

FAL 9

Interviewee: Ron Sachs

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

Date: August 19, 2003

P: This is Julian Pleasants. I'm in Tallahassee, Florida, and it's the August 19, 2003. I'm talking with Ron Sachs. Ron, tell me where you were from originally and where you grew up.

S: I was born and raised in Miami, Florida. I went all through public schools there. The first time I ever left home was to attend college at the University of Florida in the fall of 1968. [I had] four wonderful years.

P: Why did you decide to go to the University of Florida?

S: They had a great College of Journalism. I knew from the get go that I wanted to go into journalism. I could barely scrape together enough money to go anywhere, but I got a partial scholarship from Sigma Delta Chi out of Miami and they made it possible for me to go to [the University of] Florida.

P: Sigma Delta Chi is a journalism fraternity?

S: It's a society of professional journalists, yeah.

P: When did you know you wanted to be a journalist?

S: I wanted to be a journalist ever since I was a kid. I worked on my elementary school newspaper, my junior high school newspaper, editor of my high school newspaper, and I just loved the business. I loved the idea of reporting news. [During] my senior year in high school in Miami, the teachers in Florida went out on strike, in the spring of 1968, and the only teacher I had left in school was a P.E. coach, who was my study hall teacher. I asked for permission from the principal to go down to Miami Marine Stadium, where the teachers were gathering to meet and confronting Governor [Claude] Kirk [Governor, 1966-1970]. The principal declined to let me go, so I went anyway. I was suspended from school for two weeks, but I got my story. It was just a very interesting time to be a high school student because it looked like we weren't going to graduate on time because of the strike. Then my journalism teacher scolded me when I was bitching to her about probably not graduating because she was out on strike. She pretty much just said, how dare you, I'm out here for you. [She said], I'm out here for books and better classroom conditions, not for a salary for me. That's when the journalist in me kicked in and I decided to go cover the story. I didn't intend to get suspended in the process, but I did.

P: You had, after that point, a series of conflicts with administration, let's put it that

way.

S: Yeah, that was maybe a little hallmark of things to come.

P: It's very interesting. I talked with Claude Kirk about that event, and you can imagine his perspective on all of that.

S: Sure, well he's rewritten history a couple of times. I was there and saw him come in by hydro-foil. The teachers basically made a determination they weren't going to boo him or heckle him. They showed him respect, but they clearly won the issue because the special session legislature resulted in a better funding formula for Florida schools. They were victorious, but Governor Kirk remembers it differently.

P: Absolutely. When did you first decide you wanted to go to work on the *Alligator*?

S: Well, it's interesting you ask that because my freshman year I wanted to focus on school, but I went by the *Alligator* offices at the Reitz Student Union to visit. I think I wrote maybe a couple of guest columns my freshman year, but during my freshman year the editor of the *Alligator* was a guy named Harold Aldrich, I recall. In the spring, fraternities deliver invitations to their girlfriends and dates for their annual fraternity weekends. I was playing tennis near the Graham area dorms with a black student who was another freshman, from Tampa, his name was Fred Reddy. He's now a cardiologist, a very respected one. [He was made] head of the Hillsborough Medical Society a couple years ago. He's a big guy and we were playing tennis, and the Kappa Alphas were delivering their fraternity weekend invitations. They do that by dressing in Confederate uniforms, at least they did then, getting on horses, and riding across campus delivering their invitations to their girlfriends. Freddy and I finished our tennis game and we were walking back to our dorm, and a group of three or four of these KAs on horseback were just sort of semi-galloping toward us. When they saw him, in particular, and me, they stopped their horses and they basically pointed the gun at him and fired blanks at him, or at least fired the guns. It was kind of a threatening [and] obnoxious thing to do, and they used the word "nigger" and whatever epithets they sent his way. I was so outraged by it that I went down to the *Alligator* office and I went in to see Harold Aldrich. He didn't know me that well, but I told him the whole story of what I had just seen and that the *Alligator* ought to write an editorial about what a terrible thing it is to keep that kind of tradition alive in such a negative way. He kind of smiled and condescended to me that I didn't understand that this was just campus humor by that fraternity and that I'd learn to understand. He declined to do an editorial about it, so I asked him if he would let me write something about it. He said yes, to his credit, and I did. I guess I wrote a four or five hundred word long letter or guest column or whatever it was, and it appeared in the *Alligator*.

P: This would have been 1970?

S: No, that would have been in the spring of 1969 [because] I started in the fall of

1968. So help me God, a day or two after it appeared, somebody put stick pins in my dorm door at Reid Hall and burned a paper cross on my door. Fred Reddy, who was extremely tall, maybe 6'2 [or] 6'3, and I am not extremely tall, said, well you should come sleep in our room, he and his roommate's room, for a couple of nights. So I did; they threw a mattress on the floor and I slept in their room for a couple of nights. It kind of made me feel like if something I wrote could cause that kind of reaction in somebody, then maybe I needed to write some more. So, I started getting involved in the *Alligator* as a part-time reporter. I guess [during] my sophomore year I got more deeply involved, and then in my junior year I got extremely deeply involved. That's when the Baugner case happened.

P: Were you officially hired by somebody? Who decided to put you to work as a reporter?

S: I think the guy that really gave me the most inspiration was Sam Pepper.

P: He would have been the editor then?

S: He was the editor his senior year, my junior year. That's when I really became deeply involved. I was a reporter my sophomore year. I guess my junior year he made me the assignment editor. I was the assignment editor as the fall school year began in September of 1970. I assigned myself that story about the hanging in the county jail because I really was interested in finding out what happened and there really wasn't anyone else around. I used my limited authority to say, I'll do this story. Do you want me to talk about that?

P: Let's wait. What I'd like to do if we can is just go through the generic questions, then I want to spend quite a bit of time on that story. When you went to work, was there a process people went through who joined the staff? Were they hired by the editor? Was there a publications board that had to approve it?

S: No, I think it was kind of based on just expressing an interest and having a willingness to show up and showing that you had the ability to be consistent in showing up, and reliable in handling stories.

P: In other words, they would give you perhaps an assignment that was not very difficult, to see if you could do it and bring it on time, and then you would get more difficult assignments as you went along?

S: Right, and it's kind of a daunting challenge to be a young person and come in to the newspaper office and ask for the opportunity to write, but I don't recall them ever turning anybody away in my era there. If somebody had an interest in working at the *Alligator*, generally they had an opportunity. Before I became editor I remember it was not a real stringent process.

- P: When you were there was there a faculty advisor or somebody who gave some guidance to the *Alligator* staff?
- S: I recall a faculty advisor much more when Allen Whiteleather arrived, Allen K. Whiteleather. I remember even his middle initial. I don't recall having any dealings myself with a faculty advisor before that because nothing I did generated much controversy when I was writing little piddly stories my sophomore year.
- P: Once you became editor, obviously, that changed.
- S: Well, my junior year I think it changed somewhat [because I was] working on stories like the jail hanging and then the Tom Sawyer Motel. I don't know if you're aware of that one. We had stories about the Tom Sawyer Motel in Gainesville that had a racist policy of charging black customers more than white customers.
- P: No, but I would like to follow up on that, that's a good story. Now while you were there, how did you on the *Alligator* staff interact with the permanent staff at the *Alligator*?
- S: I think that I felt like older reporters there took an active interest in saying, hey, how are you, if you need anything [let me know]. I mean [they would] show you the way around. It was the era of cut and paste in the newspaper business. I remember glue pots were a big part of the newsroom, those little aluminum posts sticking up from them and the brush. I just remember feeling comfortable pretty quickly because people who were juniors and seniors, or even grad students, made you feel comfortable. You did not feel intimidated about asking a question.
- P: How about the career staff? Was Ed Barber there yet?
- S: Ed was certainly there with the student publications. [He was] not somebody I dealt with that much before my junior year because he was the business manager, as I recall, of all the student publications. I do remember knowing more and more about him as regards to the financial support of the *Alligator*, the sale of advertisements, and such.
- P: What about the power and influence in the Board of Student Publications?
- S: I don't recall [anything about the power and influence of the Board of Student Publications]. Again, I think at my low level initially, I just labored in happy relative anonymity. I didn't know much about the administration of the newspaper [and] I wasn't involved in news meeting. I just did my job, which was

the occasional news story in my sophomore year.

P: I don't want to get too [far] ahead of ourselves and don't want to get too involved in the story, but I know that when you were getting ready to publish the abortion information the Board of Student Publications ultimately approved that decision. So obviously they were fairly heavily involved, when you were editor, with some decision making. Is that correct?

S: Yeah, the board was involved, as I vaguely recall, before I became controversial. [The board was also involved] in the selection process for the editor for the next term, perhaps for the yearbook editor, and there was the literary magazine, I think it was called the *Talisman*. I don't really recall what it was called, [but] the literary magazine. I did not have any dealings with them, and I don't recall any of the more veteran members of the staff talking much about the Board of Student Publications. I think day to day, to my knowledge, it didn't impinge or infringe on our ability to just go ahead and gather news.

P: What was the relationship, when you were editor, between the *Alligator*, student government, and Blue Key?

S: When I was editor, a very good friend was student body president, Don Middlebrooks, who is now a federal judge in Miami. He was pretty key to the whole abortion issue, as you may know. I would say my relationship with student government at the highest level was very good because he was a very good friend. I knew him then, as I know [him] now, to be a man of just impeccable integrity and honesty. I just had great faith and trust in him. I think we covered student government fairly. If anything, I might have had a bias towards student government because of my fondness for him.

