the paper to meet those goals. Was that a problem with you when you were at the *Herald-Tribune*?

WP: Yes and no. The *Times* is a publicly owned corporation, and there is pressure from stockholders to pay dividends. I think the *Times* is a unique institution in that the Sulzberger family really understands that in order to make money, you have to spend money. I know there have been cutbacks, there have been personnel freezes. There were in my time and there still are, but I think that the *New York Times* has been much less afflicted by this than most newspapers.

JP: I know this is sort of privileged information you might not have, but would you say if you take the corporation Gannett, which has sort of been known as a frugal owner of newspapers, do you think that the bottom-line attitude affects the daily

quality of the newspapers? I have noticed that newspapers are getting smaller.

WP: Absolutely.

JP: What is the long-term outcome of this? Are they going to get worse and worse?

WP: I'm afraid that's a clear possibility.

JP: Do you see a time when we will no longer have a physical newspaper, that everybody will get it off the Internet?

WP: No, I don't. You can never tell what's going to happen to customs and mores over a period of time, but I think people for the foreseeable future will want to have something they can clip, they can tear things out of, they can take it to the bathroom, carry it around with them. It is a lot more convenient to turn the pages of a newspaper than it is to flip from page to page on a computer.

JP: That's exactly what newspapers do. They take all this information and compile it for you and give it to you in at least four or five sections that are organized according to what reader's interests are. Someone told me he thought that there might be a process where people get online and print out the sports and print out the first section, and they don't want the rest of the paper.

WP: I think that already exists. I think you can do that.

JP: When you were involved in the paper, did you ever have any advertisers threaten to cancel their advertisements because of editorials you had written?

WP: Oh, yeah.

JP: Could you give me a couple of examples and how you responded?

WP: Automobile dealers, real estate brokers, department store owners. In every case, and this goes with the Lindsays as well as with the *New York Times*, I was able to say, well, you've got to do what you've got to do and we'll do what we've got to do.

JP: I noticed in reading a couple of your articles that there was a clear-cut opposition from some of the people in the business community. They saw the paper as anti-business. How did you deal with them? Did you meet with them?

WP: Oh, sure.

JP: In other words, it was easier to explain your position one-on-one than to continue

to write editorials?

WP: Yeah, and at times, I can certainly understand how they might think we were anti-business. We were certainly anti-bad development.

JP: I understand that there is a difference of opinion about editors and publishers, whether or not they should get involved in community affairs. What was your position on that? I'm talking about being a member of the Rotary Club, head of the blood drive, and that sort of thing.

WP: I think publishers should and editors shouldn't.

JP: Why shouldn't editors? Conflict of interest?

WP: Too much chance of conflict of interest. I think almost without exception, editors would be able to resist this potential conflict, but I'm not always sure that they could successfully refute the appearance of conflict. The appearance is often the reality.

JP: What was the status of women as you were involved in the newspaper? I notice today that three of the top four positions in the paper are women.

WP: The newspaper is now a matriarchy, which is fine with me. The men had it long enough, and the women are not going to do any worse than we did.

JP: It was sort of a general sense that it was an old boy network in the newspapers and that women were restricted to society pages. Did you have a program while you were at the paper to increase both the hiring of women and minorities?

WP: No, I did not. Now, let me say that I think your perception that it used to be an old boy network, I think that's accurate. It was. I hired a lot of women in my time and the first minorities on this newspaper. I think that women will become a majority in the newspaper business. They're good at it. There are more women than there are men in the country. We will have newspapers increasingly geared for consumption by women. It is a business which doesn't require any physical strength. It is creative. It calls for organization, personnel skills. Women are very good at all of these things.

JP: I understand that it's difficult to get and keep qualified minorities. How do you change that circumstance?

WP: It is. I think you just keep trying. At the *Herald-Tribune*, we frequently have good black people hired away by larger newspapers. I say good for them. That's the way the system works.

JP: How has technology changed since you started? Obviously, I don't want to go all the way back to hot type.

WP: Well, that's where I started, with typewriters and hot type.

JP: Since you've been at the *Herald-Tribune*, how has that changed? For example, I know that now you have SNN and have a sort of interactive website and information on the Internet.

