

FNP 69

Interviewee: Carrol Dadisman

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

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P: This is Julian Pleasants, and it is August 19, 2003. I am in Tallahassee, Florida, and I am speaking with Mr. Carrol Dadisman. Would you tell me where you were born and educated, knowing full-well that you are a red and black [University of Georgia] alumnus?

D: [Laughs.] I was born, actually, in Statesboro, Georgia, which is my mother's home, although my family lived at that time in Jefferson, Georgia, a little town in northeast Georgia near Athens. I grew up in Jefferson and went to the public schools there.

P: Then you went to the University of Georgia.

D: I had one year at Emory [University] at Oxford [Georgia]. I thought I was going to go on to school at Emory, but Emory dropped its journalism school about that time, so then I transferred to the University of Georgia as a sophomore in 1953. I had graduated from high school in 1952. Then, I did the remainder of my undergraduate work at Georgia in journalism and graduated with an A. B. [Bachelor of Arts] in journalism in 1956.

P: When did you decide that you wanted to be a journalist?

D: I decided that in high school. I thought I wanted to be a sports writer. I was a great sports fan. I loved sports and I played sports, although I was never a star athlete by any means. But I loved to read the sports pages, mostly the Atlanta sports pages in those days, and I thought I wanted to be a sports writer. So, that first got me interested. I worked on my high school paper, and my interest in journalism broadened to cover more than just sports. Actually, I never worked in sports [journalism], even at the university. There was no school paper at Emory at Oxford. It was a very small school when I was there. But at Georgia, very early on, I got involved with *The Red and Black* and worked up the ladder there and served as editor of *The Red and Black* and several other positions on the paper.

P: How did that experience as editor of a campus newspaper influence your professional career?

D: I think it had a great influence on it. We had some very good journalism professors and some very good newspaper advisors. A fellow named Dan Kitchens at Georgia at that time was a *Red and Black* advisor. We learned very good professional techniques, and I think it gave me a very good grounding. The other thing that it did, being in a journalism school provided contacts for us in the

newspaper world and helped us gain internships. Actually, I passed up an internship on the Atlanta newspaper between my junior and senior year because I was working then part-time on campus for the agricultural extension service editor's office. I chose to stay with them for the summer, which might have been a bad decision. At any rate, the person who offered me the internship was Don Carter, then the city editor of the *Atlanta Journal* and later became one of my closest friends and a real mentor to me in the newspaper business.

P: The *Atlanta Journal* then was the afternoon paper.

D: That is right. The *Journal* was the afternoon paper in Atlanta.

P: What major issues did you have to deal with when you were editor of the campus paper at Georgia?

D: This was in the 1950s. I was there when the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954, racially segregated schools unequal and unconstitutional], came down and so, of course, that was a major issue on all college campuses and throughout the country. The reaction of the Georgia governor and other state officials to that decision and other related Supreme Court decisions, naturally, was a big thing. We tended to be, I guess you would say, liberal on the college paper and tended to react negatively to the governor's opposition to those Supreme Court decisions.

P: Was this Ernest Vandiver?

D: This was [S.] Marvin Griffin [1955-59]. Marvin Griffin was governor of Georgia, elected 1954. Vandiver [1959-1963] came after.

P: Did you take an editorial stance about the integration on the campus?

D: We did. In fact, [there] was a major controversy [with] some editors during the very first quarter I was at Georgia. I was not actually working on *The Red and Black* at the time. This was in 1953, before Griffin was elected. Herman Talmadge [1951-1955] was still governor then. The editors of *The Red and Black* wrote an editorial criticizing Talmadge for a strongly segregationist speech. A fellow named Roy Harris, who was an attorney in Augusta, Georgia and chairman of the Board of Regents, read the editorial or heard about it and got very upset and threatened to clamp restrictions on *The Red and Black* editors, which prompted the editor and managing editor to resign. Subsequently, the third-ranking editor, Priscilla Arnold, the news editor, also resigned. So, the whole top echelon of *The Red and Black* resigned over that controversy. They already had a Board of Control for *The Red and Black*, but it was essentially inactive. After that episode, it became more active, although we felt, as the group of

editors who immediately succeeded them, we still had a lot of freedom. Dan Kitchens, a faculty advisor, interceded for us and pretty much kept any real censorship from happening. That was a big episode in the history of *The Red and Black* during the time I was there.

So, yes, we wrote on those subjects, and there were a lot of campus issues. I think the first column I ever wrote for *The Red and Black* was about the need for buses on campus. Now, I go up to Athens, and there are buses all over the place. I can't claim that I am the one responsible, but maybe my voice was one of many heard over the years.

P: I wanted to briefly go over your background before you went to work for Knight Ridder and ask you a little bit about how that experience helped you. You were at the *Augusta Chronicle*, so you did a little bit of everything. You were a reporter, assistant city editor, managing editor, and wrote editorials. Then you went to the *Marietta Daily Journal*, where you did editorial page work and a column and were the editor.

D: And oversaw the newsroom. A very small staff in Marietta, so I did a little bit of everything there.

P: How did that help you prepare for your later work?

D: Both of those cities helped me a lot because, as you say, I did a little bit of everything. In Augusta, I had several different jobs in both news and editorial, including the managing editor job that I got when I was twenty-nine and oversaw a staff of, I think we had, maybe forty or fifty people on the news staff. I must say, I really was not prepared to be a managing editor at age twenty-nine, but we made it through and it gave me a lot of good experience. Then, in Marietta, because we had probably a staff of fifteen or twenty on that paper, but I was the editor, that meant I got to do a little bit of everything. If we had somebody out, a desk person out or a reporter out, I might be playing one of those roles any given day.

P: How often did you publish that paper?

D: It was six days a week. Augusta was seven [days a week], but Marietta was a six-day-a-week paper. We had a Sunday paper, actually. We had no Saturday paper. We had a Monday-through-Friday afternoon and a Sunday [newspaper], technically, [a] Sunday morning [newspaper], but we actually published it on Saturday and delivered it on Saturday afternoon to avoid the head-on competition with the Atlanta paper on Sunday mornings.

P: I should point out that I erred in pronouncing the name. It is "May-retta".

D: [Laughing.] Yeah. You know Georgia pretty well.

P: How did you and why did you decide to go to work for Knight Newspapers.

D: That is a very good question. I had grown up with the Atlanta paper, Jefferson being just sixty miles from Atlanta. The Athens papers and the Gainesville papers weren't much in those days, and we subscribed to the Atlanta papers and those were the papers I read. When I went to Augusta, of course, it was right on the border of South Carolina. The Augusta paper, among the papers they subscribed to, were the South Carolina and North Carolina papers, including the Charlotte, North Carolina [*Observer*] paper. I was really impressed with the Charlotte paper. I used to read, particularly when I was on the editorial staff, the exchange papers pretty closely, and I was really impressed with Charlotte. Although Charlotte was a smaller city than Atlanta, I thought, wow, this is a better paper than the one I grew up with. That was really my introduction to what was then Knight Newspapers because that was one of the few Knight papers in the 1950s. This was long before the merger with Ridder.

That planted the idea in my mind that I might want to work for the Knight organization. In fact, when I was still in Augusta, I had some correspondence with them and went up to Charlotte and interviewed, and it just didn't work out. I guess I wasn't offered the job. I don't remember all the particulars. But I did not go to Charlotte. I went on to Marietta and served there for six years. But I maintained this interest in Knight, and, of course, the longer I was in the daily newspaper business, the more I learned about all the newspaper organizations and learned of Knight's very good reputation, particularly in the news and editorial field. They were really known as papers that had very high quality news and editorial presentations. That was the part of newspapering that interested me most. Of course, that was the only part I was involved in at that stage of my career. So, I maintained this interest in Knight.

Then, while I was in Marietta, enter Don Carter again into my life. Don, as I mentioned earlier, had been the city editor of the *Atlanta Journal* when I was in school at Georgia and had offered me an internship at that time. Don subsequently went off and served some time in other [places], with the *Wall Street Journal* and the Newspaper Fund and was the first managing editor of the *National Observer*, a paper no longer in publication. He was hired by Lee Hills of Knight Newspapers to come back to Georgia to be the executive editor of the Macon papers. Shortly after that, at a function at the governor's mansion in Georgia during the time that Don's cousin, Jimmy [Carter] was the governor of Georgia [1971-1974; U.S. President, 1977-1981], Don and I were both there along with other media people learning about, I think, Jimmy's upcoming budget or something like that. He was presenting it to the press. So, I was able to make acquaintances again with Don Carter after all these years and talk to him that

night and expressed to him my interest in Knight Newspapers. Although I was basically happy in Marietta, I didn't think that was my ultimate career destination. I told Don if he heard of anything in Knight Newspapers that might interest me and that I might be qualified for, I would like to know.

Well, not long after that, he got in touch with me. It developed that there was a managing editorship in Macon that came open and about the same time a managing editorship in Charlotte. I interviewed for both of those jobs and really thought I might be going to Charlotte, but Byron Harless, who was then the personnel chief of Knight Newspapers, called me and said that he thought they needed me more in Macon and that I had a lot of good experience in Georgia, and so I went to Macon then. That was my first job in Knight Newspapers.

P: That decision was made by Knight Newspapers, as opposed to . . . ?

D: Well, I can't be sure, but I got the impression that both Macon and Charlotte were ready to offer me the job as managing editor and let me decide, and I think Byron Harless thought that they shouldn't do it that way, that they should decide which one was going to offer the job, and so then he called me. I think he and the editors in the two cities sort of worked that out.

P: After that, you went to work for the *Columbus Ledger*.

D: Right. I was in Macon for [just] two years. During the time I was in Macon, Knight Newspapers bought the *Columbus Ledger* and *Inquirer*, which had been owned by the [R.W. Page family, Alvah Chapman's mother's family. Knight] bought the Columbus papers during that time, and then Don Carter, although still the executive editor in Macon, they had a very small corporate staff at Knight Newspapers then and they gave Don the additional responsibilities of bringing the Columbus papers into the organization and working with the editors there. They decided shortly after that they needed to make some changes in the editorial management in Columbus, and they asked me to go over there, which was really a big break in my career. I had taken what some might view as a backwards step in leaving an editorship to become a managing editor in Macon, but I thought that it promised better things. Then, when two years later, I got a chance to become executive editor of two newspapers in Columbus, that was a big step, a big break for me.

P: Plus, you had a lot to deal with at Fort Benning and the military.

D: Right. That was obviously a very big influence.

P: Did you ever have any expose of what went on in Phenix City, Alabama?

D: That was before my day in Columbus. That was a very big thing and, you know, the *Columbus Ledger* won a Pulitzer for exposes. I learned after I got to Columbus that although the *Ledger* and *Enquirer* all those years were owned by the same family, same corporation, the newsrooms actively competed [with each other]. I knew that was the case. That had been the same story in Augusta when I worked over there and in Macon. The *Columbus Enquirer* thought they should have won the Pulitzer, but the *Ledger* was the one. They both did good work on Phenix City, bottom line, but the *Ledger* got the Pulitzer Prize. The *Enquirer* had won a Pulitzer in the 1920s when the editor was Julian Harris, the son of Joel Chandler Harris.

P: He was famous for writing children's tales such as *Uncle Remus*.

D: Right.

P: When did you come to the *Tallahassee Democrat*? I understand it was in 1980.