P: Did you have the same attitude towards Blue Key?

S: Blue Key I probably didn't have as healthy an attitude toward. I had respect for the organization as this revered bastion of leadership on the campus. I think I got tapped into Blue Key late in my junior year or early in my senior year. When I went to my first tapping ceremony with Steve Uhlfelder, a former student body president and now still a dear friend, and Don Middlebrooks I was appalled at the tapping. [I was appalled that] this organization I was so proud to be a member of [had] the horse trading that was going on and [that the way] people were selected had very little to do with their actual credentials, it seemed. I mean, they had to have some credential I guess to even be considered, but in terms of the final decision making during my first tapping, it was kind of like we'll trade you two of these for one of these. I was murmuring this to Steve and Don, who were more familiar with it having been in longer than me, and at some point I got up and gave, for me, an impassioned little speech about how distasteful I found this

process. [I said] that I thought it was an honor to be tapped into Blue Key until I attended this tapping ceremony and then saw there was no great honor to it at all. I said, I resign, I really don't want to be a part of this. Don and Steve all walked out with me and echoed their indignance at it all and we marched out of there feeling pretty righteous that we basically didn't want to be a part of that process. I say this with amusement because I love these two guys, but years later I was up here in the mid 1970s working for Governor [Reubin] Askew [Governor, 1970-1978] and Don was his general counsel and Steve was the general counsel for the Department of Community affairs. We're having lunch one day and one of them said, hey, are you going to Gator Growl? This is five or six years after I quit Blue Key when I was a senior in college. I think I even turned in my pin or something. The other one said, yeah, I am. It occurred to me, well how do they have all this information? I said, well, how are you guys going to all that stuff, how do you know about it, how do you get tickets? They said, well Blue Key mailed it to us. I said, well we quit Blue Key

They cracked up laughing and said, well that was just for a night Ronnie. The funny thing is that Blue Key will hunt you down no matter where you were. So apparently I'm still on the roster because I still get mail from them. I've never attended a Blue Key function since, except when I worked for Governor Askew and went to the banquet there at the gym because there was some big-deal politico speaking. But I was kind of amused by that. I didn't really get actively involved in Blue Key. My one attending event was that tapping, and that was my last one.

P: It's interesting talking to Phyllis Gallub and Tom Julin. Their relationship with student government and Blue Key was vastly different from yours. They apparently were in conflict all the time, and the student government, whoever was the president, was upset and thought the [Alligator] unfair in their coverage. They seemed, in a typical sense, to be in conflict with the fraternities, student government, and Blue Key. They saw themselves as representing "the rest of the student body."

S: [That's] interesting.

P: Your experience is a pretty strong differentiation between some of the other editors and their experience.

S: Yeah, I think if I didn't know who the president of student body was and didn't have confidence that this was a trustworthy individual, I might have been much more skeptical. I can tell you that I believe we had a good reporter covering student government. I was in charge of the editorials, so we had a managing editor who kind of ran news assignments. Because I was friendly with the student body president, I tried not to put myself in the path of being the day-to-

day manager of the news of student government.

P: When you were editor, Gary Grunder was managing editor.

S: Yeah, that's correct. Again, I would weigh in when I wanted to, but I tried not to do that because Don was my friend. But I think we covered Don well and fairly.

P: While you were editor, did you have any pressure put on you, because you're dealing with some pretty controversial issues? You're dealing with civil rights, you're dealing with abortion, you're dealing with reform of the jails. Did you have pressure put on you by any alumni or legislator or journalism professor?

S: Never, not once. Not once did I recall [being pressured]. [I] got a pile of hate mail over the abortion thing, I mean nasty stuff. My parents got some nasty hate mail, frightening some of it. [Some of it] likened me to the son of the devil, which even on my worst day is probably not true, and I've had some bad days. Nobody from [the] alumni [pressured me]. The only conflict that ever resulted in confrontation and serious disagreement was over the abortion issue. Our coverage of civil rights, even this discrimination case I'm referencing at Tom Sawyer Motel [didn't receive pressure from the school]. I would say, and I'm trying to freshen up my memory as we're talking about this, I would say the issue about black student enrollment was probably the one where we frayed our relationship with the administration in a different way, but at a level equal to what we did over the abortion issue. That was not during my senior year, I think that was actually during my junior year.

P: Yes, I think you covered that story.

S: Steve Uhfelder was student body president and sixty-six black students were arrested. I think the administration was not thrilled with our coverage of that, not just that incident, but that whole issue.

P: Let me go on ahead and I'll get back to that. When you look back at your work with the *Alligator*, how did that experience affect your later career? I know that you worked at the *Miami Herald* for a while and then for governors Askew and Chiles and the Education Association.

S: I actually have no question in my mind. I can get pretty emotional about this, but my experience at the *Alligator* shaped my entire professional life. I would think the best training any young journalist could possibly have is the training that I and hundreds of others have received at the *Alligator* about working collegially, about working on deadline, about dealing with the very thorny issues of the day. Just the best education I could have received for what I chose to become was at the *Alligator*, not at the College of Journalism, frankly. I received a grand education

at the College of Journalism that was theoretical more than anything, but the practical education of what I was learning in classroom in the *Alligator* newsroom, out on the streets, and on the campus was something they should have charged me for. They paid me to work there, but they should have charged us. It was that stellar, that outstanding. Honest to God, I could almost tear up when I think about what it means to me, because to this day I have vivid memories of what I did there. I draw upon those experiences every day in what I do now. Every job I've ever held since college is a tribute to the *Alligator* because I was able to stretch and apply my skills in so many different ways. I think I've worked in more aspects of media than most of my contemporaries from my undergrad years. In fact, today I have a hard time using the phrase public relations. Even though I own a public relations firm, I tell my staff, which includes several former journalists, that we are in the private practice of journalism, which is kind of how I stomach it in some ways. All the skills that I have today are an outgrowth of skills I acquired as a college student. In fact, while I look back at some of the stories you have there in that bundle and see ways that I, today, could write more smoothly, maybe change the structure of the story, the most exciting way to start a career in journalism was to work at the *Alligator*. The story about the man who was found hanging in his jail cell was about as spectacular a story as I ever got to cover in my professional career. It was just that meaningful. [It] showed me then, as a student, what I've always believed to be true before I went to UF and when I got out, that being a journalist, being a reporter, is one of the best ways to weigh in without being an advocate to some of the most important issues of our day, by illuminating people about issues.

P: How important would it be for someone working at the *Alligator* to be a journalism major?

S: [It was] not as important as I thought when I was a student. I think an English major would do well, a history major, a political science major would do well. Clearly it would be hard to work at the *Alligator* if you don't have some basic and innate writing skills. I had honed [my skills] somewhat before I came to the *Alligator* by working at my high school paper, my junior high paper. I had a high school journalism teacher who was as good or better than any professor I ever had in college. I had her for three years. She told us on the first day of my sophomore year, working at the high school newspaper, [that] the only three things that matter in this business are [to] be accurate, be on time, and be interesting. Those are still true today in everything I try to do and in everything I've ever done in a journalism related job. I think you have to have an interest and you have to have a basic ability to write. You can train people on reporting structures and writing techniques, but if they don't have some flare and intense interest to begin with, it's not going to happen.

[break in tape]

- P: Let me expand on that idea of being accurate and being on time. What else makes a good reporter?
- S: Well, I think you have to have a powerful curiosity. Without becoming an advocate, you have to have a sense of justice. I think you have to have a very strong sense of justice and fairness because so much of reporting involves fairly portraying pitched battles between powerful interests, or the powerful against the not so powerful. There are often times more than even two sides of a story. So, I think you have to have a deep curiosity, a strong sense of fairness, and an interest in contributing to your community and country by illuminating people's background about issues.
- P: What was your reaction to seeing your first story in print?
- S: [It was] the same reaction I had, but on a magnified scale, to when I saw my first story in print in junior high and high school. Just seeing that bold faced name, by Ronnie Sachs, [that] is what I was at first at the *Alligator*, was damn exciting. I would read those stories and, like any young journalist, think, well damn, there's probably never been a better story written, no matter if it was about overdue books at the library or not. It was just exciting. It felt like a great distinction, a great honor, to have your name in print attached to a story where you had reported and written something. Again, from the earliest days it wasn't really about the significance of the story, because there are a lot of stories that aren't nearly as significant as what's on the front page. To be a part of something that big and that important is the same feeling as I got in the *Miami Herald* newsroom when we were working on a major story and there were thirty reporters and editors involved in a plane crash or in a hurricane. There's no feeling like it. It's the same thing as being on a team that's pulling together and everybody is doing their part. It was very exciting. I was very proud to be associated with the *Alligator* even in my early days there.
- P: I want to get into detail later, but in that same context it must have been quite a thrill to become editor. In an interview with Jack Detweiler he said, particularly when you were editor, that you actually had as much power, or more power, than Steve O'Connell [President of University of Florida, 1963-1973], partly because the positions you took were supported by other newspapers. Do you think that's a fair statement?
- S: Well, I got goose bumps hearing you say that because I have great respect for Jack Detweiler. I didn't really ever sit and ponder, well gee, I've a lot of power, I'm the editor of the *Alligator*. I do think I felt a very strong sense of responsibility that had been imprinted on me by people at the *Alligator* I had worked with before I became editor. You pay attention to the guys and gals who were editor before you [and] you aspire to that position if you think you have something to

contribute. Sam Pepper [and] Phyllis Galub, in particular, those two who were editor before me, I had great respect for them and I saw how serious they were about the job even as we were having fun in the newsroom. [I saw] how serious they were about what the job meant. I had a deep and intense ambition to become editor because I had spent so much time at the *Alligator* and I put so much stock in how important it was to me to help shape my skills to go into this career that I coveted.