WP: Yeah. Well, you've just described how it has changed. It's a different world, and successful newspapers are going to get involved in all of these things. Successful newspapers will realize, and have realized, that what they are selling is not newsprint but information. You convey information any way you can and hope that you'll be able to find a way to do it profitably, and we will.

JP: What about the new buzzword, the "converged newsroom"? Media General owns the *Tampa Tribune* and the TV station. Do you see that as a coming trend? With all this discussion at the Federal Communications Commission, do you see that as a threat to democratic news, as it were?

WP: I think the threat is not so much in a newspaper owning a television station or vice versa as it is in having large corporations control dominant percentages of the news and entertainment business. I think that the fact that Clear Channel Radio owns a huge percentage of radio stations . . .

JP: It's like, what, 75 percent or something like that?

WP: It's getting close, including a dominant number of the stations in the Tampa Bay area. It is a much greater threat to diversity of information than having the *Tampa Tribune* and a television station operating out of the same newsroom. I think there has got to be a clear numerical limit on how many such operations you can have, joint operations, or how many outlets one entity can control.

JP: I know in one of your columns, you worried about the fact that eventually Rupert Murdoch might control everything, and that's a clear possibility.

WP: Yep.

JP: So, it's the responsibility of the FCC, and this case now has devolved to Congress, to keep that number down to 35 percent instead of 45 percent.

WP: Yeah, or get it back down to 20 percent.

JP: When you were involved with the newspaper, I know that at one time you were

president of the Florida Press Association. How do you view that particular organization and its function in helping newspapers in the state?

WP: I was not president of the Florida Press Association. [I was president of] the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors.

JP: Sorry. Can you talk about that organization?

WP: It's an influence for good, for a couple of reasons. It brings editors together, and in the case of the Florida Press Association, it brings editors and publishers together to discuss areas of mutual concern and to actually improve their performance. Also, with their contests, each of these associations recognizes merit and encourages people to raise their sights.

JP: What about the Florida Press Association? What is your view of that organization?

WP: What I've just said applies to them as well. I think is an essential support group for an essential public service.

JP: What is the general consensus and your personal opinion about *USA TODAY*?

WP: It's a free country. If you want to buy it, God bless you [laughing]. They have good color.

JP: Jump stories and the color and the charts obviously influenced just about every paper in the country. Has that been good for newspapers?

WP: It hasn't hurt them.

JP: Do you see *USA TODAY*, as some critics have called it, "McNews"?

WP: Yeah, I do.

JP: It does, I presume, serve some function as a national newspaper so you can read it on airplanes and as people travel. But you do not see that as a particularly strong source of information?

WP: No, and I doubt that *USA TODAY* does either.

JP: Although they have in the past years done a little more investigative journalism. They have improved in that category. Is that the future of American newspapers, *USA TODAY*?

WP: I don't think so. I think that we need strong national newspapers, but there can only be a few. I would hope that the future of American journalism is in strong regional and local newspapers.

JP: How important was it for the Sarasota paper to cover the Florida legislature, and in specific terms, how did you do that? Did you have a reporter there full time, or did you use pool resources?

WP: It is extremely important. The coverage of state legislatures by newspapers is one of the scandals of the newspaper industry today. The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* has had at least one reporter in Tallahassee longer than I recall. There was not one when I came here, and I sent one up there at some point. I don't recall when, but we've had a bureau there for many years. After the *New York Times* bought the *Herald-Tribune*, the Tallahassee coverage came out of the *New York Times*' Florida Newspapers Bureau in Tallahassee, which has three or four reporters full time up there, [and they] pay pretty close attention to legislative coverage.

JP: I noticed in a couple of articles you wrote fairly recently about the legislature, that one problem that I think we're all seeing now is the negative impact of term limits.

WP: Yes.

JP: How has that impacted the efficiency and the effectiveness of the legislature?

WP: Quite negatively, and it's also affected county governments in Florida. It is a pernicious concoction led from a Washington office that furnished all of the states with the propaganda to promote this. It has resulted in legislators who simply don't know what they're doing, who have no sense of history, and who do not have time to develop essential skills before they move into positions of leadership.

JP: I think in one of your columns, you indicated that we have let ourselves get taken in by slick rhetoric and nifty slogans and that the legislature lost its vision as a servant of the people. Everybody is either trying to get re-elected or caving in to what you decry as the excessive power of the lobbyists in this state.