D: 1980, yes. I served in Columbus in the same job, executive editor of the two papers, for six years, from 1974 to 1980. Coincidentally, about the time I left Macon and went to Columbus—that was in 1974—that was the year of the merger of Knight and Ridder. So, our company, during that time, became much larger, had a larger corporate staff, etc.

Anyway, yes, by 1980, late 1970s, I had enjoyed my time in Columbus, but I was still in my mid-forties, and I hoped that there was another career move for me somewhere along the line. At that time, I had no aspiration to be anything more than an editor. Editor was the ultimate job in newspapers to me. Also, Knight Newspapers had traditionally had a structure that had no publisher. We had a general manager who supervised the business operations of the paper and an executive editor who supervised the editorial and news departments. Neither of those reported to the other. They both reported to corporate bosses. So, all the six years I was in Columbus, a fellow named Glenn Vaughn was the general manager and I was the executive editor, and we both reported to corporate vice presidents. Of course, we had to work closely with each other and get along, and we did, but there was no publisher.

P: Was that true throughout the chain?

D: It was true throughout Knight Newspapers before the merger.

P: Except for the *Miami Herald*? Jim Knight, I think, was the publisher.

D: Yes, well, but that was a titular thing. Well, I guess Jim Knight was at one time the functioning publisher of the *Herald*. He lived in Miami for many years. So,

there may have been exceptions, but for the most part, Knight Newspapers did not have publishers. They had general managers and executive editors.

P: When you came to the *Tallahassee Democrat*, you came as a [general manager]?

D: Yes. I was going to give you a little background. Ridder did have publishers. Knight essentially bought Ridder, but Ridder had about an equal number of papers, and they called it, more or less, an equal merger. Immediately, Bernie Ridder became one of the corporate officers. There was a true merging of the two companies and the two cultures. Partly because Ridder did have publishers and partly because, I think, the person who was then Knight Newspapers CEO, Alvah [H.] Chapman, really preferred the publisher system—in his days before joining Knight, he had been a publisher. For those two reasons and maybe others, in the late 1970s, Knight-Ridder Newspapers began to move to the publisher system. That had happened in several cities. I really had hoped to move on to be an editor maybe in Charlotte or some larger city than Columbus. But when they decided to go to the publisher system, one day, Don Carter and Dick Capen, who were the two vice presidents in Miami whom we reported to in Columbus, came and sat down with me and told me that they thought I had other jobs ahead of me but that they [had] a better career path for me than trying to be an editor of a larger paper. I had spent my whole career on papers about the size of Columbus and smaller [and they said] that a better path would be to try to become a publisher, if that interested me.

After consideration and talking about it with my family, I decided that was the path I wanted to pursue. The whole idea of coming to Tallahassee was to be general manager. That was kind of arranged. I was technically hired by Gus Harwell, who was here as publisher at the time, but I know he was strongly encouraged by the corporate people who were trying to place people like me in positions to sort of be in publisher training.

P: Publisher-in-waiting, as it were.

D: Right. My wife and I were somewhat reluctant to make that move because we had already moved around a bit in our lives. It appeared that coming to Tallahassee meant making not one move but two moves. Probably, I would be coming here to be in publisher training under Gus for two, three, four years and then have a chance to move again. Well, the happy ending to the story for me was that about fifteen months after I [arrived] here, Gus got a chance to be promoted. He got a promotion to corporate headquarters as vice president. So, I was his general manager with no responsibilities for the newsroom but learning about the business side of the paper. Then after he was promoted, I got a chance to succeed him as president and publisher, which was, again, a big break

for me.

P: What is the title president, specifically?

D: That is the corporate title. The working title is publisher, so publisher is the title I used in town, and I was known generally as the publisher. That is the newspaper title. But we had corporate offices. There is a *Tallahassee Democrat Corporation*, although it is fully owned by Knight-Ridder. I never even attended a board meeting of the *Tallahassee Democrat* officers because they were always held in Miami, and the Knight-Ridder corporate officers, of course, they controlled the stock... It was just a paper thing.

P: Yes. So, you did that until June of 1997.

D: That is correct.

P: Now, let me ask you some specific questions. When you took over as publisher of the paper, how did you organize the newsroom, or did you turn that over to another managing editor or executive editor?

D: There was an executive editor here whom I inherited, Walker Lundy, a graduate of the University of Florida.

P: I know him.

D: Walker was a very able editor, and he was a strong supporter of my getting the job, which I appreciated very much. Of course, he and I had worked together as editors in Knight-Ridder and had gone to meetings together and so forth. Then we had a year and a half to work together in Tallahassee, and we had a good relationship. I was happy with Walker as the executive editor.

P: Would you define his job responsibilities?

D: He was responsible for the news and editorial content and staff of the newspaper. As the publisher, I immediately became a member of the editorial board. Gus had been a member of the editorial board, and that was generally true throughout Knight Newspapers. In some Knight-Ridder newspapers, the editorial page editor reported directly to the publisher. We did not have that system in Tallahassee, and we never had it during all the years that I was here.

P: But you have it now?

D: That may be true now.

P: There is a woman who is the editor.

D: Mary Ann Lindley. She reports directly to Mike [Pate].

P: I don't know, but she is listed in the masthead as the . . .

D: Well, she would have been listed in the masthead, too.

P: Okay.

D: I had a close relationship with the editorial page editors. I always backed them. In my six years of editorial writing in Augusta and my years of writing columns, I always had a special interest in the editorial page. I loved the editorial pages and so on.

P: Did you write any editorials while you were publisher?

D: I wrote columns on a fairly regular basis. I tried to write every Sunday, but it worked out to be more like every other Sunday.

P: But no editorials?

D: Maybe one or two or three. I can't remember the subjects, but it seems to me that I wrote just a handful of editorials over the years, but not on a regular basis.

P: But you would meet with the editorial board and discuss that?

D: Oh, yes, and we genuinely discussed the issues and tried to come to some consensus.

P: Which is somewhat unusual, I think, now. I was talking to Diane McFarlin in Sarasota, and she as the publisher rarely meets with the editorial board. She may meet with them if they ask her or if she feels like they need to say something on a particular news topic.

D: Different publishers do that in different ways. My impression is that Mike, my successor, still meets regularly with the *Tallahassee Democrat* editorial board. Sometimes in larger papers, the publisher, for whatever reason, doesn't do that. Size might not have much to do with it. Diane has an editorial background, and I would think that she would have great interest in that. But I don't know. It is a different company, and maybe they do things differently.

P: It varies, I am sure, according to the individual anyway. Now, when you took over the *Tallahassee Democrat*, can you give me some idea of what the circulation

was and were there any major problems that you faced when you took over that paper, either financial or in distribution or staff?

D: The paper was financially very strong. Gus was an excellent manager and had a substantial profit margin. The paper had good managers. It was basically in good shape. The paper had recently converted from afternoon to morning publication. That was just before I came to Tallahassee. It was in 1978, I believe, and I came here in 1980. So, that was still a relatively new development, and people were still adjusting to converting to morning publication, which is a big change in people's work schedules and work habits, and it was a change for readers as well. In conjunction with that, about a third of the building had been added to add a new press, so some really major things had happened in Tallahassee prior to my becoming publisher, and good things. I think the circulation when I started—I would have to check the records—I believe it was around 40,000 in 1980.

P: How do you view the death of the afternoon newspapers? There were a lot, as you know, Atlanta had both and in Fort Lauderdale and other cities, they would merge.

D: Oh, I regret it. I liked it in the days when we had morning and afternoon, and I liked the competition. I know from living it that there really was competition, even though we all worked for the same company in those cities, where I worked with morning and afternoon papers. The news staffs genuinely did compete and felt a keen sense of competition, and I think that served the readers well. Of course, we all recognized that a number of factors influenced the death of the afternoon paper, television probably being the biggest of those. The afternoon papers thrived in the days before TV and in the days of more blue-collar workers when people generally started to work earlier in the morning and got off at 3:00, 4:00 in the afternoon and came home and welcomed the chance to sit down with their afternoon newspapers before they had television and so many channels to watch.

P: When you started out as publisher, did you have any specific goals that you wanted to achieve while you were in that office?

D: Yes. I loved all of the newspaper and I still do, but I had a background in the writing end, in news and editorial presentation of the paper, and that was always the part that interested me most and motivated me most. While I recognized and loved all the other parts as being integral to the success of newspapers, my interest in becoming a publisher was motivated in large part by trying to help improve the news content and editorial content of the paper. In Tallahassee's case, I felt that, as I mentioned earlier, the paper was very strong business-wise. I didn't think it was as strong as it should be in news content and editorial content. It had some very good people here, but I thought more resources

needed to be devoted to that end of the paper. It was particularly apparent in Tallahassee, being a state capital and having other larger Florida newspapers sold here and all had bureaus here, so people in Tallahassee were much more conscious of other Florida papers than people in another city might be. So, we were constantly being compared, and they probably still are being compared to St. Petersburg and Miami and Orlando and Tampa and the larger papers that have representation here and are sold here. That particularly comes in to play, of course, in covering the state capital because our state capital bureau has to compete with the bureaus of those larger papers.

P: And covering the legislature is a prime responsibility for the *Democrat*.

D: Oh, yes. Our readers were and still are constantly pointing it out anytime the *St. Pete[rsburg Times]* gets a story before we do or [the] *Miami [Herald]* or *Tampa [Tribune]* or whatever. We can't get them all first, but we certainly should be competitive, even though we are a smaller paper with fewer resources. People don't generally think that much about that. They think, well, I pay my quarter or now fifty cents for their paper just like I do for all the others. They ought to do the same thing for me.

P: Yes. Well, you have to compete with Lucy Morgan [Tallahassee bureau chief for the *St. Petersburg Times*] sometimes.

D: [Laughing.] That is right. So, I thought that a big part of what I had to do was to try to continue to build on the business success of the paper to provide more revenue and, therefore, more resources and also to convince my corporate colleagues that we needed to maybe take not quite as much out in profit and put a little bit more into building the paper. The thing that gave me the most satisfaction over the seventeen years that I was at the *Democrat* was that we were able to do both of those things. It didn't happen overnight, but in the early 1990s, we had approved, by the top corporate people, Jim Batten and Tony Ridder at that time, a major improvement plan that expanded the news hole and expanded the staff at the *Democrat*.

That was sort of the single biggest event, but it was a series of things over the years. For example, when I started in 1980, the paper was a standard two-section newspaper, all black and white. Sports did not have its own section. It was inside the local section. I don't remember the news hole, but it wasn't very large. Over the years in the 1980s, we were able to expand to a standard four-section paper, sometimes more but at least a minimum of four. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, we added special sections to the point that we had a special section [every day]. That usually was a tabloid section, one on business, one on health, one on entertainment, one on families, sports.

P: Yes, I saw today the section was on families.

D: That is right.

P: Now, in the context of competition, I notice that the *St. Petersburg Times* is for sale here. It is not for sale in Gainesville. And I notice that there are several competing papers here, partly because, I assume, that they have permanent staff here.

D: Well, and they want exposure in state government. They want the top state officials reading their papers.

P: So, that really is an unusual set of circumstances because by now, most newspapers are really regional papers so that the *Miami Herald* no longer brings papers to Gainesville or Jacksonville, for example. Orlando does. But you are sort of regionalized, yet you have competition.

D: All the major Florida papers are sold here, and that is what I was referring to earlier. That makes our competition very visible to all of our readers. Not nearly all of our readers read all of those papers, but they are at least exposed to them.

P: But your advantage, my presumption would be, on better coverage of local news?