P: Let's talk a little bit about the process of putting the paper out. When you were editor where was it printed?

S: It was printed, as I recall, in Ocala. I don't even remember the name of the printer, but he became a part of the abortion controversy if you are familiar with that. We can go into that. It was a paste-up job in the backroom there at the third floor of the student union. It was a cut and hot wax. I recall that one of my duties as editor, I was not the primary person, was to come in and help read pages. To this day I still very rarely look at advertisements in newspapers. I used to resent the advertisements in newspapers because I didn't work on the business side, but clearly, the fact that there are advertisements are the reason there is space to have news. I had an under appreciation for the importance of the advertisements and did not really read them. I didn't consider proofing the ads was something I wanted to spend time on when I came in to read pages.

You probably don't know this story, but my senior year as editor, a controversy that was far less significant than the abortion information controversy was [that] in an advertisement there was a pub in town that catered especially to law students called the Bench and Bar. I think there was a woman named Judy Miller who was one of the proprietors there. Every Wednesday or Thursday night they had old time movies on the wall and they had an ad that promoted the fact they had free movies and nickel beers or whatever. I got a call from President O'Connell before the abortion controversy, which was fairly early in my editorship, because I did not proof the ads. Some smart ass paste up artist student, in the big, forty-eight point headline, or larger, of the Bench and Bar ad where the headline was supposed to be screaming "FREE FLICKS" had run together the L and the I in flicks so that it appeared to say "FREE FUCKS." President O'Connell called me about the "FREE FUCKS" ad to ask me what was up with that. I remember flipping open the newspaper on my desk in the *Alligator* offices and then seeing it for the first time because he called my attention to it. Obviously it became the big smile of the day for students across campus. I had no good excuse except that it was a mistake and a paste up error. I had a pretty strong talk with the paste up staff later that day. In the meantime, I can tell you this, that evening the Bench and Bar was packed.

P: It was packed at least out of curiosity, right?

S: It was packed, yes sir.

P: Describe the situation when you were getting the paper out. Obviously these are students who are going to class and are doing this part time, but there's a tremendous amount of pressure because you've got to get the paper out. Describe the process you went through every day to meet your deadlines.

S: Well, we had a couple of news meetings a day. I can remember a couple of primary news meetings a day. There would be an early one in the day when we had the managing editor, the editor, and a couple of copy editors, and the sports editor and [we would] do an early planning meeting. [We would] decide there, what kind of wire stories were the big stories of the day globally and nationally. Again, at that time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *Alligator* wasn't just the campus newspaper, it was the primary source of information for many, if not most, of the students on the campus. Many students did not subscribe to a regular newspaper [and] many students did not have a TV or cable to see television news. So other than radio, WGGG, the *Alligator* was a primary source of information for students. We really took very seriously the wire function of the *Alligator*, even editing down to an inch or two national and world stories that appeared in the paper. The local stories and the campus stories, I think, obviously took a lot more of our focus because those were stories that were being produced by our own staff. The assignment of those stories; some were daily stories, some took more than a day; happened in that process, and the managing editor, Gary Grunder, and copy editors were more directly involved with reporters on that than I unless it was a really big story. There were a lot of protests on campus for various issues, whether it was against the war or for civil rights or for women's rights; there were a lot of high visibility stories.

P: It was a very volatile period, wasn't it?

S: Absolutely, I mean, even the ACCENT Program that brought great speakers to campus, like I remember when Jane Fonda came. She actually gave a speech in which she talked about American G.I.'s fragging, killing, their superiors who were putting them in harm's way.

P: That turned out to be a correct story.

S: It was a correct story.

P: That was down by Graham Pond, correct?

S: Yes it was, but it was a front-page story that she was there, and she was fairly controversial because she opposed the war. Frankly, watching that entire movement grow on campus was amazing. It was reflective of what was

happening all over the country.

P: Then, there was Kent State.

S: There was Kent State, and the protests and services in solidarity.

P: While we're on that, you went to Washington?

S: Well I was going to tell you, the May Day Demonstrations is what it was called, of 1971, were intended to coincide with the one year anniversary of Kent State. There was an attempt by college students all over the country to shut down the bridges from Virginia and Maryland leading into Washington to kind of bring Washington D.C. to a standstill on this one day. I had never been to Washington except as a kid on a trip with Miami news carriers. I drove up there my junior year with the managing editor of the *Alligator*, Ken McKinnon, photographer, I think Tom Kennedy, and a couple other *Alligator* staffers. It was amazing. I was there to cover it, basically, for the *Alligator*, and I was the lead reporter on the story. At the HEW [Health, Education, Welfare] building there were protestors. We were at the bridges [and] there was tear gas all over the streets. I remember running through the streets of Washington to escape tear gas and running in the other direction, right by me, is a guy I went to high school with. I remember gagging back tear gas, stopping, and saying, hi Bob, how are you, and then just hauling butt. At the HEW building police formed a circle around the protestors and they were going to arrest everybody and they were taking them to RFK stadium to keep them. I think I did a story that appeared on the front page about the *Alligator* managing editor. I think it was a really poorly written lead, *Alligator* Managing Editor Ken McKinnon and such and such and thousands of other students were arrested on whatever day it was. It was unbelievable. The way I avoided arrest was to pull out my reporter's notebook and my pen and to step up hedge height to a wall that ran the perimeter where the police were. I just stood on that wall looking down at the police and the protestors, feigning that I was taking notes, and sashaying sideways until I got past the line of police. Then I jumped down and ran to a phone and phoned in my story. Had I not avoided arrest, there probably wouldn't have been any story written by an *Alligator* staffer about the arrest of our own managing editor.

P: Describe the physical conditions of the *Alligator* office and the kind of equipment you used.

S: We used manual typewriters. We had a teletype machine or two. Maybe [we had] an AP and a UPI machine. We had a supply closet. It was a fairly small newsroom. I mean, the editor's office was glass enclosed. I recall that, but it did not go all the way up to the ceiling, which was interesting because of a prank pulled on me once during my editorship. The managing editor's office was right

outside the editor's office. The newsroom was kind of a square with desks around the perimeter and small work places for reporters. I remember production was back behind that on the same floor.

P: So all of the pre-press was there?

S: All the pre-press was out in the newsroom, and then the wax machines and typesetting. The type printed out of fairly primitive computers at the time. The production boards were just basically angled wooden boards that the flats would be put on. Our newspaper columns were waxed up, laid down, and pressed out. It was a fairly intimate setting, there was no palatial office, but it was actually a very nice building in the Reitz Student Union. [We] were proud to be there. It was a nice place to be.

P: Everybody I've talked to described the actual putting out of the paper as rather frenetic and sort of organized chaos. What was your assessment of that process?

S: We had some junior editors who made sure that the young reporters were getting their stories. I would say it was probably a goal directed, haphazard production. We knew what the goal was, we're not going to miss deadline, and there were some processes and protocols established, but it was a very energized, if sloppy, process. It was not precision like. This would be on a slow news day, so on a big news day with a breaking story or some protest [it would be more chaotic], but it worked. It actually worked. People did their jobs, people worked together, and people stayed late if necessary to help out, but it always got done.

P: Did the *Alligator* staff party together and socialize together?

S: I think that most of my closest friends at the time were *Alligator* people, but my roommates did not work at the *Alligator*. My girlfriend did not work at the *Alligator*, and I had some balance that way. Pretty much, especially when I was editor, every single day I was driven by, from the moment I woke up, what was going to happen at the *Alligator* that day. I told this story to Ed Barber and a couple of others. I think the college of journalism and its relationship to the *Alligator* was not as slick as I would have liked when I was editor. I recall I had Professor Ed Weston my junior year, the fall of 1970, for an advanced reporting class. This is when the jail hanging happened. In late September 1970, I'm covering the jail hanging story for the *Alligator*. For my JM402, Ed Weston [was my instructor]. He was the make-believe editor of a nonexistent newspaper, and as a student in that class you had to go to his office door and sign up for a story off the so-called tip sheet. Well, I'm covering a real-live apparent murder at the county jail, but I have this academic responsibility as a student. So by the time I could get by the professor's office to sign up for a story, the only story left for me

to sign up for was about overdue books at the campus library. I remember asking Professor Weston if he would allow me instead to submit my work on this series of stories which were taking me far more time and required far more journalistic enterprise and effort than a story on overdue books at the campus library. He refused to count my stories on the Baugher murder at the county jail. I intended to do the story on overdue books at the library, but I got so drawn into this story for days and then weeks that I did not do the story on overdue books at the library. In fact, I submitted some of the stories you have with you about the hanging at the jail. Though he told me the stories were really excellent, he gave me a zero on the assignment. The day I graduated from college, by the way, I did not attend my graduation ceremony. Instead, I went over to the college of journalism to respectfully but firmly tell him what a cheese head move I thought it was by him to not give me credit for those stories. That actually was more important to me now that I was a graduate, to express my displeasure at that one decision he made, than to attend my graduation.

P: While we're on that subject, how did you manage when you were editor to balance your responsibilities as a student and your responsibilities as an editor? Everybody I've talked to was over at the *Alligator* offices all the time.