WP: Yes, that's an accurate statement.

JP: Part of it has to do with just sheer funds. I know this is a pejorative term, and I have been told that you shouldn't say Big Sugar, but the tobacco industry lobbying against Lawton Chiles. How do you deal with this huge amount of money, soft money, direct contributions, that tends to influence legislators?

WP: I don't know, and we have not been dealing with it very successfully. The recent legislation with respect to soft money, while I applaud it, is only a very small part of the solution because people are doing end runs around this right and left and overhead and underground. The single biggest source of trouble in American government today is the influence of money. We've got to combat it with better information. We're going to need more legislation. We're going to need to get public money where we can for use in political campaigns.

JP: One would assume that if an industry gave money to legislators, they did it for a specific reason, to have influence.

WP: Oh yeah, absolutely.

JP: And if they didn't get that influence, they wouldn't be giving that kind of funding.

WP: Absolutely. If they didn't get that influence, their stockholders should complain.

JP: This past summer, the legislature had to meet four times to try to deal with the cost of malpractice insurance. I thought it was very interesting that many of the members of the legislature are trial attorneys and it seemed to be very clear where they came down on these issues. It would seem to be a conflict of interest because that legislation could directly affect their income. The legislature seemed almost unable to come up with a solution to this problem. Is that due to self-interest or incompetence, or how do you explain it?

WP: It's partly self-interest and it's partly the inability of the governor to compromise and the reluctance of the senate to compromise about something which is really a peripheral issue. A \$250,000 cap or the \$500,000 cap is not going to make any difference. A \$1,000,000 cap wouldn't make much difference. Did you read my column on this subject?

JP: No, I missed that.

WP: Well, I said when it comes right down to it, the trouble with malpractice is that there is malpractice. Yes, Virginia, there is malpractice, and its victims are entitled to some sort of compensation. The only people, said he dogmatically, who can deal effectively with malpractice are physicians, who have got to get actively involved in policing their own streets. Until that happens, there ain't going to be any effective solution.

JP: Plus, as I know, many physicians practice defensive medicine, and they order all kinds of tests that may not be necessary in order to cover themselves from a lawsuit. When you look at the history of the governors of Florida, and I don't want to get you too involved, but I know that in a couple of your columns you praise

the integrity and the industry of Reuben Askew [1971-1979] and Bob Graham [1979-1987]. How would you see [Bob] Martinez [1987-1991], [Lawton] Chiles [1991-1999], and Jeb Bush [1999-present]? How would you evaluate their terms as governor?

WP: I would put Chiles in a class with Askew and Graham. Martinez was a well-meaning governor who never quite understood what the hell was going on. Bush is a real disaster who will be cursed by future generations of Floridians.

JP: For what specifically?

WP: For cutting taxes instead of improving services, for decimating the education system, for his kowtowing to polluters who are decreasing the livability of Florida.

JP: Although he did support the Everglades restoration.

WP: Yeah, but then he harpooned it.

JP: The recent legislature?

WP: Yeah.

JP: If we see Bush as detrimental to the future of Florida, isn't he the kind of politician who is going to be successful in the current environment?

WP: Could be. Sadly, could be.

JP: What we lack are, in effect, statesman.

WP: Yes, I would agree with that.

JP: Let me ask a question. I know this is after you left the paper, but I was just curious. If you look back at the 2000 presidential election, what's your assessment of all that and who do you think actually won the state of Florida?

WP: I think Gore actually got the most votes in the state of Florida. I think that the Republicans recognized the situation early on, they organized quickly, they got their troops in here and went to work, and they won the election in the courts.

JP: Is that a blow to democracy?

WP: Yes, indeed.

JP: Another issue that I'm intrigued about, and you wrote about this, not only is

television news becoming more entertainment but there is the trend, at least in a lot of newspapers, toward that end. There's not as much hard news or foreign news. People tend to do sports, local news, and let it go at that. Is that a trend, again, in regional newspapers?

WP: Yeah, I think so.

JP: How can you reverse that?

WP: You've got to have right-thinking publishers.

JP: And that's sometimes hard to do when you're still dealing with corporate headquarters and the bottom line.