D: Yes, definitely. Then covering the legislature better and all of state government better was a major goal of ours and something that we improved over the years, and I think that they have continued to improve the state government coverage.

P: How important a challenge was television to you as you expanded the newspaper?

D: Not so much. It was a challenge in advertising, but let me answer first the news part. News-wise, not a big challenge. We have a strong TV station here, WCTV, for a market of this size. It totally dominates the television market in this area. They do a pretty good job for a television station in a city of this size, but they don't do nearly the local news coverage that the *Democrat* does. So, we were able to constantly beat them, I think, and they still do in news coverage. But it is a strong station and it reaches a lot of people, and, therefore, it appeals to advertisers and so it's a very, very active advertising competitor. Our market share of advertising probably was reduced during the time I was there and has been reduced some more, I think, since I left. It has just been a trend that is true in most markets around the country. When I started in the newspaper business and well into my career, in the 1950s and 1960s and maybe even the 1970s, we used to brag in the newspaper business that nationally, we got more advertising

revenue than radio and TV combined. Well, of course, that hasn't been true now for a good many years.

P: What are the most important functions of a newspaper?

D: The most important function of any newspaper is providing information that readers need with an emphasis on local information because there are so many other information sources nationally, regionally, state and so forth. But being a lifeline for readers. Providing the information and news that we need in our lives everyday.

P: Do you see your paper as an advocate, perhaps, in environmental issues or with political issues or with issues like abortion?

D: Certainly. The editorial function. I spoke of the news function. The editorial function goes right along with that, and, yes, as I said, I always loved editorial pages, and I feel very strongly about the advocacy function of newspapers.

P: How did your audience change from 1980 to 1997?

D: I don't think it changed all that much. Certainly, Tallahassee grew a lot in the 1980s and in the early 1990s, more than it is growing now, I believe, percentage-wise. With the influx of more people, we certainly got a more sophisticated readership and less provincial. That probably applied even more in the 1960s and 1970s in Tallahassee. Tallahassee was a pretty good size town by the time I came here. But other than that, I don't think the dominant political philosophy in Tallahassee changed that much. I guess a more sophisticated audience and a better educated audience over the years [were the biggest changes].

P: How do you get young people to read the newspaper? My experience has been that very few current college students read a newspaper.

D: Well, that was one of our very largest challenges and remains one of the very largest challenges for newspapers everywhere and accounts for circulation declines nationwide as we progress into other generations. We did a lot to try to reach more young people. We had a very active newspaper in education program to try to get kids in the elementary, middle and high schools reading the newspaper.

P: So, you would give away papers to schools and things like that?

D: Yes, we got sponsors for them. No, we didn't give them away. We started out selling them to the schools. Then when they didn't have the budgets to cover

them, we would sell them for half-price because you could get credit for circulation if you sold it for half-price or better, but you didn't get any credit if you didn't. Of course, circulation wasn't the main consideration in newspaper in education. The main consideration was trying to train a new generation of readers, but you would like to get the circulation credit as well.

P: It is always the bottom line.

D: Yeah, right. Then later, we got into a very active—I think a lot of newspapers have this—sponsorship program where we would get businesses to supplement the newspaper purchase by schools, and then we would recognize them, of course, in various ways in the community. We also did things like youth pages and high school pages and all kinds of things, and I think those things worked, but you are fighting a strong tide of young people who are more interested in television and computers and video games and lots of other things.

P: Plus, I guess most kids might read the *Flambeau* before they would read the *Democrat*.

D: Well, the *Flambeau* is no longer in existence, but during the time I was there, yes, it was, and still they have a paper called *FSView*. I guess they incorporated the name of the *Flambeau* because they bought the *Flambeau* for competitive reasons in later years.

Yes, I think that is certainly a factor in a college town that they read the college paper, but the readership problem is greater than that. It is not just college students, of course. It is young adults that we face the challenge to get them into the newspaper.

P: How did reporters change from 1980 to 1997?

D: I think they became more inclined to get some of their opinions into the stories and to want to write columns and editorials, not altogether. But I don't think there was a recognition that there was when I started in the business of just stick to the facts in news stories and save the opinions for the editorial page. I think that began in newspapers before 1980. I think, back in the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of television and maybe other factors, a lot of us editors started saying just reporting the facts is not enough because television or other broadcast media can always beat us to the facts, so we have got to be more analytical. So, we started putting much more analysis in our news columns and usually labeling it analysis. But allowing reporters more freedom to, if not express their own opinions, to get analysis and interpretation and considerations in stories other than just the facts. I think that continued to spread and, I would say, is still spreading. Writers tend to get more opinionated. I think that was the biggest

change that occurred over the forty-one years of my career and to some extent from 1980 to 1997.

- P: I think some of them wanted to be Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein [*Washington Post* reporters responsible for uncovering the Watergate scandal that ultimately led to Richard Nixon's resignation as U.S. President].
- D: Well, that was a factor, too. That is a good point. It wasn't just television and just analysis. It was seeing things like the Woodward/Bernstein phenomenon that had such a big impact on our business.
- P: One individual told me he thought that the reporters were better educated and more sophisticated. This was an old-time publisher, and he said, I can remember the days when reporters would turn out eight or ten stories a day. He saw a big difference in that regard.
- D: That is a good point, and that is in some ways a function of years and in other ways it is a function of the size of the paper. It is probably not true in Marietta now, but when I worked in Marietta, the publisher I worked for, Otis Brumby, a family owner who is still the publisher of the paper there, laid down the rule at one point, which I objected to but he was the publisher and I was just the editor. He laid down the rule that every reporter was expected to write four substantial stories a day. By the time my career ended, you were lucky if you would get four a week out of some. Although we still have some older reporters who are very prolific and who turn out a lot of stories. Yes, that changed a lot. I think to some extent, that is the function of the size of the paper. I think in Philadelphia and New York, they have been having lower productivity for many years.
- P: How would you rate your newspaper while you were there with comparable newspapers in the state? I presume the *Gainesville Sun* and maybe Pensacola would be pretty close to your . . . ?
- D: I think we ranked very well. We generally did well in the contests, although nobody was blowing everybody away. There were some other good papers, Gainesville, Pensacola, Daytona Beach. But I think we ranked certainly very competitive, and I would like to think we were the best in that group.

[End of side A1]

- P: I was looking at the *Tallahassee Democrat* today and I think there were five letters to the editor. When you were publisher, who chose the letters, and how have they changed over the years?
- D: The letters were chosen by the editorial staff. Now they have a letters editor. We

didn't really have anybody with that title during the time I was there. The editorial page editor and the two associate editors, and, I think, we had what we called a clerk or something. I guess they have kind of converted that. Anyway, they decided—I don't think there was any one person but it was the four or five people who worked on the editorial staff—what letters were published and worked with the letter writers in cutting them down to size to be published and so forth.

P: How important were they?

D: Oh, I think very important. I think the letters of any paper are very well read, and that is particularly true in a town like Tallahassee with very strong opinions and great interest in government. That helps the *Democrat* totally. It is a good newspaper town because there are a lot of well-educated people here and a lot of people who like to read, and I think they are interested in other people's opinions. You get some very prominent people writing letters to the editor.

P: Would the editorial board ever respond to any of these letters?

D: We tried to hold responses down. I will say that they are still doing that. Occasionally, we would add an editor's note, but I always said and others I worked with, I think, agreed that we should exercise that with great discretion. People shouldn't think that every time they write a letter the newspaper is going to have the last word.

P: When you presented the editorial page, the left side is editorial opinion. Did you try to provide alternative views or at least alternative opportunities for people to write op-ed pieces?

D: Yes, [we] definitely did that, and I think most newspapers [do]. Certainly at the *Democrat*, we tried to provide, not to the extent that the *USA TODAY* does it, where there is an editorial in the same paper presenting the other side of their lead editorial, but we over time certainly tried to get views in that represented other views than our own. One program that we were quite proud of, and I believe Bill Mansfield, the editorial page editor of the *Democrat* in the 1980s and early 1990s, really originated. I know a lot of papers do this now, but he was really one of the early editors to invite what we call community columnists to write on a regular basis. That was a very active program. I regret to say that they haven't continued to keep that on the same level that we did. I think they still have some group of community columnists who write occasionally, but we had it going on a very active basis, I think, running as many as three of these a week. We developed some really good writers. A big thing every year was having people apply to be community columnists. Although we were selecting only maybe nine or ten a year, we would get eighty, ninety, sometimes maybe more applications from people who would sit down and write. We would require them

to send in two or three sample columns. The editorial board and sometimes including the publisher really spent a lot of time poring over those, trying to pick out the best and a representative sample of people. So, we were quite proud of that program.

P: You might do something like invite the head of United Way to write a piece about what United Way was doing?

D: Well, yes. That was different. I mean, the community columnists wrote on a regular basis and usually weren't prominent citizens, and then, yes, we ran what we called and they still call, "My Views," in the paper, which is sort of an adaptation of something, I think, *Newsweek Magazine* started some years ago, "My Turn" or something like that.

P: They still do.

D: Yes, and they still do that, and that is still something that is pursued quite frequently.

P: How important are editorial endorsements from the *Tallahassee Democrat* for political office? I presume you did do that.

D: In national and state races, I think they are pretty insignificant. In other words, I think in major races like president and governor and even the major local races like sheriff or mayor or something, the people who vote generally learn enough about those races to make up their own minds. The lower down the list you get, the more important the editorial endorsement becomes, in my opinion. That is true not just in Tallahassee but just generally. I think people don't take the time to learn about all the city commission races and county commission races and voter registrar races and all these other offices.

P: Particularly judicial offices.

D: Judicial offices is a good example. I think they tend to look to the paper for some direction and leadership in those offices. So, the endorsement is sometimes critical in those races, I think.

P: Would you interview the individuals in these races and then collectively come to some sort of decision?

D: Yes, and that required a lot of the editorial board's time. When I first started as publisher, Bill Mansfield and the others who served with him at that time, thought it was important to have individual interviews with all these candidates. That was just so demanding in terms of time that I suggested—and I suggested for another

reason, too—that we started to interview them in groups so that we had all the candidates for mayor, all the candidates for sheriff, or all the candidates for judge come in. Not only did it save us time, but I liked to see them side by side, and I thought we could size them up a little better when they were sitting there in the same room. Then if one made some charge against another candidate, we could just turn to that candidate and say, what about that? So, we started doing that, and even that took a lot of time because usually those groups, we had to be with them at least an hour. During election season, it got to be pretty burdensome but I thought important. I regret that the *Democrat* chose [to limit endorsements] in the last election, and maybe some other papers are making the same decision. They have cut back on the number of offices [for] which they endorse. The primary reason they gave was the time constraint, the time required.

P: I don't like labels, but if you had to put a political label on the paper when you were publisher, was it liberal or conservative? I realize the name *Tallahassee Democrat* doesn't necessarily mean that.

D: Oh, it caused a lot of problems for us because it was founded as "little d" democrat, but people don't think of it that way. I would rather avoid labels, but if I had to, I would say that we were a liberal paper by local standards, moderate to liberal by local standards, but by national standards, I would clearly put us in the moderate category. Tallahassee, by Florida standards, is a liberal city. I mean, you look at the voting records, and we almost always vote—Gainesville does, too, I think—for Democratic candidates.

P: Well, the two highest votes that Ralph Nader got in 2000 were in Leon and Alachua counties. That is a limited number, but I think Al Gore carried Leon, did he not?

D: He did, yes. He carried it by a substantial margin. I don't know when the last Republican candidate carried Leon. It has been a while. Reagan might have his second term.