S: Very clearly my studies suffered because of it. [My grades suffered] not because it was a load that could not be balanced, but because I imbalanced the load in favor of the *Alligator*. My responsibilities, in my own mind, at the *Alligator* were so important, so significant, far beyond the difference between getting an A or a B or a C in a class. I knew I was going into journalism, I knew I'd get a job at a good newspaper, and it was important to me to do a professional like job on that newspaper, more so than having a high academic average. I wasn't trying to get into grad school or law school; I was going to be a journalist. I had an opportunity everyday to be a journalist or to be a very serious student. So I was a very serious student of the newspaper business because I was working at a newspaper. I recall my biggest academic disappointment. I had a very deep interest in Jo Ann Smith's class, law and the press. That was one class where, even if you're a good writer and reporter, you couldn't get by without going to class, and I did not go to class enough to make a decent grade there. [In] my entire major the most disappointing job I ever did as a student was in that class. I regret it to this day because I would have benefitted from being a better student in that class.

P: Let me go back to the interrelationship with the members of the staff. Did staff members date each other? Did any of them get married?

S: Phyllis [married] Randy Coleman. It was an era with free love and such. There were friendships that might have resulted in what would today, or before then, be called one night stands or just friends getting together, but we did hang out

together for meals and for social occasions and parties. I think most people also had a separate group of friends, but there was a real sense of bonding just as deep as any fraternity or sorority on campus that you had if you remember the *Alligator* staff.

[End side A1]

P: Do you keep in touch with many of the people that you worked with on the *Alligator*?

S: Frankly no, I mean I run into them. I would liken this, Julian, to childhood friends who you grew up with and who are frozen in your mind. Your attitude and opinion about them, no matter what's happened to them since, is based almost solely on the sense of solidarity you had as young people growing up in the same neighborhood. I have an oldest friend who I hardly ever see and only speak to a couple times a year who has been my best friend from childhood since I was seven years old. Again, we're in totally different worlds and we know how to reach one another and don't do it that often, but when we do, it's an immediate flashback to the affection and friendship we felt as kids bike riding [and] delivering papers together. We don't actively socialize together, but what I'm saying [is] it's a friendship that's a lifetime friendship. I would think that you have that feeling about people you worked at the *Alligator* with. A guy like Robert Rivas. I don't even remember him when I was editor because he's several years younger than I am. I know he had a great career at the *Alligator*, he's had a distinguished career since, and without even talking about it we have a respect for each other based on that fraternity of being an *Alligator* alumna. Sam Pepper was the editor when I was a junior and allowed me to go work on the jail hanging stories. I've only spoken to [him] maybe once in the last ten years, yet I have a deep fondness for him based on me still looking up to him in my memories of what a great role model he was to a young editor when he was editor-in-chief. I bumped into Phyllis Galub at the *Alligator* Hall of Fame selection committee meeting. I was overwhelmed with how pleased I was to see her. She looked great. I remember fondly some practical jokes I pulled on her but [had] never taken credit for. I told her, I finally confessed, to one that I had committed against her when she was editor. It just is a special feeling that you have for those people. When you go to one of these *Alligator* functions, like the Hall of Fame induction dinner, it's a special treat to see people who, again, were not necessarily my contemporaries. I came back to UF in the mid-1970s to teach for a couple of semesters at the College of Journalism as an adjunct. One of my former students is Dennis Kneale, who is managing editor of *Forbes* magazine. Another one is Kathy Pellegrino, who became a lawyer after being a journalist and is a major executive at the *Ft. Lauderdale News* and *Sun Sentinel*.

P: There's quite a few, Phyllis and Tom Julin, that went into the law and quite often,

now, deal with First Amendment issues. That's a pretty good background both for journalism and for communications.

S: Well there's not a better lawyer you'd could find on a First Amendment case than one who had been a reporter at some point, or editor, even if it was back in their college days. I think the same qualities that we spoke about a little bit ago, a sense of fairness, a sense of justice, are what would propel somebody who has been in journalism to want to go into law.

P: Let's talk about how you became editor. You indicated earlier that you had a desire to do so. What process did you go through, and who actually made the selection?

S: I have recollection of being interviewed by the Board of Student Publications. For some reason I don't remember students in that process, although I think I'm sure they participated because they were on the Board of Student Publications. I remember being interviewed by a panel, people sitting at a table.

P: Was it open?

S: No, I don't believe it was open. I don't recall that there was an audience there. I think I was the only one other than the panel in there when I was in there. I do remember that I felt very good about the interview because I had worked so hard as a reporter and mid-level editor. But in particular, the stories about the jail had really been a very proud achievement, not just for me but for the *Alligator*, because of what they led to. I thought that that was basically my leading edge going into this process. I don't remember who else was up for the job.

P: You did have some other competition?

S: Yeah, there was always competition. You would be hard pressed to find any season in a decade since or before where only one person would have an interest in being editor of the *Alligator*.

P: When you were chosen, you were chosen for one term, is that right?

S: No, [I was chosen for] fall and spring quarters.

P: That did not include the summer?

S: No, I was done by the end of the spring quarter. We were on a quarter system then, so it was two seasons or three seasons, you know fall, winter, and spring.

P: Did you ever have any confidential sources?

S: Yes, I did [have confidential sources].

P: How did you deal with them?

S: The two stories I recall that were most relevant to your question would be on the jail hanging story, and number two, on this case of racial discrimination by the ownership and management at the Tom Sawyer Motel.

P: If you were in a position where you had to divulge those sources, would you have done so?

S: No, and I did not [divulge my sources] even then to the faculty advisor at the *Alligator*. By the way, I remember Allen Whiteleather because he was a pretty upbeat, positive guy who did not strike me as overly authoritarian, but the one celebrated difference I had with him was over the abortion information series of stories and issue.

P: Let's talk about this story about William Baugher, who was this twenty-five year old drifter who was found hanged in his jail cell. How did you first get interested in that story?

S: I remember being in the *Alligator* newsroom and listening late in the day on September 22, 1970. I can tell you the date. We had WGGG piped into the *Alligator* newsroom. Don Reed, the newsman, read a story about a twenty-five year old man who'd been found hanging at the county jail. The sheriff's deputies were calling it a suicide. It started out as a fairly routine thing and [we thought], wow, that's pretty dramatic. We tried not to be the *Gainesville Sun*, but to cover outside the campus, community stories. I think the *Alligator* did a great job of covering stories about poverty, for example, in Gainesville, with some enthusiasm and energy. I remember making a routine call to the jail after hearing that radio story to find out the guy's name. I thought he was a student, which is what propelled my first phone call. Basically I found out that he was in there for possession of marijuana. I called up a roommate of mine, a good friend I went to high school with from Miami. I said, Dennis, a guy was found hanging in the county jail today, twenty-five years old, for possession of marijuana. I don't know how long he was in there, but [it was] for possession of marijuana. Now, if you were busted for smoking pot, would you kill yourself? This was a serious question. He paused for a little bit and he said, no, I wouldn't kill myself, I wouldn't have to. He said, my father would kill me. I think that jived kind of with my own sense of things here. It certainly was a felony in Florida back in 1970 to smoke even a joint of marijuana.

So I went do to the jail. I just kind of assigned myself the story. After hours it certainly was beyond the deadline of the paper on September 22. The paper for

September 23, was going to come out probably without a story, or maybe with a small story with the police story that he killed himself. I remember running into a sergeant there. The sheriff's department had kind of put a clamp down on talking to the press about this story, but to my advantage the sergeant I ran into that evening, when I showed him my *Alligator* credential, did not put that on the same par with a real newsman.

P: It's really not the press, right? [Laughing.]

S: Yeah, really not the press, which I would have argued about at some other point, but it was serving me well that he took pity on me, a poor student newspaper reporter. I think I asked the right questions and felt a little, in retrospect, like Peter Faulk in *Columbo*, except he's really brilliant. In my case I just happened to be stumbling through a good series of questions, probably not asked in the right order. What I gleaned from this first interview was information about the man's name, his age, where he was from, that he was not a student, and that he had been arrested much earlier for possession of marijuana, smoking a joint on a street corner in downtown Gainesville when a police officer drove by. Again, it just seemed strange to me that a guy would kill himself. Having no familiarity with a jail, I'd never been to a jail even to see one, I asked, in retrospect, a stupid question. Was he all alone in the cell? I was told, no, there were three other prisoners in there; they were all asleep when he did this. I found out the dimensions of the cell, six by eight feet and such. I just started putting together a basic set of facts. I had tried not to show my shock and surprise and excitement about this set of facts, because clearly I was excited that this might not be suicide. It just defied credulity in my mind.

P: As you reported, when he was hanging, his feet were flat on the floor.

S: Well, I interviewed the jailer who had found him also, a guy named Ronald Hinson. I mean I remember this to this day, Julian. Some stuff just stays with you. He described for me that William Baugher had had long hair, it was that era, almost to his shoulders, and a moustache. He was found early in the morning of the twenty-second, so he died sometime the twenty-first or early in the morning, in the a.m. [Earlier in the evening that his body was found] his head had been completely shaved and there were blood specks on his scalp. While he was hanging from a sheet that had been platted into a rope from the top of the cell door, when Ronald Hinsen found him his feet were flat on the ground. As a young boy growing up watching my share of westerns, you know you always figure a hanging is the trap door goes [out from under you] or the horse is knocked out from under the bad guy or whoever is getting hanged and basically your neck snaps. But I came to learn that you can die from asphyxiation from having your feet even suspended just a fraction of an inch off the ground, if you just can't touch. His feet being flat on the ground, it just occurred to me, as it

would anybody, how does that knock the life out of you? It doesn't.

P: Do you think then, and in retrospect, that this was a cover-up by the sheriff?