WP: Absolutely.

JP: What did the paper do when you had errors in the newspaper? How did you correct them? Where did you correct them?

WP: We corrected any significant errors of fact that were called to our attention and tried to do it on the same page in which the mistake appeared. Sometimes it was more practical to do this on the section page of the section in which it appeared.

JP: Many newspapers put all the corrections in one place.

WP: Yeah, that's true, they do. We did not do that, and as far as I know, have not done that.

JP: You have a position that I think is fairly unique. You have a position in the paper called advocate. It's sort of an ombudsmen, I presume?

WP: Well, not really, at least as I understand it. Now, this occurred after my time and I'm not sure exactly what the advocate's mission statement is, but my observation is that the advocate simply receives complaints and passes them along to somebody but does not actively campaign to get something done and can't in as much as the advocate changes every week.

JP: It is not a permanent position?

WP: No. It's a different person every week.

JP: One of the problems I see with newspapers, and I won't get into any specific names, is errors. I was reading a newspaper the other day, and on one page, I found at least—and I quit counting—ten factual errors or misspelled names. I

wonder why newspapers don't do a better job of proofreading.

WP: I'm not aware of anybody who does any proofreading [laughing].

JP: I think that's true.

WP: You know, it goes into the machine, it goes to the electronic typesetter, and it's stripped on the page.

JP: Shouldn't newspapers do proofreading? It seems to me that when I see names misspelled and I see factual errors, the credibility of the newspaper declines. I read a newspaper the other day that said Lewis and Clark discovered the Grand Canyon. That could not be farther from the truth. It sort of undermines my faith in the credibility and the accuracy of the newspaper.

WP: Absolutely. I agree with you. I'm going to plead the Fifth on a general answer to that question. It becomes costlier and costlier to do any effective proofreading the more you go into new technologies. I think that perhaps newspapers need to employ more people who have more skills to catch the errors before they actually appear in print. The spell checker on your computer will catch spelling errors, but it won't catch any factual errors or grammatical errors. I would think that there is a role for better trained copy editors.

JP: One publisher told me that he was thinking about hiring retired schoolteachers and bringing them in, not having to pay them a lot of money, but he could bring four or five of them in and let them proofread the paper. That seemed like a pretty pragmatic response.

WP: It sounds like a good idea to me. I think that you ought to have on any sizable copy desk maybe a retired geography teacher and a retired historian. I thoroughly endorse that idea.

JP: I read in a paper the other day in the sports section that such and such a football player will not play in Saturday's game because he "enjoyed" his ankle. Now, you would think somebody would catch that. Of course, enjoyed was spelled correctly, so the spell checker is not going to pick that up, and obviously they meant to say injured. I think people don't complain or don't worry about it, but there are individuals, particularly in the academic community, who are quite concerned about that because it is a major source of information, and when people get incorrect information, that really undermines the whole process.

WP: That's true, and when you get incorrect grammatical constructions, the uninformed readers tend to think that the newspaper knows what it's doing.

JP: Let me talk to you a little bit about an issue that is current, and that is the Jayson Blair embarrassment for the *New York Times* [Blair was a *NYT* reporter who plagiarized stories]. Was this a problem of lax editorial control because there had been previous complaints about his work, or might you see this as a failure of affirmative action?

WP: I'm going to plead ignorance on this one because I don't know anything except what I read in the newspapers. I have no particular information about the case. It was an embarrassment to the *New York Times*. This sort of thing is always, in one format or another, going to be an embarrassment to newspapers and to television and to textbook publishers, any source you can mention.

JP: Do you think the *New York Times* salvaged its reputation by doing a thorough investigation and publishing all the details?

WP: Yes. I think in general the *New York Times* handled it well. I was a little disappointed that the publisher had said at first that he stood wholeheartedly behind Howell [Raines, former executive editor] and then had to change his mind. I think he may have spoken a little hastily, but overall I thought they handled it well.

JP: Because eventually Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd [managing editor] both ended up being "asked to resign." I guess that's the way it's understood anyway.

WP: Yes, and I have no problem with that. If it had been in Japan, they would have committed hara-kiri [ritual suicide by disembowelment].

JP: Well, it was on their watch.

WP: That's right.