P: Although now the entire state government is Republican.

D: That is right, but the people who work for state government and universities and live in Tallahassee are still predominantly Democratic. I guess the Gore/Bush [presidential election] is the most recent good example of that. Although Jeb Bush in his re-election bid lost Leon County, too, and he lost it the first time as well.

P: To go back to the purpose of a newspaper, do you ever see the newspaper as being sort of the conscience of the community? I know that is kind of a moral standard, but did you ever see that as a responsibility that you had?

- D: That is a pretty heavy burden to put on a newspaper. I know people sometimes talked about that, and I guess I liked not to think that that was our responsibility, to be the conscience of the community, although in certain respects, yes. I think in terms of being the watchdog in government, we clearly take on that role and relish that role. In that sense, I think we are the conscience of the community.
- P: Let me ask you about editorial cartoonists. Did you have your own editorial cartoonist?
- D: We did not, I regret to say. That was one thing that I had hoped that we could do while I was at the *Democrat*. I am glad that they now have [Doug] Marlette as a *Democrat* cartoonist. He is still syndicated, but this is his home paper now.
- P: Is it? Does he live here now?
- D: I don't think he is living here. I think he is still living in North Carolina, but he seems to be drawing more and more for the *Democrat*. I don't keep count, but he has cartoons in there several days a week.
- P: He was in the paper today.
- D: He was in there today, and I think over the year or two that they have had him, it seems that he is getting into more state and local subjects.
- P: Which is what you want a local editorial cartoonist to do. The syndicated ones have to do national issues.
- D: Right. It is a real good addition. The papers I worked for throughout my career seemed to always be just not quite big enough to afford our own cartoonist. I guess it was a matter of priorities.
- P: The *Gainesville Sun* has had one for several years, and he is quite good. In fact, I knew Doug Marlette when he was in Charlotte. He has been syndicated for twenty-five years, I think. When you were editor, what kind of editorial cartoonist did you use? Did you use people like Herblock [editorial cartoonist for the *Washington Post*], or did you alternate? How did you choose?
- D: When I was editor in the Georgia papers and actively involved in production of the editorial page, we had a selection of cartoons, and we tried to vary the political flavor over time. Of course, the biggest consideration was to try to be timely and the cartoons that were good and timely, but we tried not to let them all be pro this view or anti this view.

- P: When you were publisher, did you have any say over what columnists were picked and, even of greater importance, the comics?
- D: Columnists, yes. The editorial board assumed that responsibility of deciding which columnists ran on a regular basis. Now, the editorial staff, primarily the editorial page editor and whatever people he assigned to help him, they would sort things out, and I didn't get involved until the later stages. But I would sometimes be involved in the selection of columnists. Our effort there was to get a variety of views and a variety of backgrounds and diversity in terms of females and races and so forth.
- P: So, you might have George Will and Molly Ivins or something like that. I noticed in the paper today that there were no national columnists that I was aware of. One was with the Knight-Ridder syndicate, and one was with the *Washington Post*, but no major names.
- D: The *Democrat* has moved in that direction. I am not sure about other papers, but they tend to get columns off the Knight-Ridder news wire or whatever they call it. They move a lot of things from other Knight-Ridder papers on the Knight-Ridder Tribune Wire Service. So, I believe they don't buy as many truly syndicated columns as they used to, and they get more off that and develop some of those people into regular columnists.
- P: Is that a good idea?
- D: Well, I regret that they dropped David Broder, who is one of my favorites. [The Broder column returned to the *Democrat* shortly after this conversation.] They do still have [George] Will and they still have Molly Ivins, who is a big name in the syndicate world. I grew up in the years when there were a handful of really big names, and I enjoyed that. I like diversity, but I think maybe they have taken it too far so that if I picked up [the paper] today [and see] somebody I am not familiar with, I am not as likely to read the column unless it is a subject that really compels me.
- P: From talking with other editors and publishers, my understanding is that people not only like to read those individuals, they look forward to them. They know, let's say, George Will comes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or twice a week or whatever, they look forward to reading his column, or whoever it is, Maureen Dowd, that this is someone they particularly like to read.
- D: Right. I think that is an attraction, so in answer to your earlier question, it may be a mistake, it may not be a good idea, to be moving in that direction.
- P: I saw something in the paper today that kind of intrigued me. I don't think I have

seen it before. There is a little section called "Zing." Did you put that in? I guess it is called "spicy opinion." Do people send in e-mails?

D: Right. That was beginning in some papers when I was still active at the *Democrat*. Our editors at one time wanted to start that, and I didn't allow it as publisher. I did not like the anonymity of those columns, and I feared that people were going to get away with a lot of cheap shots anonymously and that it really wasn't fair, that people should sign their names to their opinions, as they do in letters to the editor. We ought to just do more to encourage the letters column. So, I was a definite detriment to that ever happening at the *Democrat* while I was there.

Sometime after I left, not immediately but some years after I left, they started this Zing column. I must say that I do read it, and I think that it has worked out pretty well. I have no idea what they get in terms of the unpublished Zings, but they seem to be doing a good job of keeping cheap shots out. It has turned into a nice addition to the page, I think, for the most part being kind of a humorous [commentary], not-lighthearted because there are some pretty heavy hitting in there. It is mostly people whom we consider fair targets, like the president, the governor.

P: I noticed there were a couple of shots that were not particularly mean-spirited.

D: Yes. I think they have taken out the more mean-spirited ones. If somebody writes something about a private citizen or a lesser-known, they don't publish those kinds of things. So, I think they have done a pretty good job of selecting the Zings to be published. If I would have it to do over again, I still don't know whether I would allow it in my newspaper or not. It is entertainment, I think, more than anything else.

P: Is that one of the changes and/or problems with newspapers? They are getting more into the entertainment business than the news business?

D: I don't think newspapers are particularly guilty of that, no. I think television is clearly getting into more entertainment. Speaking strictly of editorial pages, I think they still need more humor. Humor doesn't equate to entertainment always. I think one redeeming factor of Zing is that although it is not intended to be a humor column, people get off some pretty clever lines, and it is a different approach and it provides a little change of pace and, in a sense, humor. They also carry a syndicated humor columnist from time to time, but there are just not many of those around. Humor is difficult to write, I know, but I wish we had more Art Buchwalds.

P: Do you carry Dave Barry at all?

D: They do carry Dave Barry in the features section, not on the editorial page. Yes, Barry is carried on Sunday on a regular basis here.

P: When you were a publisher, how much investigative journalism did you do?

D: We did a fair amount for a paper of our size. We tried to always have one reporter whose primary role was investigative and was given enough time to do investigative projects. I felt and still feel very strongly about that. I think that is a very important role of newspapers, in terms of the watchdog function and also in terms of the competition with the broadcast media and other newspapers, to be able to do investigation. There is so much that needs to be investigated, and I don't mean that we are a corrupt society, but I mean there are lots of things around that ought to be [investigated]. It is not always investigating wrongdoing but investigating and getting depth out of our public institutions that we too often don't get.

P: I remember Tippen Davidson telling me that in Daytona, they did a series of exposes of restaurants that were violating health codes, which is important, and some environmental problems and some issues of poverty and roads that needed repair. There are a lot of things that are out there in this realm of investigative journalism.

D: One of our most prominent ones when I was publisher was investigating the sheriff's office and some of the abuses of the local sheriff's office. It was a different sheriff from the one we have now, but I think it really made a difference.

P: He eventually had to resign, did he not, or was defeated?

D: No. He subsequently retired, probably earlier than he would have otherwise.

P: I look at, for example, the Enron scandal, and two business reporters literally uncovered that scandal which then unraveled all across the business world. This was a major, major story. I am sure in terms of the *Democrat*, what goes on in the state is of comparable importance. Let's look, for example, at child welfare, there were a series of missteps by the state in terms of childcare. Would these be the kinds of things you would want to pursue?

D: Oh, yes. I think all Florida papers are guilty to some degree in letting the child welfare thing go on as long as it did. I mean, it is not just the newspapers. The agencies are primarily responsible, but no Florida paper, to my knowledge, investigated that sufficiently for many, many years. It might not have gotten into the shape that it did had a newspaper been more aggressive in looking into that.

So, yes, that is a prime example, that kind of thing. There are lots of agencies in state government that don't get a lot of attention, and they need more attention. Of course, the big challenge for papers always is to take limited resources and try to do these things. You can't take on everything, especially on a paper of this size. We were always stretched to do what we would like to do in terms of all the things we needed to cover. Just as an example, and I don't think there is any great wrongdoing there, but we have a civic center authority here that has just been covered off and on through the years, and they handle a lot of public money through the various universities and local governments that finance the civic center. That is just one example.

We do a very good job of covering city commission and county commission meetings and the major local government, the school board and things like that, but there are lots of other things that need more delving into. Of course, newspaper reporters are generally not trained accountants or they are not trained lawyers. So that is another problem, that a lot of those areas you get into, you really need some knowledge of law or accounting.

P: As publisher, how would you have reacted to the current story where FSU President T. K. Wetherell has apparently intervened in a case where a Florida football player was accused of rape?

D: I would have encouraged our newsroom to be very aggressive in trying to find out everything they can about that. I hope there were no sacred cows when I was at the *Democrat*, and certainly if there was going to be a sacred cow, FSU and FSU football would be one in this town.

We did have a case. I wasn't really functionally involved in it, but back about the time I became publisher, back in the early 1980s, the *Democrat* under Walker Lundy's editorship was very aggressive in reporting front page for days at a time about questionable finances at FSU. I don't remember the details of all that, but it appeared. It wasn't so much misappropriation of funds. It was just loose handling, as I recall. The state got interested. I don't remember whether they got interested before or after we did. Anyway, the paper, although you might think that a Tallahassee paper would be reluctant to be real aggressive in going after FSU, it went after it pretty aggressively, and I would hope that they would do the same thing in this case you are talking about.

P: Newspapers, from what I can determine, with maybe the exception of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and *L. A. Times*, the major papers, are doing much less work on investigative journalism. As you indicated, it is time-consuming and it is costly.

D: Of the papers I read, I would say that is true, yes.

P: Is that something that you regret?

D: I do regret it. There are a number of reasons for that, but, certainly, one reason for it is something we haven't talked much about in this conversation yet, [which] is corporate journalism and the heavy influence of Wall Street on operation of newspapers through demanding more and more profits from newspaper companies.

P: I presume that Knight-Ridder would come to you and give you a budget every year and expect you to meet that target.

D: Right. They would give me a general target, and then I would submit a budget. My management team and I would submit a budget, and we would negotiate about it. They would wind up dictating what the bottom line finally was. Yes, that is the way it works in corporations, including newspaper corporations.

P: Carl Hiaasen told me that Tony Ridder came to the *Miami Herald* and said, 25 percent. I can quote Carl. He said, I know cocaine dealers don't make that good a percentage. That is really a very high profit margin.

D: Newspapers have high profit margins. Of course, that is a pretax, pre-corporate overhead profit margin. That is your operating profit margin that he is talking about, and then later corporate has to take out its expenses and they have to pay the taxes. We didn't have any line in local [budgets] for the federal taxes. But still, it is a high margin. You know, it was well-publicized what happened to Jay Harris in San Jose, and there were other less publicized cases in Knight-Ridder of people who left or complained bitterly or whatever about the emphasis, and the march goes on. I mean, they are demanding greater profit margins now than they were when I was there.

P: And so I notice a lot of newspapers have smaller sized papers, they are dropping pages, they are firing reporters, they are cutting back on expenses in general.