S: No, I don't think that. I think it was just sloppy investigative work from the get-go. Nobody ever posed that question to me. I just took it for granted that they missed it, that they wanted a simple explanation. I wouldn't call it a cover-up so much as just sloppy police work.

P: It was really worse than that though. How could you have three people in that small cell and not "observe" what went on?

S: Well, that was what I thought. They had all claimed to be asleep. So, I rushed back to the *Alligator* offices. Oh, one other very important piece of information was, and I think it was in that first story, I bluffed Ronald Hinson, the sergeant. I said, what's the name of William Baugher's girlfriend. [I said], I know he had a girlfriend to visit him. I had no idea that he had any friends or visitors at all, but I hit pay dirt, because he did in fact have a lady friend who did visit him from time to time, and they gave me her name. Her name was Marie Moran, as I recall.

P: That's correct.

S: I went with Tom Kennedy, an *Alligator* photographer, over to her house. We found her address either in the phone book or some other way. I remember saying to Tom, let's leave the camera in the car. [I was] trying to be sensitive that this woman had just lost a friend or a boyfriend, and [I thought] let's go talk to her and kind of get the lay of the land. I was certain she knew. It had been all over the radio and TV. I'm pretty sure this was either the twenty-second or the twenty-third, probably the twenty-third as we were trying to put together our stories for the twenty-fourth. [I] knock on the door with Tom and she answers the door. I hadn't really planned this and I said to her, hi, I'm Ronnie Sachs from the *Alligator*, this is Tom Kennedy, we wanted to talk to you about Bill Baugher. When I said that, almost before the name got out of my mouth, she smiled. She said, oh, I'm so happy, because we're pretty sure he's going to get out next week. I don't remember hearing what she said, but it became very clear she did not know he was dead. I said, excuse us a second. We walked back down the sidewalk to the car and Tom and I whispered. He said, let's just get out of here. I said, no, it would be a bad thing to let her find out some other way, mostly because I really thought it would be terrible that we knocked on the door and then didn't tell her. I hated the idea of being the one to tell her, but I hated more the idea of her finding out over the radio or some other way.

P: I understand that you actually called the *Alligator* to get advice on that. Is that correct?

- S: I believe we did. I don't even recall who I talked to. It might have been Sam Pepper or Phyllis, but I think they counseled [me] to do [what I] thought was right. Also, I'm fairly clear they said, we need a comment from her, which was an editor talking. To this day those kinds of things are practical journalism, but boy, they're hard to do as a human being. So I went back up and asked if we could come in, and [we] sat down with her. I think the words I started with are, I'm sorry to tell you this, but something bad has happened to Bill. Then I proceeded to tell her that he had been found hanging and the police called it suicide. Immediately she protested and cried vehemently that he would not do that and that he was killed. [She said that] he had been complaining to her for a long time about being beaten and abused by other inmates at the jail. Then she told me more about the pre-sentence investigation and how he was likely to get released pending sentencing, but probably wouldn't be sentenced to prison because this process was fairly far along. I recall that she was so upset and we were so on deadline that I did not feel comfortable leaving, but I also knew that we had to get back to the *Alligator* offices to write the story. So I asked her to come with us, which appears in retrospect to be the height of insensitivity. But I really did not want to leave her alone, and frankly I just thought she was so important to this story. I brought her with us and talked to her on the drive to the *Alligator*, talked to her at the *Alligator* office. [We] calmed her down, got her some kind of beverage, and I think she became very important in that initial story because she disputed what the police were saying that it was suicide. The basic set of facts seemed to throw into significant doubt this story that the establishment media had swallowed. The *Gainesville Sun* did not seem to ask the same probing questions that the *Alligator* was asking.
- P: How did the investigation actually work out the fact that Terry Grub is the one who had molested him and killed him?
- S: Well, what happened, and this is a real testament to the power of the press, the day the *Alligator's* first story appeared in the paper, and I'm pretty sure it's my byline on that story, I got an anonymous phone call at the *Alligator* offices. You asked about anonymous sources, protected sources. The call was from a young man who had just been released from the county jail the day the story appeared, saw the story, and said to me on the telephone I have information about William Baugher's death. [He said], I didn't know his name, but I know he was being tortured and even sexually brutalized forcefully, and I don't want my name used. [He said], I'll talk to you. So I remember being actually scared because this was so exciting. For a twenty year old kid this is big stuff. I remember telling my editors where I was going to meet this man, but I did not tell them his name because I didn't know his name. I met this man, and I do not recall his name to this day, which is a real good job of keeping him anonymous even to myself [laughing]. He was part of some local rock group and had a party at his house. I

guess there were drugs and alcohol involved, [and] some girl passed out and aspirated, choked to death, on her own vomit. So he [was] put in jail over that until it was cleared up. I don't know if ultimately he was charged, but what he told me is during the few days he was in jail, in the same cell block as William Baugher, is that there was a guy in that cell there that was brutal and had brutalized him at razor blade point and shaved his head. [He had] committed violence and sexual violence against him. I think that was our second day story, the allegations [that this man made]. We asked the sheriff's department and the jail and they did the dumbest thing you can ever do, which was to have no comment. Then they treated us like they were treating the rest of the press. I think that those first two stories really generated a lot of interest from the regular press. I think the *Alligator* stories were getting picked up. The *Gainesville Sun* was now starting to notice our coverage, and yeah, I do recall that the *St. Pete Times* ultimately did a major story and credited the *Alligator* with turning this investigation around. I don't recall beyond those first two stories, there were other smaller stories, but those two were blockbusters on the front page. Sam Pepper was very proud and was just a great editor to work with. I mean, I get moist eyes thinking today about how he shepherded me through this very exciting story.

P: This is a pretty dangerous situation. This guy Terry Grubb had murdered one person. This was a dangerous group of people.

S: [This was a] dangerous group. Interestingly, those stories, in particular those first two, threw enough doubt on the police explanation of suicide that the state attorney, to his credit, convened a grand jury to look into this case. They returned an indictment or an information against Terry O. Grubb, who was an AWOL soldier who had joined under age, lied about his age. The ultimate irony of this whole thing is [that] I covered the trial of Terry Grubb later, not only for the *Alligator* but for the *Miami Herald* I think, and he was convicted. My own sense of justice was really conflicted because I had never attended a murder trial, so I had no experience to compare it to. In watching the trial and listening carefully to what the rules of evidence are supposed to be, I did not believe in my own mind that the prosecution had proved that he did it. I knew he did it, I was just darn certain he had done it, but I didn't think they proved he had done it. I think I wrote an op-ed piece after the verdict about my own conflicted feelings about the system of justice.

This is just a little footnote, Julian, but after I left the campus and graduated more than a year later and went to work for the *Miami Herald*, I went to the state prison once a year for the next several years to visit Terry Grub and interview him. I was going to write a book about this case called the *Hanging Party* because he had never really told his story. I needed to know that he did it. I never did write the book; I wrote about three chapters of a book. Finally, on my third or fourth visit to him in the mid 1970s, I had left working for Governor Askew [and] I was

teaching at the university in the fall of 1977, he finally confessed to me that he had done it and he told me why. It was just so terrible a reason to kill somebody. He had been brutalizing William Baugher, he had been holding that razor blade point and sodomizing him. William Baugher at some point, and this came out at the trial, wrote a note [saying], I'm in danger, please get me out of this cell. [He] had passed it through the cell bars to Carlos Joyner, a trustee, an inmate who is trusted enough to deliver meals. Carlos Joyner recognized Terry Grubb as such a powerful, evil figure, that he, a few minutes later, spirited the note to Terry O. Grubb that William Baugher had written. So Terry O. Grubb reads this note written by his cell mate saying, I'm in danger, and feared that on top of the auto-theft, grand-theft, [and] AWOL stuff [that] he was looking at, he might face some assault charge. So his answer to this, this is criminal logic, was to commit a murder and make it look like suicide. The really horrendous thing about this case, if you have a sense of humanity, is that one of the reasons I could not accept the verdict at trial was because the medical examiner testified that there was no evidence that there was any struggle other than his shaved head with blood specks; but no evidence that he had struggled against the death. If you were being hanged against your will, generally you would pull at the noose or something and it would leave little blood bruises called, I remember this from thirty years ago, petechiae. There were none of those, and that always bothered me. Terry Grubb finally gave me the answer, and that was that basically he had so brutalized William Baugher, who had, at some point, given up on ever getting out of that cell, [that Bill didn't struggle]. The TV set was set up outside the cell block and Gunsmoke [television western] was on. The four guys were in the cell; one of them was a child molester I recall, and one was a guy who bounced checks I think; and there's an episode [of Gunsmoke] where there's an angry mob trying to hang Doc Adams. Terry Grubb is sitting on his bunk, who's seen the note that Bill Baugher has written, [and he] said, we're going to have us a hanging party too. [He] started ripping up the sheet and plating it into a noose. When he put it on Bill Baugher's neck, Bill Baugher did not resist. His spirit, I'm assuming, was so broken, that he just stood there when Terry Grubb tied the noose to the top of the cell door. The reason his feet were flat on the ground and he did not die of his own hand, as Terry Grubb told me in the interview at the prison, that he held his legs and pulled him out from the door so that Baugher's body, while he's alive, was horizontal, and asphyxiated him. Terry Grubb told me that he kind of blacked out while he was doing this and what broke him from this death trance was that he smelled feces, he smelled William Baugher's body relax and release its waste. That's when he just let the body go to a resting position, standing. He went into his bunk, and the other inmates who had seen it as well all pretended to be asleep until the body was discovered. He did earlier that evening, before the note got written by William Baugher, shave his head with a razor blade. When he did get down to whiskers [he] made cuts in his scalp. It was just an appalling and horrible thing.