JP: Let me continue with the questions about the Jayson Blair incident. This is not the first time that something like this has happened. I recall Janet Cooke of the *Washington Post*, and Stephen Glass writing for the *New Republic*. You get these kinds of situations where journalists, in effect, make up sources or make up facts. Did you ever have any problem with that at the time you were at the newspaper?

WP: I don't recall any out-and-out fabrications. I recall lots of mistakes.

JP: In terms of editorial control, if you look at somebody like Howell Raines, how could he possibly keep up with all the sources of all the people who work for the *New York Times*?

WP: Oh, he can't. He has simply got to establish a culture. It's just like the failure of the culture of NASA in this morning's headlines. You've got to establish a culture in the newsroom where people feel free to walk in your door and say, hey, here's something you ought to know about.

JP: Is this an example of a deteriorating ethical standard in society? We have people who want fame and fortune, we have Enron, we have all of these corporate failures, and we have Martha Stewart. Do you think this is reflective of a change in ethical values in America?

WP: No, I don't really. I don't see any widespread deterioration of ethics. I think what has happened is the same thing that has happened with crime. Crime rate has actually been declining over recent years, but there's more and more crime news on television. I think that the ethical standards, I won't say that they're any higher, although they may well be, but I don't think that they have been declining. I think that we are just in such a state of instantaneous contact with everything that goes wrong anywhere that when something like this happens, we all know about it.

JP: We're just more aware of these events because of CNN and other places. There is now a group of politicians who are saying, well, we never trusted the *New York Times* anyway, and now we see that they are printing material that is not correct, so now, we're going to ignore them all together. Do you think that long-term can hurt the credibility of the *New York Times*?

WP: No. I think short-term it will, and I think that it is difficult to refute what they're saying when they can just point to it and say, aha, gotcha. But I think this too shall pass, and fairly quickly.

JP: Anna Quindlen [columnist, author] said she thought it was an overreaction and that, whatever you say, the *New York Times* is still the best newspaper in the world, even with these failures. That it is almost inevitable in a large corporation like that for something to happen.

WP: Yeah, and the people who are saying this never believed in the *New York Times* anyway.

JP: I noticed also in one of your articles that you have been opposed to this "gotcha" journalism. There is a tendency to attack and misrepresent, and if you go on any of these talk shows, there's no rational discourse. It's primarily James Carville yelling at some conservative Republican. I noticed in your article, you said that really doesn't reflect the attitude and demeanor of most Americans. Why do those shows work, and why are they popular?

WP: Because they're cheap to produce.

JP: Why do people watch them?

WP: We watch them because that's what's on, and sometimes there's not much other choice. I know my wife and I look over the television schedules for an evening and say, what do we want to watch tonight? Nothing.

JP: Therefore, television has been dumbed down for the mass audience.

WP: Yes.

JP: Is that also true of newspapers?

WP: To some extent.

JP: I notice you quoted Robert McNeil of the *MacNeil/Lehrer Report*, and one of the things he was saying about the process was that the network news departments have abandoned serious documentaries all together and that what you have now is almost pseudo news. How can newspapers fill in that gap? I can remember, for example, a couple of years ago, Dan Rather was talking about genome research or something and he said, we can't explain this on television. So, it falls to newspapers to give the in-depth details or analysis of these issues. How can you get people to read newspapers? Here's a further example. I took a poll in one of my classes at the University of Florida this summer. Out of seventy people, one student said he read a daily newspaper. How do we get people educated?

WP: The short answer to that is I don't know. I think we just keep plugging away, and if we don't find a way to do it, then newspapers will suffer and the country will suffer.

JP: Let me ask a few questions about something you mentioned earlier. I know the issues of the environment have always been very important to you. In one of your articles, you wrote, which I thought was rather perceptive, that everybody talks about sustainable growth, but nobody is quite sure exactly what that means. How did you present your views in your paper about what one might call slow practical growth? In one case, I think developers wanted to build a series of high rises in Sarasota Bay, just sort of fill in the bay. That was Arvida, wasn't it? Was that the corporation?

WP: Yeah, Arthur Vining Davis.

JP: So, what kind of impact do you think your editorials and the writing of the newspaper has had on, at least in this community, keeping negative growth down?