D: That is happening all over.

P: And does that not affect the quality of the newspaper?

D: Oh, it absolutely does. There is just no way around it. It absolutely does. I mean, the *Democrat*, no fault of the local management, in my opinion, I am sure they are being squeezed. The corporation is demanding a higher profit. I know for a fact they are demanding higher profit margins. I don't know all the details, but I know that Knight-Ridder Newspapers, throughout the corporation, are demanding higher profit margins. Just recently, the stock market listings have

been reduced here. They said by half. It seems to me more than half but [it is] a major cut in the stock market listings. They made some other changes. The television book, which used to be a quarter-fold book that was stitched and would hold together--now is a tabloid that comes apart when you open it up, and it has gotten a lot of complaint from readers. They did that as a cost measure because they can produce the tabloid section on the press considerably cheaper over a year's time and save quite a bit of money.

P: So, is much of this stock driven?

D: I think so. I think it is stock market and Wall Street driven. Now, Tony Ridder would say--and he may be right, he knows more about it than I do--that they have to do this to avoid being vulnerable to a takeover, seeing the stock market price drop and being a weaker corporation and therefore more vulnerable to takeover by a company that would be even more profit driven than Knight-Ridder is. There certainly are companies out there like that. I mean, we do still have high news values in Knight-Ridder, but it is certainly a different company than it was when I started in terms of the balance of values, in my opinion.

P: Is that true for all the other chains, the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*?

D: I think it is.

P: Is that why there are so few independent papers? Even weekly papers, there are just not a lot. The most prominent, of course, is the *St. Petersburg Times*, and that is only because of Nelson Poynter who organized it that way. Do you see the whole concept of conglomerate journalism as sort of undermining the quality of journalism?

D: Well, I wouldn't say that because in my lifetime, I saw what I would say are two major somewhat countervailing trends in that regard. I saw a lot of newspapers, including some in Georgia where I grew up and I know a lot about, where corporate ownership improved the newspapers, and I felt like I was a part of that. I think when first Knight and then Knight-Ridder bought the papers in Macon and Columbus, they definitely made those papers better than they had been under their individual local owners because the local owners, not for Wall Street reasons but for, I guess, their own selfish reasons squeezed those papers tight and got a lot of profit out of them, too, over the years. Then the corporations were able to bring certain corporate efficiencies in and primarily bring an expertise that hadn't existed before, and I hope I was a part of that in places like Macon and Columbus that the papers really improved.

It seems to me in later years--and I don't understand all the reasons on Wall

Street or in the stock market or in the big business corporate financial world of this country—that the corporations have felt themselves under more and more pressure to produce greater and greater profits. That is probably true in all businesses, not just the newspaper business. Then there is a certain competition in newspapers. I mean, Gannett, for example, has been demanding higher profit margins from their papers than Knight-Ridder. We used to say in Knight-Ridder, you know, we were the [company] that cared about the news quality. That was generally our perception, and I hope it still is in the business, that we produced better quality papers than Gannett, although they produce higher profit margins. Tribune was also known as a company that generally had high news and editorial standards. Anyway, it seems that now everybody says, well, if Gannett can do it, why can't you do it, or if [Rupert] Murdoch can do it, why can't you do it?

- P: Speaking of Gannett, I know when they took over the Pensacola paper, they completely revamped the newsroom, put in new technology, new computers. The New York Times [corporation] did the same thing for the *Sarasota Herald*.
- D: There certainly were a lot of improvements made originally by corporate owners. You ask about so many papers being part of corporations. Of course, almost all papers, with a few exceptions like St. Pete, are now. Big newspaper companies in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were paying top dollar to buy these papers because they knew they could put these efficiencies in and that they could make even more money. Newspapers were a very profitable business and still are, despite all the competition that exists out there that didn't always exist.
- P: Did Knight-Ridder ever try to influence you in any of your editorials or any of your news decisions?
- D: No, they did not. I can say that without qualification. That was strictly a hands off corporate policy. I will tell you a little anecdote. We had an editors' meeting back when I was still in Columbus as the editor. We were meeting with some of the corporate staff in just a regular editors' meeting that we held periodically to compare notes and talk about things, you know, here is what we are doing and you might find this [helpful]. An editor from North Dakota who was particularly interested in some agricultural issue made a little speech about how we could all help if we would get behind Congress to do so and so. Before he got through, the corporate vice president intervened and said, now, you are not suggesting anything like a corporate editorial policy, are you? And that was the end of that conversation. In other words, don't go there. And probably the best evidence of that during my time [is], and still, I guess, papers in Knight-Ridder in a presidential race go all kinds of ways. Some endorse the Republican, some endorse the Democrat, some don't endorse at all or they endorse through varying levels of enthusiasm et cetera.

P: Did you ever have a problem from any advertisers as a result of some editorial or some article you published?

D: Absolutely. A number of times. With some frequency, I guess you would say. We had some really major incidents where advertisers got together and threatened to boycott. Real estate advertisers, I believe, during the time I was there, or automotive, or maybe both. Those tended to be mostly local advertisers and didn't have the more sophisticated view of newspapers that generally department stores and others who were parts of big national groups. Some of them sometimes felt—I certainly would not say that all of them did—that they spent so much money that they should be able to control the newspaper. Oh, yes, I had to deal with advertisers who felt that they had been wronged in the news columns or who wanted to influence the news columns. That was a major factor in my life, yes.

P: Did you meet with them?

D: I would try to meet with them as the publisher and listen them out. I remember a couple of occasions when we had editors meet with them because I thought they had some legitimate reasons. There was an example I remember. Sometimes editors, they don't do it to deliberately hurt the local merchants but sometimes they do it just unthinking. Like we published a big full-page cover feature in our Living section or something one time about how you could buy your furniture directly from the dealers in North Carolina. There is nothing wrong with saying that in the paper, but it was like we were advocating that this was the way to do it and there was no other way. We did not present the disadvantages to that system, so, of course, the furniture dealers were just outraged, our furniture advertisers. As I recall, on that occasion, I allowed the furniture dealers to come into the paper and sit down with the editors and explain their position. You know, it didn't get into a shouting match, but they obviously felt very intensely about this. I think we might have published a subsequent feature which sort of gave the other side.

P: A little more balanced view. Of course, the bottom line in a sense is that even with television, particularly for automobile dealers, the newspaper is probably their best source for advertising, is it not?

D: We certainly thought so.

P: They probably need you as much as you need them.

D: Oh, yes. That is right. We knew that, but we did not want to be so haughty and arrogant that we said, you just go take a hike and you'll be back. We tried to listen them out but knowing in the back of our minds that they needed us as

much as we needed them, sure.

P: What was your biggest source of advertising when you were publishing?

D: In terms of a category?

P: Yes, just in general, automobiles, department stores.

D: Department stores, and particularly during the time that we had both Gayfers and Dillard's. After Dillard's came to town in the early 1990s, that was a big boon to us because we already had Gayfers here. Gayfers had a big store, and then Dillard's came in. We had others like Sears and [JC] Penney.

P: And they would take full-page ads.

D: They ran a lot of full-page ads, and they had the biggest contracts. Now, automotive was big as a category, and it may even be bigger now. Of course, Dillard's is the parent company of Gayfers, so it is all one. There is no Gayfers anymore in Tallahassee. There are just two Dillard's stores, [which] effectively cut their department store revenue by a big margin. Automotive, in the meantime, has come on strong in recent years, so it may well be that is the strongest category right now.

P: One of the things I think you demonstrate by your membership in several community organizations, United Way, Economic Club, the Capital Cultural Center and so forth, is the publisher's responsibility of being involved in community affairs.

D: Right. I felt strongly that a publisher, not necessarily an editor and probably not a reporter, but a publisher as the head of the company should be active in the community, particularly [because], due to the nature of Tallahassee, we are one of the largest private employers in town. Even as publisher, I had to watch that. I didn't want to get into a situation where I was dealing with anything like a quasi-government organization or anything that was so much in the news. For example, although many publishers have done this, I chose not to serve on the chamber of commerce board and be chairman of the chamber, which I could have done. I certainly had a chance to serve on the board, and I probably could have ultimately been chairman if I had chosen that route, but I felt it was enough of an advocacy organization in the community that I shouldn't be a part of that, in addition to which sometimes they were privy to things that they were keeping out of the paper, like an industry that might be looking at Tallahassee. I just didn't want to get in that situation where I had to keep things from my own newsroom.

P: You didn't want any conflict of interests at all.

D: I didn't want any conflict of interests, so the organizations I was active in were not like that. The Economic Club, I enjoyed it, still enjoy it, but it was basically a meeting and eating club and brought some interesting speakers to town, but it didn't make policy. So, I avoided policy-making organizations. Once in Georgia, I was invited by the Speaker of the House or President of the Senate to be on a state ethics commission, and I declined that. I did not think that was appropriate for a newspaper editor to do that. You have to watch those kinds of things. Some newspaper editors and publishers just say they shouldn't join anything, but I have never felt that way.

P: And some I have talked to are even more active.

D: That is right. Some are.

P: They get involved in politics and everything.

D: Right. I never got involved in politics. I have gotten involved a little bit since I have retired, in terms of contributing to campaigns and being a little bit active in campaigns. I did none of that as publisher.

P: Tell me how technology changed your newspaper from 1980 to 1997.

D: Primarily in the way that the pre-press pages were prepared. This changed even more since I have retired. They have gone to so-called pagination where everything is done on computers. I guess the biggest change, although we had a word processing system that produced stories and we did the editing in it in 1980, we got a much more sophisticated system in about the mid-1980s here, so that was certainly a step up in terms of computer production of stories and editing. But we continued all the time I was there to turn the type out, black type on paper and wax on the back and stick it down on the pages, we continued to do that throughout the time I was there. Since then, they have gone to the full pagination where they do the pages on the screen and turn out full pages at a time. We were already offset, so, you know, not the biggest changes. The biggest changes, in terms of technology, came in my career in other cities. I mean, I was still in Georgia when the computerized . . .

P: Hot type?

D: Oh, yes. When we made the big change from hot type to cold type, that was earlier in my career, yes. Although that was still happening in some of the larger papers in the 1980s. Tallahassee was already fully cold type.

P: And that was partly through the conglomerate? Do you think that Knight-Ridder wanted to update the technology throughout their system?

D: Yes, although that probably would have happened with a private owner, in all honesty. I think that was happening in privately-owned papers as well as corporately-owned papers in the 1970s and 1980s.

P: How did the new technology affect your coverage of the news? Obviously it is more efficient and it is faster, but did it affect at all how you cover the news?

D: That is a good question. I think it affected how we edited the stories more than the way we covered. It didn't really affect the reporter's life that much, but once they wrote their stories, then you could involve more editors more conveniently in terms of looking at [the copy].

[End of side A2]

D: We did not have the luxury of having lots of editors, but between the managing editor, city editor, news editor, assistant city editors and so forth, it was much easier to pass stories around. I would like to think we caught more errors that way, and more questions were raised, and the writing was honed. So, the whole editing process was better with the computerized writing and editing.

P: When you made errors in the newspaper, where and how would you correct the error?

D: We went through several phases of that. At one time, we were determined to correct the errors on the same page where they were made. So, if an error was made on the front page, we would run a little correction. If the error was made in the top story, we wouldn't necessarily put the correction at the top of the page, but we would insist on it being on the same page. Then at other times, we did it in the same section. We said if was an error in a local story, we would make sure it got into the local [section]. If it was on the editorial page, we would put it there, and so forth. Probably during my career, we did what many papers do now, which is to group all the corrections in one place in the paper.