P: One aspect of this is that in your reporting you went back and demonstrated, number one, the jail was way overcrowded, with poor ventilation, bad food, and not enough medical care. Ultimately because of this, a grand jury met and demanded that they build a new jail.

S: I think that the murder story triggered a deeper look by the *Alligator* into the jail itself. What was amazing [is that] it was an opportunity to use what I was learning in the College of Journalism and just do a search for public records. The jail's own records and the courthouse's own records had copies of state Department of Corrections inspection reports. [They] basically excoriated the Alachua County Jail for a whole range of flaws and deficiencies, and pretty much ordered that they be corrected. In most cases they were not. There was an attitude that people in jail, I guess, didn't deserve a posh place [to live], but Alachua County Jail then was anything but. Interestingly though, people who are in a county jail, very often, are poor people who cannot afford a lawyer and are awaiting trial. So it was a real miscarriage of justice at the front end of law enforcement because the sheriff's department, which had a direct responsibility for the jail, really was asleep at the switch knowingly and willfully about the conditions at that jail. I think, as proud as the *Alligator* was about the Baugher murder being uncovered, the conditions at the jail was a pretty significant story.

P: Let me ask you about what I guess would have been your most controversial set of circumstances, and that was your decision to publish a list of abortion clinics not in the state of Florida.

S: [They were] not clinics actually.

P: Okay, you tell me about it.

S: In the fall of 1971, early in my tenure as editor-in-chief at the *Alligator*, you have to recall what was going on at that time. It was deep in the heart of the war in Vietnam and the anti-war movement, deep in the heart of the civil rights movement, and in the early stages of the women's rights movement. It was a pretty volatile time with a lot of these issues, and [there were] very vocal audiences advocating about these issues. As the editor, besides having a daily newspaper, I tried to make sure that once a week we would do a major takeout, a major in-depth story and related stories, side bars, about some critical issue. I think it was in early October of 1971 [that] I determined that there was enough controversy about the issue of abortion that it warranted an *Alligator* special report. I recall that the main story was to be about women on campus that might find themselves in a predicament of being pregnant and confronting this difficult decision about what to do; being young, not married, and not ready to have a child. The abortion laws in the various states were fairly divergent.

In Florida it was a very restrictive law that had been passed in 1868 that

prohibited abortion unless the mother's life was in jeopardy. I don't even know if rape, I don't recall, was justification for an abortion, but the mother's life had to be in jeopardy; that was one of the hallmarks that would allow an abortion. Anyway, we assigned stories. We wanted to do a comparative side bar about the laws in the various states. Then it occurred to me that it might [be] interesting to provide some resource to people in a predicament and counseling. So I started to put together a resource list side bar of abortion counseling services. One of them, as I recall, was the Catholic Student Center, which was not going to be a place where they had a doctor performing abortions. Several of them we gleaned from nationally circulated magazines and they were truly counseling agencies. None of them were clinics, none of them were a place where you could go for an abortion, but [they were there] for counseling. John Parker was a law student during my editorship, and he wrote a very popular regular column on the editorial pages called "Fluted Columns." John was a very lighthearted and very brilliant man, but very lighthearted, and a marathon runner as well. When we were starting to lay out the stories and John picked up on what was happening in that day's paper, he came into my office and said to me, hey Ronnie, if you print this list of counseling services, you're committing a felony under Florida law. I remember laughing at him and saying, that can't be so, John. As a diligent law student, he plopped out a law book and showed me Florida Statute, and I remember it to this day, 797.02.

P: That's correct.

S: It was the brother/sister/companion law passed in 1868, the same year Florida's anti-abortion law had been passed. [It] had language in it that I recall said something that not only in the abortion statute could you not have an abortion, but in 797.02, you could not hint, print, or advertise where someone could go for an abortion. Now, an analogy to that would be, at that time and to this day casino gambling is illegal in Florida, so it would be illegal for the *Alligator* or the *Miami Herald* to write a story about Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, because you can gamble there.

P: Excuse me, most of these referral centers that you had listed were out of state, is that correct?

S: Yes, they were. Frankly, we had a hard time finding much information on deadline for where someone could go get help on campus, but I think the Catholic Student Center was one of the ones we put in there so that there was a local one. I think we put it on there knowing that it would at least give some balance to the appearance that we were trying to promote abortion, because that was not our intent. Anyway, I was incredulous when John showed me that law. It occurred to me, my God, this law is 103 years old, and this law says we can't print this list? That's ridiculous. Mr. Whiteleather became aware of this little

controversy.

P: He was the editorial advisor?

S: He was the faculty advisor. Normally he was there in a short-sleeved shirt and open collar. He was a pipe smoker and somewhat professorial, and certainly not condescending. [He was] very collaborative and nurturing, but boy, his whole demeanor changed when this came to his attention. He said to me, I cannot allow you [to do this]. This was the first time he ever seemed to assert authority over the process [of producing the paper] in my memory. [He said], I cannot allow you to put this in the paper.

P: Ron, do you think was an issue that was a legal issue or a moral issue?

S: I think for Mr. Whiteleather it was about legalities. I think he was sensitive to his own position that he was supposed to be our advisor, and he did not want to formally be on the record advising us to do that. In fact he was very adamant. It wasn't like he officially had to be against us doing this, but he privately told us I think you should do it. He was just diametrically opposed to us doing it because he felt a very strong responsibility at that point.

P: It would be hard for him to advise you to break the law.

S: Absolutely, and I don't fault him for that, but I disagreed with him. I don't know who he called, [but he called] someone in the administration.

P: He called Lester Hale, who was then the vice president.

S: That's right, and [then] the process kicked in.

P: But now again, the Board of Student Publications approved that with a three to two vote.

S: Well, it was four [to] three. The process in such a dispute is that the Board of Student Publications is convened. I don't recall, before or since, ever going to them about any issue. I didn't set the process up, but I determined and I told our staff [that] we're going to live with the decision of this board. If they tell us we can't print it, we won't print it, and that will be it, we'll just move on. But I went to the board and I made my case, and I removed myself from any control over the coverage that the *Alligator* had about this issue. [I put] Gary Grunder in charge, besides being managing editor, of every aspect about this issue, except the editorials of course, which were still my province. I recall that on the day of the vote, one of the faculty members did not show up to the meeting. I didn't think all the students would vote for us because one of them was a Tri-Delt, and they just

weren't considered to be at the forefront of political thought on the campus. To my surprise, it was a four [to] three vote to allow publication, all four students voting for publication and all three faculty members voting against it. I don't think Detweiler could vote because he was the chairman, he could only break a tie, and there was no tie. I wasn't overjoyed or delighted, [but] I was pleased. It wasn't like [it was] a huge victory; I thought we had the right to print it all along because it was a law that obviously was anachronistic. In the era it had been written it might have made sense, but it certainly didn't in the late twentieth century.

So, I went back to the office and then got a call from, I believe, Hugh Cunningham, on behalf of President O'Connell, saying that the president wanted to talk to me. I remember the president coming over to the student union and us going down to the cafeteria and having a soda pop together. He sat across a little table from me and he said, I'm sorry, but I'm going to prohibit you from publishing that list. I expressed disappointment because I said, we submitted to this process that you had asked for and we would have lived by the result no matter what, why can't you? He said, because I'm the publisher of the newspaper as the president of the university, and the university uses state funds through a portion of tuition and I can't allow you to do this, it's a felony. I tried to talk to him about the merits of why we wanted to do it and the flaws in the law.

P: This is really a First Amendment issue, isn't it?

S: It is to me. How can congress or even the state of Florida pass a law telling the press what it can do? The fact of the matter [was that] I wasn't making the case as a student editor, I was making the case as a journalist. I mean, I considered that we were doing a professional job. The president was a former chief justice of the state supreme court. [He was certainly] a lawyer far beyond what I ever was going to be because I didn't choose to be a lawyer, but even if I had. He said he just plain prohibited me from doing it and printing it in the paper. I do remember that I decided to go ahead and do it anyway, I believe. I don't remember though, Julian, if this was before or after the BSP vote, but we had it dummied into the front page of the paper. The printer called me from Ocala at about two o'clock in the morning and said, I can't do this because I might be culpable on the same felony statute if I print it. So he allowed me to at least quickly write something to explain why this white space was appearing in the *Alligator*. I explained, this white space is here because we were about to commit a felony and the printer wouldn't let us. So we basically explained in the white space in the paper why the list wasn't printed. The president, either through Hugh Cunningham or through his own phone calls, made me aware that I could not do this. I basically went and met with my friend Don Middlebrooks, then president of the student body, and told him about my frustration in not being able to do this. He said to me, look, I agree with you. Oh, one point I want to make

with you is that Jean Chance, a very dear friend and a mentor [who] I never had her for a class, [gave me] the most important lessons I [ever] got at the college of journalism. She never told me what to do on this, but her ex-husband, but then husband, Chuck Chance, offered to take my case. I was struck by the irony of having my first and only felony case being handled by a lawyer whose name was Chance.

P: We talked to Jean about this and she said that several of you had met at her house and discussed this.