WP: I think it has had a very positive impact, and I think that we were able to stop several very harmful developments, including one by Arvida which would have put condominiums on the whole south end of Lido Key, which is now a public park. We just kept plugging away on this. I always tried to sell the concept that growth is good up to a point, but after a certain point in your life, as well as in the life of your community, you don't want to grow anymore. You're capable of functioning as an adult doing everything that you want to do, and any more size that you add will actually detract from your ability to perform. I think we may have sold that concept. I think we may also have sold the idea that growth in Sarasota County is going to stop. When, I don't know, but I can tell you what the maximum population will be. I figured it out to be 1.6 billion. The population of Sarasota County would give you twelve square feet for every person to lie down in the sun, and you couldn't have any double decking because everybody wants to get the sunshine. At 1.6 billion, the growth is going to stop. Now, actually it will stop well before then, and we don't know where, but once you accept the concept that growth will stop, then you can start asking the question, how much growth should we have? Then you start asking a whole different set of questions, and then you've come to the concept of sustainability. How much growth can we sustain over the long haul based on the resources available? The truth is we don't know, and people have thought about this and they still don't know. We will never get a satisfactory answer to that question, but as long as you keep asking the question, you get people in a mind-set where they are not afraid to say, no, you can't do that because that is something we can't sustain over the long haul. We can't follow this precedent.

JP: In very specific cases, if we look at Southwest Florida, already there are issues of water, pollution, and traffic. Once that starts impacting the life of an average citizen of this community, they are going to start complaining.

WP: Yes, and [they] have.

JP: But the power of the developers is that they will say, look, we want to expand, that's jobs, more people come, more businesses, it helps the economy, more taxes, better schools, that growth is not only essential but beneficial. How do you counteract those kinds of statements?

WP: In the first place, you go back and examine the tax history in the county, which I don't think anybody has done recently but I did several times and printed the results. The truth of the matter is that as the community grows, the per capita tax rises. Growth doesn't lower your taxes; it actually raises them. I think in most any situation, you can check the tax records and that is what happens.

JP: I noticed that the 1000 Friends of Florida gave you an award, and I also know that there is a Waldo Proffitt Award for the best article written about the

environment. I'm sure you feel very good about that kind of recognition of your efforts.

WP: Hm-mm [yes].

JP: What is the future of Sarasota? Is it going to end up like Ft. Lauderdale?

WP: Well, it could. I hope that it will be enlightened enough to avoid that fate. The Sarasota County government and citizens have been devoting a great deal of time and thought to that question. What do we want to be when we grow up, in effect? A lot of people have been thinking about it, and I think just the process will help to keep us from making some of the worst mistakes we could make.

JP: One of the comments about you when you retired, even from people who might have disagreed with some of your editorials and some of your positions, was that "he was incisive, fair, and balanced and wrote with integrity and was an independent thinker." I would say that would be about as good of things as you can say about an editorial writer.

WP: Oh, yeah, I'd be pleased if that was all true.

JP: But there is a difficult circumstance when you are trying to write about such a crucial issue for Sarasota because part of the economic success is tourism. If you come in here and destroy what makes this a beautiful community, you ultimately undermine the economic base, do you not? It's sort of like despoiling the Florida Keys, and then after a while, nobody wants to go to the Florida Keys.

WP: That's right, absolutely, and that's the message that we have tried to deliver, that a healthy economy depends upon a healthy environment. They go together. If you have one, you have the other. If you don't have one, you don't have the other one, either. The enlightened businessman or the enlightened developer, in their own self-interest, will choose to do business and to develop in a way which will not endanger the future of the community.

JP: The problem is, as I see it, that neither the federal government nor the state has a sound pragmatic energy policy, number one, and a very efficient or effective growth management policy. Would that be fair?

WP: That's an understatement. Our national energy policy is a disaster, and, effectively, there is no state growth policy. The Bush administration has undermined it.

JP: You're talking about things like Preservation 2000, where they would purchase land and wet lands, mitigation, and that sort of thing?

WP: Yeah.

JP: If you had an effective state policy, how much difference would that really make on the local level? Don't many of these decisions have to be made on the local level?