I don't think there is any perfect way to do that. I do think the newspapers ought to feel a special responsibility if it is a error made in a headline or on the front page or involving a photo. I think it ought to be more than just a two-line standard body type correction somewhere in the paper, and I see that sometimes. I think that each one, in a sense, has to be judged on its own, although you need some kind of standard policy. But if it is a really major error, one that got a lot of attention, then you should try to draw some attention to the correction as well.

P: Normally would you get phone calls or e-mails that said, look, you spelled my name wrong, or the serial killer has been misidentified? If you made an egregious

error, someone would let you know?

D: That was usually the case. Sometimes I would notice it myself because I was out in the community a lot and knew a lot of people. If we ran a picture with the wrong cut line under it, I might recognize that, well, that is not that guy, and called it to the attention of the newsroom. But usually, somebody involved in the story will call it to your attention. We did some spot checking pretty regularly throughout my time as publisher of the *Democrat*. We developed a form that we would send to sources who were quoted in a story that just asked basic questions like, was your quote accurate? Did you think the story reflected the facts in the case?

P: This was after it was published, right?

D: That was after, and that is more of a check to see how good your accuracy is, and our record was pretty good on those.

P: Obviously, a newspaper can't correct all the errors in any newspaper. I was reading a newspaper recently. I read one page of the newspaper, and I came up with ten errors, either of fact or grammar or typographical. I look at it a little bit differently as an academic, and there are, to my mind, too many errors in newspapers today. I was wondering if that is a manpower problem, or is it a problem of just less attention to detail?

D: I think there are actually more errors in newspapers today, and I will give you at least one major reason for that. When we were still in hot type and everything was being set on the linotype, you had another chance for the error because you had to so-call re-keyboard or retype all of the [text]. The reporter typed it the first time, and then the linotype operator had to do it the second time. Even if you caught all or most of the reporter's [mistakes] in the editing process, then you had them happening in the linotype. Newspapers recognized that we had to have proofreaders, and all newspapers had a group of proofreaders who usually worked in the production department because they were primarily to catch the linotype operators' errors. But they also caught some reporters' errors, and they were generally good grammarians and well educated people, and they did a good job. I knew a lot of good proofreaders in my day.

When we went to cold type and we went to computerized typesetting, people said, oh, well, now what you see on the screen is what you get. There is no re-keyboarding, so the editors are going to be perfect and they won't let any errors go through, so we won't need proofreaders anymore. So, newspapers for the most part, including the *Democrat* while I was there, did not have proofreaders, and I think that is generally true of newspapers today. As a result, that is one of the reasons we get more errors all the way through the paper.

P: Doesn't that undermine your credibility to some degree?

D: Yes, I think it does. Papers have decided that would rather put their resources somewhere else.

P: One publisher told me that he had hired retired English teachers and had literally re-instituted a proofreading section for the newspaper.

D: I did never do that, I regret to say, but I thought about that very seriously when I was publisher, of re-instituting the proofreading in some way. It was just always a budget battle, and I hated to give up a reporter position or some other position to do that. Then we just never decided to do it.

P: He said the good news is that they found a lot of errors, and the bad news was that they found a lot of errors.

D: Yes. I share his views.

P: What do you think of this new concept of the converged newsroom? Media General, for example, owns the *Tampa Tribune* and owns the station. I think it is WFLA. They have a pretty powerful command of information in the Tampa area, and their theory was that if the newsrooms are merged that the TV can use reports by the newspaper staff and vice versa. Do you see that as the coming trend?

D: I am afraid [so]. For business and corporate reasons, I do see it as the coming trend, but for journalistic reasons that I go back to, I don't think it is a good idea. I regret to see that. I am opposed to the relaxing of the FCC rules. I think that is a bad idea. I think that it is not good for one company to own the newspapers and the TV stations in the same market.

P: Rupert Murdoch [Australian media magnate] might end up owning all of them.

D: That is right. He might. And if not Rupert Murdoch, it could be somebody else from out of this country. You can't tell what is going up and down the road.

P: What about some of the other developments, like web sites for newspapers? Do you see that as a positive change, or do you expect at some point that we will no longer have a newspaper as it currently exists and that people will either be reading off monitors or printing out the sports section, which is all they want to read?

D: Of course, all of us in the newspapers in the last ten, fifteen years have given a lot of thought to that subject. My own theory is that newspapers in something resembling their current form, printed form, will be around for a long time and will

not be displaced by reading it on the screen. I recognize that to some extent, reading it on the screen already happens, and I do it myself. I enjoy being able to read newspapers that I can't go out and buy in Tallahassee. But still, if I could get them, if I could get the *New York Times* delivered to my house everyday, I would rather do that than read it on my monitor. I do have it delivered on Sunday, which is the only day I can have it delivered. But I can't read all the newspapers I would like to read, so I like to check the *Washington Post*, where my son works now, and other papers, the Atlanta papers, because of my interest in Georgia, on the screen.

P: But you would check out editorials or specific sections?

D: Specific things. I wouldn't want to try to read the whole newspaper on the screen. There is just too much to go through. I am not a computer whiz, but even somebody who is faster than I am on the computer would have a hard time going through the whole paper on the computer. I think that web sites were something that newspapers had to get into, and they did do that while I was still active, and, of course, they have continued and accelerated that move. I think that was necessary, if nothing else than as a defensive move. We did not know where the Internet was going. We still really don't know where it is going in terms of being an information provider of the kind that newspapers are. I think it would have been a big mistake for newspapers to say, well, people are not going to do that and we are not going to worry about the Internet and we are just going to go our own way. I think that newspapers were smart to establish their own web sites and try to make them profitable. I guess most of them still are not, although I am not up to date on that. There is a fair amount of advertising on some newspapers' web sites. I don't know whether they are covering the cost of the Internet production or not.

P: Some newspapers are starting to offer high speed Internet access, starting to branch out in competition with other communications companies like Bell South. Some people in the newspaper business see that in the future.

D: Well, that may well happen. You know, I certainly don't claim to be the best authority on what the future holds in that field. I don't blame anybody for exploring possibilities. I guess that I am old-fashioned, and partly it is because of what I want to happen. I just think there is so much value in the portability of newspapers and the habit [they form]. It is just so much easier to read. At least, it is for me. Maybe the new generation won't find it that way.

P: Plus, I think one of the benefits, and this is from talking with other editors and publishers, is that the newspaper organizes all that material for you. You don't have to search. If you just want to read the editorials, you know where to go. Plus, with the front page or international news or whatever it is...

D: Of course, it is organized on newspaper web sites, too, in something of the same way.

P: But it is somehow easier to turn the page.

D: Easier for me to, yes.

P: How did the status of women change on the newspaper, and did you go out of your way to try to hire more women and promote them?

D: I will tell you a story. My wife [and I] met at Georgia in the early 1950s. She came to Georgia from Commerce, Georgia, to study journalism, started out as a journalism major. A professor we both knew quite well at the time, both took some courses under him, in a counseling session with him one day, they were talking about her future, I guess. She was still a sophomore or something. He said, you know, you may want to consider getting your major in something else because a lot of newspapers already have their women reporters. I mean, in those days, it was like if you didn't work on the women's page staff, there might be one token woman in the newsroom, and it was almost literally that way. There were not nearly the opportunities, which of course is the point of the story. She wound up changing her major to home economics and minoring in journalism, and she did some newspaper work later.

Anyway, there was a vast change. When I wrote some columns at the end [of my career] when I was retiring, I sort of reviewed my career in three or four columns in the last month I was at the *Democrat*. I said something to the effect that the biggest change—I was speaking of societal change and not just newspaper change—the two biggest societal changes I thought in my newspaper lifetime were in the status of women and the status of minorities, primarily blacks in the South. But as far as [in the] newspaper, yes. One of your questions was, did we deliberately diversify? I think at one point, we did. I don't know exactly when that point would have been. I guess in the 1960s, early 1970s, we were seeking more women for the newsrooms. Later, and I think continuing now, there was a much greater supply of women. Journalism schools are populated more by women than by men now. I know that is true in the journalism schools I am familiar with, and I think it is for most of them.

P: While we are on that subject, how important is journalism education for a career in newspapers?

D: Certainly, not essential. Many good newspaper people I worked with over the years and [whom] I know now did not graduate from journalism school. They got a liberal arts education or they got a legal education or they got some other kind

of education and either did that knowing they were going into newspapers or decided later to change to newspapers. It is certainly not essential. I always felt that it was an advantage for me. I knew what I wanted to do before I went to college, and I stayed with it. I didn't think that the course work in the journalism school was as important to my career as the contacts that I made by virtue of being in the journalism school. The exposure to journalists who came in to be guest lecturers or to attend the institutes that Dean John Drewry used to have as the dean of journalism at Georgia and the opportunity for internships and things like that [where] you learn a lot about the newspaper business, the very practical things about it, and you develop professional contacts while you are still in school. Some of those really paid off for me, so in that sense, I thought it was very important. I thought the course work was less important, although, you know, it helped to have courses in subjects like libel and history of newspapers and writing and reporting and reporting techniques and things like that.

P: Let me go back to minorities. In that category, did you make a concerted effort to hire more African-Americans?

D: Absolutely. We did, particularly in Tallahassee. We did that some in my career earlier, but in Tallahassee, one of the things that we did [was], Walker Lundy, [who], again, was the idea person behind this, [and] I had a lot to do with maintaining and building on his original idea, he came up with the idea of an extensive internship [program] with Florida A&M's journalism school, taking advantage of the fact that they were right here in town, and had minority students learning journalism out there. He and Dean Bob Ruggles, who was the dean of the Florida A&M Journalism School, started in the early 1980s a very extensive internship program which brought, maybe, five or six interns to our newsroom every semester. Of course, we didn't wind up hiring all of those by any means. We couldn't have, but it did help us make contacts that led to some permanent hires. In the meantime, it brought black faces into our newsroom and a minority presence much greater than we had before.

P: Talk about your relationship with the Florida Press Association. I know you were president in 1987 and 1988. While you were president, there were several major issues you had to confront. Would you comment on those?

D: It was an unusually active year for the Florida Press Association. The thing that I guess I remember best and that I am proudest of was the fact that it happened to be the year that the Florida press building in Tallahassee where the newspaper bureaus had been housed down behind the capitol on two city blocks, the city bought all that property and turned it into what is now Klemm Plaza, a huge underground parking lot and buildings on top of that. So, the building that the five newspaper owners had acquired and used as the Florida press building was no longer, and there was a real possibility—when I became president, this had

already happened—the bureaus were scrambling to find new homes and very little was being done to try to keep them together. I guess it was fortuitous, I hope it was fortuitous, that a Tallahassee publisher became president of the Press Association at that time. Of course, I was here in town, and I felt that was very important. Some of the bureau people felt that it was very important that they stay together, although we lost of couple of them who had already made commitments to other buildings.

Dick Shelton, [then the] executive of the Florida Press Association, and I got busy and looked at a lot of downtown property and wound up finding a site and a builder and making a plan that turned into a new Florida press building here, and it is still the home of most of the bureaus in Tallahassee. One thing that makes me feel so good about the fact that we were able to keep most of the bureaus together and build a building is that subsequently, quite a few years after I was president of the Press Association, the Association was able to buy the building. The original building that we had to abandon, where [Kleman] Plaza is now, was owned by five newspaper companies in Florida who were the joint owners because the Press Association didn't have the money to be the owner in those days. Even in 1987, when we were making the change, we couldn't finance the whole building ourselves, so the owners remained the same for some years after that. But then, subsequently, they were willing to sell their interests to the Press Association, and the Press Association did well enough through some of its advertising programs that it was able [to purchase the building]. It is probably still paying for the building, but anyway, it is the owner now. So, it is a permanent property, and it made the Press Association much stronger, I think.