S: We met at her house to discuss this, including Don Middlebrooks and all my friends from the *Alligator* and student government. Jean said they did not want to advise me to break the law. In fact, they encouraged me not to do this. They said, this could be bad, you could go to jail for a year, you don't have to do this. I listened to their sage counsel and then I said to all of them, I appreciate your advice, but I think we need to do this or everything we're learning is just a sham. [If] we find something like this that shouldn't even be on the books anymore and let it go, then all the lessons that we're getting in the classroom don't mean anything about the First Amendment. So once I told them I'd made the decision we were going to do it they all were fairly pleased, but no one wanted to be the one to suggest that I do it.

P: I think Jean and others thought that it really was a First Amendment issue and admired you for having the courage to go ahead.

S: Well, I think they did not want to sway me. If I was inclined to do it, they were very, very supportive and enthusiastic. I remember Don Middlebrooks offered that he would spend \$200 out of his own pocket to pay for the paper and ink necessary for us to replicate these lists, the lists of counseling services, on a mimeograph sheet, and that's what we did. We ran a mimeo sheet that I signed my name to so that it would be very clear that I was responsible for this, not the *Alligator*. I think we ran 23,000 copies off all night long at the student government offices.

P: This was like an insert into the paper?

S: It was a white sheet of paper and we just ran 23,000 copies imprinted with the *Alligator* letterhead, masthead, and the list and my signature at the bottom. Then I met with my staff with a pile of 23,000 copies of this abortion counseling list. I said, look, this is not a democracy, this is a newspaper, but I've made a decision that we should go ahead and offer this information to our readers. [I said], I can't involve you in that by me telling you you have to do this, but the only way we can get this in the paper is if we stuff it into the paper when it arrives at the drop boxes on campus. [I said], I can't do it by myself, but I'm not asking you to do it.

[Then I said], I want to open this up to discussion. I'm very proud to say that it was a unanimous decision by every member of the staff that they wanted to participate in this felony. This was no conspiracy, this was just young people juiced up with belief that the First Amendment meant what it said. So we divvied up the stack of 23,000 copies of this mimeo sheet in book bags and stealthily worked our way across campus and basically waited for the newspaper to arrive. When it did [arrive] at the box you were at, you stuffed one mimeograph sheet into every single copy of the paper so that every copy had this counseling list. Later that morning, as the paper was being snarfed up across campus, it became apparent that we had committed this felony. I got a phone call from Chuck Chance saying that the state attorney's office had called him. Obviously they had followed this controversy. This is a year after we broke the stories about the jail and the Baugher hanging. He said that there was an information for my arrest because I had signed the sheet and taken responsibility for it. They called him to see if they needed to come down to the *Alligator* office to arrest me there, or if I would turn myself in. I remember very clearly thinking what a disruptive thing it would be to have deputies coming in the *Alligator* newsroom and handcuffing me, though it surely would have been dramatic. So I went down to Chuck's office and talked with him. I recall the walk from his law office to the jail was a pretty short distance, but it was my first exposure to being on the other side of press coverage, because somehow the press knew that I was about to be arrested. Cameras [were] in my face and people [were] barking out questions at me. I [was] now a target of news as opposed to a coverer of news.

P: You were on the perp walk.

S: Yeah, the perp walk. That's a very good phrase. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind not to pull a windbreaker up over my face like some petty thieves or mobsters do. I remember going into jail and the sergeant who I had interviewed a year earlier was the guy who took me in. He joked, I think he was joking, as I came to the counter to get fingerprinted and mug shot. He said, I knew we'd get you in here eventually. He was clearly kidding, but it was not my favorite joke given what had happened at the jail. I was fingerprinted and photographed for a mug shot. I remember I was wearing a short sleeved yellowish alligator Lacoste shirt.

[End side A2]

I think I was wearing an alligator Lacoste shirt and a pair of jeans, and I'm surprised, in retrospect, how long my hair was. I was arrested, and because I had been a student in Gainesville for four years, I seemed to be a fairly minimal risk for flight and they released me. Chuck had arranged for me to be released on my own recognizance. So I spent scant amount of time in the jail itself, happily, by the way. As I was getting out of jail, within the hour I got

in jail, I was informed that President O'Connell was holding a news conference in Tigert Hall and wanted me to attend. This is the very hour of my arrest. I went to Tigert Hall after I was released and the president was holding a news conference. All sorts of statewide, and even some national interest, had been generated in the case already. I remember him calling me up to the podium at his conference room where he's holding this news conference and putting his left arm around me and clutching my shoulder really tight. It struck me as not an affectionate grab. He recounted, accurately, our difference of opinion about the issue. The reason he wanted me at the news conference, I found out, was to use me as a prop basically. I was a human prop for the president because what he told the reporters was that I had disobeyed his command, he probably didn't use that word, not to publish the information. He said that if I were convicted of the felony charges against me I obviously would be fired as editor and removed from the university. I don't remember if the word was suspended or expelled.

Then he surprised me by saying that he also was asking then attorney general, Robert Shevin, to render [an] opinion. He was going to request an opinion from the state's attorney general about whether he, as publisher of the *Alligator*, had the power to exercise prior restraint over the newspaper's content, which is what he attempted to do in this case. I'd never heard the president called publisher before this dispute. He then said that if the answer from the attorney general's office, though it was not binding legally [but] was merely an informative opinion from the state's top lawyer, was that he did have that authority, knowing that I already disobeyed the authority he had believed he had, that I would also be fired from the *Alligator* and expelled or suspended from the university. I remember thinking to myself, I didn't say it out loud, well gee, this is kind of like double jeopardy, I kind of get screwed either way. If I'm convicted of a felony I'm going to prison and I lose my job as editor, and if the attorney general gives the president this opinion, I'm screwed too. So it seemed like I needed to win on both fronts to be happy. The principle that was involved was very important to me, and my ability to continue as editor was extremely important to me. Fletcher Baldwin joined the case with Chuck Chance from the UF College of Law. [He] was a constitutional law expert, as he is to this day.

From that point, what happened on campus was fairly interesting. All these social issues were burning, and I remember that a women's liberation group threw a flyer on campus that talked about that Ron Sachs obviously has a greater concern for the First Amendment than women's rights. [They pointed out that to me] this is not about women's rights, this is about the First Amendment. They intended that to be a cutting commentary, and I took a step back and I was kind of struck by the naivete of the flyer. They weren't opposed to what I'd done,

but they were opposed to the idea that I didn't do it to promote women's rights to have an abortion [and] that I had done it on First Amendment grounds, which is exactly what I did.

P: Let me ask you, what was your personal feeling about abortion?

S: My personal view of abortion, I think I was a product of the time, where I thought it was a not great solution to a problem, but I did believe, when I heard all the arguments, that in the early stages it should be within a woman's rights to control what was going on within her own body.

P: Essentially you would have agreed with *Roe v. Wade*?

S: Yes, I would have [agreed with *Roe v. Wade*], but that really didn't drive this whole issue. I was not on some soapbox championing abortion. As an editor, it was an issue in Florida because Florida had such a restrictive law. There were women all the time who were getting abortions in Florida, illegal ones that were very dangerous, by people who would basically put up a shingle and would provide this so-called service. We were driven more by a concern about the issue, like any social issue you might cover. We were not on any kind of crusade until we found out there was a law that told us as journalists that we couldn't publish something. That changed our entire motivation, [and] then we actually were on a mission to call attention to this bad law. But basically the women's group was correct, it was a First Amendment issue [for us]. The irony of their opposition was that if we did not have the First Amendment right to publish information, then their issue would suffer, because women could not get good, accurate information about where they could go for help. Anyway, I remember a defense fund was taken up so some modicum of money could be paid to our lawyers. It was paltry. Sigma Delta Chi up there helped raise it. My parents were struck by the hate mail and phone calls they received, which was more than balanced out by the fact that my name was uttered by Walter Cronkite on the CBS evening news, which did a reader on the case. I was very pleased that newspapers all across the country and newspaper people all across the country wrote me letters or wrote columns and editorials in support of what we had done. My greatest disappointment about the whole controversy was probably Buddy Davis, who is very dear to me to this day. He was one of my professors. Every year I was in college I had him for every class that mattered. Making an A in his editorial writing class was my proudest academic achievement as a journalism major.

P: There weren't many.

S: Right. [It was] chin up, chest out, keep your lens clean, and don't take any wooden nickels, was his way to close every single class. I love him. I went to

him during that controversy before we broke the law. As a professor/mentor he spoke to me [and said], I was right, we were right, and that the law was a bad law. [He said], it was flawed in the perspective of modern view, it shouldn't be on the books any more. Never did he say to me I think it would be a mistake for you to challenge it through the *Alligator*, never. In fact, if anything, he was very encouraging that we were on the right track. I think there was a parallel case at the same time of a Daytona Beach woman, Shirley Wheeler, and he did make an opinion to me that this thing is probably going to get resolved eventually because of Shirley Wheeler. I said, well, we're in the middle of it now and we can't back down. But not once did he say to me, Ron, I think this is a bad idea, you shouldn't do it; if anything, he was very encouraging.

P: That's interesting, because we talked to Buddy about that and he had it exactly the opposite.

S: My recall is that he didn't tell me to do it, but he didn't tell me not to do it.

P: He said he thought it would be better to wait, number one, because it was breaking the law, and, number two, it was being adjudicated through the Daytona Beach case.