WP: Yeah, and should be. But your pollution standards can and should be set and enforced at the state level, and that will make a big difference on what happens at the local level. If, for example, you say, thou shalt not pollute rivers or thou shalt not pollute underground aquifers, that makes a difference. Regulations can make a big difference in what you can do locally.

JP: It at least gives the local officials a standard where they can at least decide to adhere to that standard. In the long run, that strengthens all of the people's attitudes, as it were, because this is the state law and we have to adhere to that, even though something might provide more jobs. I think at one point, some oil company was going to try to build a refinery around here, and the newspaper came out against that, right?

WP: Yeah. Belcher Oil Company wanted to build an offshore unloading dock for supertankers some fourteen or fifteen miles off of the coast, which would have been a disaster, and we contributed heavily to the defeat of that. There are three or four people or organizations who can claim that they defeated that because the margin of victory was something like 498 votes. Either one of these groups, including the newspaper

JP: The Sierra Club and organizations like that?

WP: Yeah, and ManaSota-88, which was the leading environmental organization of the two counties. Any of us could have swung that many votes, so it took all collective efforts, but that was defeated.

JP: Let me ask you a few generic questions that you were kind enough to prompt me with. Why did you suppress a prize-winning photo in Charlotte and therefore learn a lesson that would help ease school integration in Sarasota?

WP: Okay. Good question. I was city editor in Charlotte at the time that President Eisenhower called out the National Guard to assure peaceful integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, which was probably 1957. I was really happy to see him do that because that helped to take a little of the heat off of Charlotte, which, as you know, is close to South Carolina, which, as you know, was a hot bed of the KKK and White Citizens' Councils. Charlotte had a White Citizens' Council operating under another name, and Charlotte was under order to integrate some schools that year. They were starting with the early grades,

and we had a really tense situation. The fact that Eisenhower was willing to send out troops to integrate schools, or to assure that local governments would integrate schools, affected what happened in Charlotte.

On the first day of school, we did indeed have black kids going to a certain number of first grades, and we had photographers. This was one of those few events that happened, fortunately in the news cycle, for the afternoon paper, so we had reporters and photographers out at all the key spots. One of our photographers came back with an absolutely world-class picture of a little black girl dressed up in her Sunday finery walking down towards the school with great gobs of spit drooling down her face. He brought me this picture, and I took it in to Brodie Griffith, who was the executive editor, and I said, Brodie, look at this. This is a prize-winning picture. Yeah, he says, it might be, but not in the *Charlotte News*. I said, Brodie, how can you say that? He said, very simple. If we publish that picture, there will be blood in the streets. We didn't publish it, and the next year it won first prize in a world contest in Amsterdam. That taught me a lesson. So, when I came to Sarasota, which probably was in 1962 or 1963, the Sarasota School Board voted to send a few black kids to previously all white schools. They were not under court order. We just had a right-thinking majority on the school board, and they wanted to get started, and they did. I didn't send very many reporters out on this and even fewer photographers. I told them to get some good constructive shots, and we did. We covered it very thoroughly, and we had a few pictures that would have been inflammatory, nothing in the same category as the other one, but we just published the positive stuff. I edited them out, and things went off very smoothly. Now, I must say that in a sense this integration was not successful because it didn't go on and progress.

JP: You're talking about Sarasota?

WP: Sarasota, yeah. It did not go on up with more black kids going to white schools each year because there was no real pressure from the community. The black community did not instigate this. This was not something that they had started, so they didn't feel any stake in it. Some years later, new and more active black leadership came forward, and they pressed for really substantial integration, and it happened, which is another lesson in this or any other situation where a group is involved in advancing its right, its economic position or what have you. The impetus has got to come from them. They have got to have a stake in it.

JP: This was pretty late in coming, wasn't it?

WP: No, this was pretty early.

JP: Was it? What years was this?

WP: This was 1962 or 1963 in Sarasota.

JP: Charlotte was really a little bit ahead of the curve, weren't they?

WP: Yes, it was, as was Little Rock.

JP: Is there anything that we have not talked about or questions that I have not asked you that you would like to comment on?

WP: Gee, I don't think so. You have been very thorough. I'm really surprised that you have allowed me to wander so far afield.

JP: It was great, and on that note, I want to thank you for your time.

WP: You are very welcome. Thank you for coming down.

[End of the interview.]