P: Also while you were president, they set up the Florida Newspaper Hall of Fame.

D: That was established. During that period, I was on the board. I think maybe it was during the year I was president, or we started the ball rolling during that year and it got established the next year. Somewhere in that period of the late 1980s, the Hall of Fame was started, yes.

P: Also, I think, during that period of time when Bob Martinez was governor [1987-1991], there was this big issue about the sales tax, and that directly affected newspapers.

D: Indeed it did, and that was probably the thing that required the greatest amount of time for me as president in terms of the time I spent in official duties as president of the Press Association. We changed officers as they still do, I think, at the June convention. I believe it was in 1987 in June, and that was Martinez's first year in office, and that was the year that they passed the sales tax on services. At Martinez's behest, the legislature passed the sales tax on services [act] that was in effect from, I guess, something like April of 1987 until later that

year. Newspapers naturally opposed that very vigorously. Newspapers as a business opposed it vigorously. Not all newspapers opposed it on their editorial pages, and that is a story in itself because that created some real divisions in the newspaper business in Florida. But the Florida Press Association representing the business interests of Florida newspapers opposed the sales tax on advertising.

Then, by the time I became president, I think the law had already been passed, so my major emphasis during my time was trying to work with those implementing the laws as to how it was going to be applied and how actually a sales tax on advertising would be applied and to try to make sure that if our advertising in Florida newspapers was going to be taxed that all the advertising coming into Florida from out of state—out-of-state newspapers and magazines and all that—got taxed, too. We had a lot of conferences with tax officials in those months.

Newspapers continued to be unhappy about it, but as you may recall, the television industry was particularly outraged about the sales tax on advertising, and it really applied heavy pressure in the fall of 1987. There was a lot of talk about conventions boycotting Florida, and a lot of other things came into play that led Martinez ultimately to back down and urge legislature to abandon the sales tax on advertising later that year. It actually never became effective. It was to become effective in, I think, January of 1988, and it never became effective.

P: I presume the *Democrat* was editorially opposed to the tax?

D: I would have to go back and see exactly what we said. I am afraid that wasn't our proudest moment. There was a real division on the editorial board because Bill Mansfield thought that we, like the *St. Petersburg Times*, should say that the state needed the money and the sales tax should be applied to all services including advertising, even though it was going to hit our pocketbooks.

As both the publisher and later that year the president of the Press Association, and even while it was being considered, I was an officer of the Press Association, I was really torn about it because I could see the Mansfield/*St. Petersburg Times* argument and I agreed that the state needed more money, but I did think that there were legitimate concerns about the way it was going to be applied. I didn't see how all advertising coming into the state could get equal treatment with that in the state. I thought it was going to be unfair to Florida newspapers and to other Florida publications and television stations because I didn't think that the tax could be applied to everything out of state. So, I know I was opposed to it. Bill was in favor [of it].

I think we did some waffling on the editorial pages, to be frank about it. I don't

remember exactly how we came down. We tried not to be hypocrites, but it was a touchy issue.

P: I think people now think that, at the very least, some of the exemptions should be eliminated.

D: I continue to think that, yes. Whether it ought to be applied to advertising and lawyers' fees and accountants' fees, I am not sure, but some of the more remote exemptions, I think, clearly ought to be removed.

P: Let me get you to briefly give me a thumbnail sketch of your appraisal of a couple of Florida governors whom you would have observed pretty closely. Lawton Chiles.

D: I thought Chiles was a very good governor. I admired his strong stand on fiscal matters in both Washington and Tallahassee, and I thought he was a very effective governor. I thought he related to the Florida people, and they related to him. He helped education during his time as governor. He was not a governor who made nearly as many changes as [Reubin] Askew [1971-1979] did and [Bob] Graham [1979-1987] did, but I thought he built basically on what Graham had started in terms of education and social service.

P: What did you think of Bob Graham?

D: Not strong at the beginning but came on, and in the last six of his eight years, I thought he was a very strong governor and a very good governor. I think he is a good public official.

P: Jeb Bush.

D: My philosophy is different from Governor Bush [1999-present (2003)]. He is a nice fellow, and I see the reasons that he is in favor of what he is in favor of, which is, among other things, privatization of a lot of government. I don't think that is the way to go. I think that some things might be privatized, but private industry, the private sector where I worked for all of my career, is just different from government. It operates differently, and it doesn't perform functions like government, and some things are better done by government. I am not an enemy of government myself, and I am afraid that Governor Bush is, that he seems to think that everything can be done better by the private sector. I am not a fan of the alternatives to public education being used in Florida and other states.

So, I am not a fan of Governor Bush's philosophy. I don't think that he has improved education in our state, I am afraid, and I think that we are not spending as much money. I am not for high taxes, but I don't think it was necessary, for

example, to remove the intangible tax. I think, in a state that has no income tax, the intangible tax was fair enough and that we needed that money and that we are not doing very well by our children in terms of education or social services or, in my lifetime, highways. For example, in Georgia, they [the roads] used to be terrible. I don't know that Florida's were any better in those days, but Georgia compared itself to some other surrounding states like North Carolina and Tennessee, and we had terrible roads. Now, Georgia, for whatever reasons, is doing much better than Florida in road construction. So, Florida, I am afraid our infrastructure is lacking in many ways, and our education system, both higher education and secondary education, is still lagging behind most of the rest of the country. I think that could be better with a different governmental approach.

P: Let me ask you your assessment of the 2000 presidential recount. Who do you think actually won the state of Florida?

D: Well, I am not an authority on that subject, and I wasn't even in the newspaper business at the time, so I don't really have any knowledge that most of the general public doesn't. I think that it is pretty clear that if all the people who went to the polls that day to vote in the presidential election had had their votes recorded, [Al] Gore would have won by a substantial margin. Of the votes that actually were recorded and recorded properly, I don't think anybody knows yet who won, and maybe we never will know.

P: What is your view of *USA TODAY*?

D: I think it is an important contribution to newspapers in the country in terms of being a special kind of paper, in part a commuter's newspaper, in part a newspaper that everybody can relate to. I think it fills a niche. I hope it will never supplant the local newspapers and local news, but it fills a role, primarily for the traveling public.

P: Some of it was rather innovative.

D: Yes. The other big contribution it has made is that it has brought a lot of innovation in terms of color, in terms of graphics. Many of my colleagues in the years soon after its inauguration poked fun at it for some of its methods, but they wound up adopting a lot of them in terms of presenting things in graphic form, shorter stories, more photos, more color. In those senses, I think it has made some real contributions to the newspaper industry.

P: A lot of people are critical of these stories that jump to a back page, that it destroys the continuity.

D: That is another thing we fought throughout my career and went different ways. At

one point in Tallahassee with my encouragement, we ruled out jumps entirely and said that, although we know that some stories needed to be longer, we will put sort of a digest of that story on the front page and we will put a longer story in the back, but they won't be connected. They will be two separate stand-alone stories. The editors found that unworkable, and I guess if I had been still an editor, I might have found it unworkable, too. They wound up going back to jumps. I still think jumps are overdone. I think that a lot of jumps are unnecessary, and I would like to see papers minimize jumps.

P: One of the things that *USA TODAY* has done lately is, they have done quite a bit of important investigative journalism, which was not something that they were doing early on, for obvious reasons. The first three or four years, it didn't make any money. But now, they have sort of gotten a little bit away from "McNews" and have expanded at least their area of responsibility, but they still do not cover much international news.

D: I don't read it on a regular basis, so I wasn't aware of that, but I am glad to hear that. More power to them if they are doing investigative reporting. We need more of it. It is good to see that they are making money, and not only that they are making money but the extra advertising makes them a fatter paper, gives them more space to work with and so forth.

P: I should point out some of that comes from the founder, Al Neuharth, so maybe that is understandable. Obviously, he views it rather favorable.

D: Yes. You interviewed him, too?

P: I did not, but a colleague of mine did interview him. When you look back on your career, and here I would like to sort of focus on the *Tallahassee Democrat*, what would you say that the newspaper's greatest contribution was to the community and to the state?

D: Speaking broadly, I believe our greatest contribution to the community during those seventeen years was the significant improvements we made to the *Democrat*, the greater volume of content and the greater quality and diversity of content. In other words, we just became a better newspaper and therefore served our readers and the community better. Along the way, we also did a lot. I believed strongly in the newspaper sponsorship of worthwhile programs in the community, and we started and maintained the Volunteer of the Year, which is one of the big civic activities of the community every year. We started and maintained the High School Bowl, which is teams competing in the old college bowl format and going on to present prizes. We talked about the Newspaper in Education program. We used to sponsor Quality of Life seminars every year, which discussed issues, kind of like town hall meetings in the community.

Unfortunately, they don't [do that] anymore.

All of those things, I think, increased our service to the community, brought us closer to the community and made us a greater part of the community. It is hard for me to pick out one thing.

P: Were you involved in any critical Freedom of Information Act or First Amendment conflicts?

D: I am sure I was. None stand out. We had some libel suits. I guess the biggest Freedom of Information fight we had goes back to that thing I talked about, about the sheriff. One of the things that precipitated our investigation of the sheriff's office was that one of our reporters was doing a series on the jail and was out interviewing inmates at the jail. Her notes were taken from her, and they wouldn't give them back to her. Subsequently, she was arrested. It had something to do with notes being passed between her and an inmate, and she was arrested for some form of complicity with an inmate. They wouldn't drop the charges. We saw it as a First Amendment issue because she wasn't getting access to all of the records and the people at the jail we thought she should be. That became a big issue and sort of degenerated, or elevated or however you want to look at it, into a fight between me and the sheriff. It became a very personal thing. I wrote columns, and he criticized me. Ultimately, the charges were dropped, and she didn't get tried or serve any time.

P: But the paper would have supported her.

D: The paper did support her, and that won me a lot of friends. I mean, I hope I already had friends, but that won me a lot of support in the newsroom because I supported the reporter very strongly throughout the episode.

You asked about service to the state. I guess the extent that we served the state, and we really are not a big factor in the state as a whole, but our greatest service would have been an improved state government and legislative coverage.

P: Talk about your experience as a Knight International Press Fellow to Russia. How did that come about, and what were your responsibilities?

D: Tallahassee had a very active sister city program in Russia, in Krasnodar, for several years in the late 1980s and early 1990s where delegations went from Tallahassee almost every year to visit Krasnodar and some other locales in Russia. On some occasions, [although] not as frequently, we had delegations from Krasnodar come here. My wife and I went on one of those trips in 1987, and we were in Russia for about two weeks, visiting Krasnodar for almost a week and also making what really were sightseeing visits to Moscow, St. Petersburg and a resort city on the Black Sea, Sochi.

During that time, particularly Krasnodar was our most meaningful [visit], for obvious reasons. We were the sister city, and we had good contacts there, and a number of meaningful visits were organized for us. They tried to put us with counterparts. I was the only newspaper person on the trip, and I got a chance to meet with a Soviet journalist. Of course, this was still during the communist era, although [Mikhail] Gorbachev [General Secretary of the Communist Party in the USSR, 1985-1991; President of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 1988-1991] was in power and there were the beginnings of change in Russia. My daughter was in public relations at that time. She and I, with an interpreter, spent most of an afternoon with this Russian journalist, and it really whetted my appetite, my interests, for what they were doing to try to improve their newspapers and become less government dominated. Of course, after the fall of Communism, that accelerated greatly and more independent papers were formed. Anyway, that 1987 experience whetted my interests in international journalism and particularly journalism in Russia.

Then my active work as the publisher with the Knight Foundation enabled me to learn more about the beginnings of the Knight International Press Fellowship Program in the early, mid 1990s. At the time of my retirement, I knew something about this program and I knew some people like Ed Johnson from Gainesville, who had already participated in the program. I thought that would be an interesting and challenging and productive way to spend some of my retirement years, so soon after I retired, I decided to apply for a Knight International Press Fellowship. When you apply, you just apply to be a fellow. You can express an interest in a certain country or a certain part of the world, but it is up to them to try to match you up with a partner organization. I did express a special interest in Russia and Eastern Europe, and when I was awarded a fellowship, they assigned me to Russia. I was very pleased that they did. They assigned me to an organization called the Media Viability Fund, which was a rather small organization that was working with a very limited number of independent newspapers in about half a dozen Russian and Ukrainian cities at the time.

The fellowships were designed to be a minimum of two months and up to eleven or twelve months, and they preferred you be on the high side rather than the low side. I wasn't willing to commit quite a year, and I wanted my wife to go with me and it was going to be very difficult for us to leave for that period of time. We did commit, initially, to five months. We were going in July, and we decided we would come home in early December before the holiday period. That was with the understanding and approval of the people in Washington at the International Center for Journalists who administered the program.

Of course, we had communication with the Media Viability Fund before we went over there. Their office is in Moscow, but they had two papers in Chelyabinsk, a

city over in the Ural Mountains region, and they had one in Ekaterinburg, north of there, also in the Ural Mountains region, and they had two or three others. They decided they wanted me, as a Knight Fellow, to do a project in market research for Russian newspapers. They felt they might be able to help their client newspapers develop more market research and, therefore, improve themselves by learning more about their readers and advertisers. They wanted me to help the newspapers generally, but, specifically, they wanted me to talk not only to newspaper people but to advertising agencies to advertisers to readers to

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D: . . . market research providers and so forth. It was a little indefinite, but probably I would write some kind of paper about market research, and certainly I would help their newspapers inaugurate some market research projects.

We went in July. We decided I would go to Chelyabinsk first because they had two papers [and] they thought it was better if I worked in one of the regional cities rather than Moscow. They had two papers there, so we went there and lived for two months. I did a lot of my research there, and then I was going to go back to Moscow and write the paper, which I did in the MVF office in Moscow in September. Then, the remaining two months, October and November and perhaps early December, the plan was that I would then help the newspapers in maybe four, five or six locations initiate some market research projects.

It happened that that was 1998, and in August of 1998 was when the ruble was devalued in Russia, and the economy just went to hell much more than it already was. Newspapers, as other companies, started laying off people and cutting back their space. These were independent papers that already were struggling to survive. They couldn't even begin to think about putting resources into market research right at that particular time. So, it just seemed once I wrote the paper—which has, I hope, been widely used in Russia and has subsequently been broadened and reproduced by the International Center for Journalists for journalists in other countries, not just Russia—there really wasn't an obvious assignment. I mean, I could have stayed on with MVF, but there wasn't an obvious assignment for me. Our family was worried about us because things were getting a little hairy in Russia during that economic crisis, as you may recall, in August and September of 1998. So, we decided to cut the fellowship short and come home in September. Still, three months was a long time in Russia.

P: I know this is sort of a difficult assessment for you, but do you have any sense of how Russian newspapers have changed from *Pravda* and total state control to the point now where President Vladimir Putin has, from time to time, as you know, influence over newspapers. Are they moving toward a free press?

D: That is a difficult assessment. I haven't been to Russia [recently]. I did go back after the fellowship. I met some people over there who invited me back, not the MVF people but in another organization, and I went back to Russia two other times on two- and three-week consulting missions, once up in St. Petersburg and Vyborg, a smaller city north of St. Petersburg, and once way over to the far east of Russia to Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk, two cities on the Amur River right across from China.

P: By Vladivostok. You were way over there.

D: Almost to Vladivostok. Then on a trip with some University of Georgia people where they have an international center [in the] journalism school there, I went on a trip to the Ukraine. That was the last time I was in that part of the world on that kind of mission. I went to Yalta to conduct a seminar and to do some consulting.

Back to your question, at that point—this has now been three years since I was there—I would say that the independent papers were gaining, but things were slowly becoming better. The biggest change in the days you mentioned when they had *Pravda* and *Izvestia* and, I guess, a bunch of local papers, but mostly more like this country in terms of numbers, they would have one or two major papers in a city and then those big national papers.

Once Communism fell and so much property was privatized, one of the things that happened in the newspaper business was that many papers were started, often niche publications, but the cities I was in on all of those trips, it was not unusual for a moderate-sized city to have half a dozen or more newspapers. They might not publish everyday. In Russia, a daily paper is five days a week. There are no seven-day-a-week papers. Some of these papers I worked with were three days a week or two days a week, or some that I observed, or even weekly papers. But there were really a proliferation of newspapers in varying degrees of private ownership sometimes. Sometimes they were completely private, and sometimes it was kind of hard to find out. But sometimes they were completely privately owned, sometimes they were partly owned by private [and] partly by government, usually local government, not national government. Even some of those that were privately owned were owned by people that had ulterior motives, like political motives or something, really what you would call a dedicated journalist.

P: So, it is kind of chaotic in a sense.

D: Pretty chaotic. My impression is that it is still pretty chaotic. I don't have a good feel for whether the number of papers has increased or decreased. I really don't have a feel for how the change from [President Boris] Yeltsin [1991-1999] to Putin has [affected newspapers]. I mean, I read everything I can, but I still just

have a smattering of knowledge about what that change has meant to newspapers.

P: Let me try to finish up with one final question. I just thought it would be interesting to get your take on the Jayson Blair affair, how that impacted the *New York Times* in specific terms and how it may have impacted American journalism because some people say, well, if the *New York Times* is in trouble, all newspapers are in trouble.

D: The Jayson Blair episode just makes me very, very sad. In my years as a reporter and my years as editor and publisher, I never encountered anything like that and I never expected to encounter anything like that. Sure, we had some reporters who acted strangely sometimes and I am sure we had some reporters who were less than diligent in their reporting and did a sloppy job of reporting. I don't think I ever worked with anyone who went out and made up stories and just totally fictionalized the copy. In a sense, I can understand how it happened because you just don't have enough people in newspapers, I mean, reporters work on their own for the most part. Now, they have to bring their copy in to editors, but editors have to trust the reporters. They can't go with them, particularly in a case like Jayson Blair, where some of his work was done in New York but a lot of it was done in other cities. They can't have somebody looking over his shoulder everywhere he goes.

P: So, you don't see it as a problem of lax editorial control?

D: Well, it was in the sense that there was clearly some red flags that had gone up months before the end of this episode, and I blame the *New York Times* for not reading those red flags. You would think the *Times* of all papers with their reputation and their resources would have jumped on that, whereas a smaller paper with fewer people, it might have gotten by them. So, yes, I don't think it was inevitable that it went as far as it did.

P: So, you think that Howell Raines [*New York Times* executive editor] and Gerald Boyd [*New York Times* managing editor] should have resigned?

D: I think he should have offered his resignation, and I guess I think the publisher should have accepted. I don't think that is exactly the way it happened. I think it was the other way around. I think their resignations were requested. From what I read, I am pretty clear that is what happened. But, yes, I believe if I had been in Howell Raines's position and that had happened, I would have felt so responsible that I would have offered my resignation. One episode or two episodes, maybe not, but to allow it to go on for months like it did . . . .

P: Do you see it, as some editorial writers did, as a failure of affirmative action?

D: No. I mean, in a sense, I guess it was, but I don't think it is a failure of affirmative action. I think it could have happened with a white reporter as well as a black one. In fact, I saw a white reporter for *New Republic* magazine interviewed on TV, a similar case to Jayson Blair.

P: *New Republic's* Stephen Glass.

D: Yes, Stephen Glass. I saw him interviewed on TV the other night and the similar thing, of course, that he did.

P: Even worse.

D: In a sense, worse, yes.

P: Well, you remember Janet Cooke with the *Washington Post*?

D: Indeed, I remember that very well. That was very embarrassing to the *Washington Post*. I think a little more forgivable on the *Post's* part because I don't think they had the red flags in that case that they did with Jayson Blair. When you've got assistant news editors saying, we can't keep sending this man out, and they keep sending him out on stories, something is wrong.

P: Do you think the *New York Times*, by admitting mistakes and doing a thorough investigation and publishing everything, do you think they have salvaged their credibility?

D: I think they will come back. I don't think they have salvaged it all yet, but it is such a strong paper and such a good paper, I don't think it has ruined its reputation forever. But it will take a while for it to recover, and it will take all newspapers. I mean, it just hurts the credibility of all papers for something like that to happen. It feeds the worst suspicions that readers have about us.

P: Particularly the "liberal" *New York Times*.

D: Oh, yes.

P: People like [U. S. House Majority Leader] Tom DeLay are now saying, well, we don't have to trust anything the *New York Times* says anymore because they deal in fabrication.

D: And if they do, probably the *Washington Post* or any other paper they want to call a liberal paper, the *St. Pete[rsburg] Times* or anybody else. They would transfer it over to them, too.

P: Absolutely, and therefore justifying . . .

D: That we can't believe this liberal press.

P: Anna Quindlen in a column said that it was really an overreaction because when you really look at it, the *New York Times* is still the best paper in the world and that this is one blip, embarrassing, but you shouldn't damn the whole paper because of this one incident.

D: I agree with that except that they let it go on for so long. That really aggravates the situation.

P: One thing that intrigued me, and this is a little off the subject, but I would like to get your reaction. When I read it, I thought, well, this is part of the ethical breakdown in American society. We have Enron [a corporation that engaged in illegal accounting and money laundering activities], we have Martha Stewart [TV personality charged with insider trading]. These things go on all the time, and this is sort of standard procedure. Jayson Blair didn't seem particularly upset about it, didn't seem particularly remorseful. He was just trying to get ahead.

D: I think it is part of the ethical breakdown. I think I said, I meant to say, I can't imagine it happening when I went to work in newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s. I just can't imagine somebody making something up like that and trying to get it past an editor, even one time, let alone repeatedly. I don't know if that's a sign of ethics or what, but it's certainly a sign of a change in society.

P: The other interesting thing is, most citizens either ignored it or were not upset about it?

D: Yes, that is right, which is another indication of the breakdown. It is also, I am afraid, that they didn't trust us to start with.

P: They don't have trust in newspapers, so what else is new, right?

D: Yes. I know, or I think I know, that really is a big exception and almost never happened in earlier years in newspapers. A lot of people might think that it did and just never was exposed, but I really don't think it did. But to see it happen with these three cases, and probably some others but those are the three most egregious we know of . . .

P: Is there anything that I have not asked you or we have not discussed that you would like to talk about?

D: No, I think we have covered the waterfront. I really can't think of anything. You have done a very good job prompting me on a number of things.

P: Okay. On that note, I would like to thank you very much for your time.

D: Thank you.

[End of the interview.]