S: Again, he called attention to the Shirley Wheeler case. He did not tell me to go do it. He certainly wasn't an enthusiastic advocate of that, but he never said to me, I don't think you should do this. His word carried a lot of weight with me. He told me I was right, he didn't say go do it, so I have a different recall on that. Maybe it's because of my youthful enthusiasm. Maybe he just didn't directly communicate to me what he was completely feeling, but I felt betrayed by this mentor of mine when, in his role as the editorial writer for the *Gainesville Sun*, he ripped me a new south-side. He wrote that I was on an un-aborted ego trip. It hurt me deeply because I'm a guy who'd never been away from home until I went to University of Florida and, to this day, I have great respect for Buddy Davis, and I actually sought his counsel. He did not tell me not to do it. I knew we were on solid ground. What he said to me when I told him how upset I was about it [was], you need to separate the Buddy Davis you know as a professor from the hat I wear as an editorial writer. I just thought he had not treated me fairly, because he knew me personally, he knew I wasn't on some self serving, self promoting [trip].

P: Plus, as an editorial writer, he challenged the civil rights laws. His argument always was in class, if you're going to write an editorial you've got to be tough, you've got to take a strong position.

S: Right, and, again, I don't fault him for having a difference of opinion with me about it, but he personally hurt me. I was taking responsibility for what I did, I

was facing some legal consequences, but I looked up to him so much. It didn't change my attitude about him forever, my love for him goes far deeper than my hurt and my disappointment at what he did, but I felt really betrayed by him personally and professionally.

P: Now, what did Bob Shevin finally decide? Did he ever make a ruling?

S: It's late November [or] early December in 1971, we're about to go to trial, and Shevin's opinion comes back. Shevin's opinion was researched and written by Barry Richard, now known by all as America's lawyer, a strong Democrat who was the lawyer for the George W. Bush presidential campaign and the dispute over all the Florida stuff. [He was a] brilliant young man at the time, [and] a brilliant older man now. He wrote the opinion, and I don't recall the specific language, but I remember the thrust of the letter to President O'Connell, which was not binding. It was, no, President O'Connell, you do not have the power to exercise prior restraint over the Florida *Alligator*. [That] was a story that sent shock waves through the college press across the country, because it was, while not binding, the greatest encouragement and incentive that what we were doing was important and that it was bullshit. Just by being president of the university, and even though the university received taxpayer dollars in the form of a small portion of the student activity fee, that that alone was not justification for messing with the journalistic integrity of the newspaper.

P: Prior restraint is prior restraint.

S: Right. I didn't recognize President O'Connell as the publisher of the paper. No one ever told me he was that before until he wanted to be. Clearly in retrospect, and now that I'm older, I recognize that he probably was viewed by the law as the publisher, but I'm just damn glad. When I see Barry Richard to this day on the street in Tallahassee, I shake his hand and give him a hug and thank him for that opinion. President O'Connell clearly was so pissed off by that opinion, which he expected to be exactly the opposite, that he determined at that point that if he could not control the *Alligator* about this one incident, he wasn't going to be responsible for it. While Hugh Cunningham, and even Ed Barber, might argue with you that in making the *Alligator* go independent it was his intent to see it succeed, I had a far different impression as the editor whose decision triggered the move to independence. It was not something we were excited about. We were greatly fearful that it would be the death of the *Alligator*. To the credit of staffs that came after me [it still exists]. I had very little to do with it except for cheering them on.

P: Plus, O'Connell [knew] you were deeply in debt, some \$90,000.

S: I heard Hugh rewrite history in a speech no one asked him to give at the *Alligator*

induction ceremonies last year. I almost wanted to stand up and say, bullshit, Hugh, but I'm just too old to be the rabble-rouser I was in the same way. Clearly this ad contract for the Campus Crier was some sustenance for the paper, but clearly it was an almost overnight effort, even though there was a transition period, to kill the *Alligator*. No one will ever persuade me otherwise. It might have seemed paternal to some, even though I was on the staff, how the university was helping. My view is that they did not intend for the *Alligator* to succeed. They did not think it would or could. We went to trial on the criminal charges shortly after the attorney general's office opinion. Frankly, all I had to do was show up and sit there in the defendant's chair. The judge, I don't know if he's still alive, is a hero to me, Benmont Tench. A year later [I] had him perform my wedding ceremony to my first wife. He had freed me from one thing only to enchain me to something else.

P: There's a lot of ironies to this story.

S: Yes, Benmont Tench's son is part of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers as I recall. Anyway, he ruled on the abortion information statute, 797.02, that it was in fact unconstitutional, which had been our contention as non-lawyer practicing student journalists from the get go, but our lawyers made a very compelling case about why it was unconstitutional. Then our lawyers took the gambit of challenging Florida's 103 year old, 1868 abortion law itself.

P: This is outside of your case?

S: No, this is the same hearing after the judge declared 797.02 [unconstitutional]. Apparently my lawyers were so imbued with enthusiasm for how good they were, and they were great, they argued with the judge about the unconstitutionality of Florida's archaic abortion law itself. In that same hearing where I was found not guilty, in fact the law was found to be unconstitutional, Judge Tench struck down Florida's abortion law.

P: That was 797.01, right?

S: Yes, and I remember Chuck Chance telling me that Alachua County was the only one of sixty-seven counties in Florida that technically abortions were not illegal from that day forward. I recall the attorney general's office entering the case not on behalf of the state against me on the abortion law, but basically advocating for a change in the abortion law, which the trial judge had done as well.

P: Now, was Whitworth the prosecutor?

S: Gene Whitworth was the prosecutor, yes. He also had been the prosecutor for Terry Grubb when I covered that murder trial a year earlier. It was very strange

to be prosecuted by the same guy who did this murder case.

P: You go in and your jailer is the same guy that you talked to in the Grubb case [laughing].

S: Oh, yeah, somebody could probably write that a lot better than I'm telling it, but it was a little eerie.

P: So Gene Whitworth did not appeal this decision?

S: I think the decision was appealed. What I'm telling you is, I think that normally the process, and a lawyer could tell you better, is that the attorney general would enter the case on behalf of and on the side of the judicial district's state attorney, but the A.G.'s office I think entered it on our side in terms of advocating that the law be changed. I don't think it will be on my tombstone, but I'm proud that our standing up for the First Amendment actually led to a saner look, in a more modern time, at Florida's very, very restrictive abortion law.

P: What would have happened if you had been convicted and the appeals failed?

S: I would have gone to prison for a year. I recall the day I was arrested, I'm the youngest of four children, and I remember calling my mother and father to tell them that I was going to be arrested and I was going to turn myself in and what it was about. I remember, as a twenty year old kid, advising my mother especially. I said mom, you may get some calls from reporters. [I told her], I just want to tell you, just be careful, because anything you say when you're talking to a reporter could end up being in a story. My mother didn't really listen. The now defunct *Miami News* was still operating then, and a reporter from the *Miami News* called my mother. [My mother's] remarried name is Gray. [She said], Mrs. Gray, your son has been arrested and blah, blah, blah, and he could face a year [in jail]. This woman really befriended my mother on the phone, so my mother just had no guard up at all. To the question, what will you do if your son is convicted, my mother is a typical Jewish mother and very dramatic, and she just blurted out, I think I will stick my head in the oven. So that's the quote that appeared on the front page of the *Miami News*, that my mother was going to stick her head in the oven.

P: I could have almost predicted that.

S: [That] would have been painful, by the way, because we didn't have a gas oven, but it was the symbolism. Julian, just very briefly, [there was an] avalanche of hate mail that came in and there was some very supportive mail that came in. I remember getting phone calls from women all over the country who wanted to know where they could go for counseling about abortion or [where] to get an

abortion. I became, overnight, the resource [of abortion information]. This is right after the arrest. But before the trial and the weeks that ensued, at my home in Miami, my parents received such terrible hate mail. I saved a lot of it.

P: Were they supportive of your stand?

S: They were very supportive. I think they were surprised their son was embroiled in the middle of this, but a year earlier I called my mother from the May Day demonstration and told her I was up there where a lot of people were getting arrested. I remember before hanging up, typical of a mother, she said, well if I can't stop you from going just make sure you wear a jacket, because it's cold in Washington.

P: Wear clean underwear [laughing].

S: She meant a sweater or a jacket to be warm.

P: Was there any anti-Semitism in this, in the threats and the letters?

S: My Judaism isn't like imprinted in my face or in my name automatically. No, I think it was just hateful stuff from some right-wing folks. I remember newspaper clippings coming that had writing all around the perimeter. People would read this in the paper and then rip it or clip and write nasty things on it and draw a beard on me and devil ears. Somebody even glued a couple of metal washers and tied strings to it and referred to I should be hanged, which is another one of your ironies [because it was] a year after the Baugher stuff. I remember being amused, mostly, by the hate mail, but the volume was staggering.

P: In retrospect, this is pretty extraordinary for a twenty year old editor of a campus newspaper to literally risk his career, because that may well have been the case had you been arrested and had a felony. It would have been tough to get jobs. At any point did you have this fear that this is going too far, it's too dangerous?

S: Actually, I really had a lot of faith that we were right. I mean, I didn't believe we were taking a huge chance. It just was so contrary to my sense of fairness and everything I was learning at journalism school about the First Amendment. It did not seem to me [like I could go to prison]. It's not like I obsessed about, gee, I could go to prison. I knew that that could happen, but I had great faith that we were right and a lot of faith that we were represented by some really smart lawyers who would not have taken this case on if they did not think they could win it.

P: Although you did at some point talk about the fact that you thought that O'Connell and Maxwell were making decisions about printing or not printing, and that

O'Connell had made some sort of indirect threats against you. Was that true, and did you feel in any way intimidated by that?

S: By indirect, how do you mean?

P: Well, that was just a term that you had used. You said, in one of your editorials I think, that he had used indirect threats against the editors, and I presumed that he was going to fire you or throw you out of school.

S: Well, I think that he didn't privately threaten us, he did it publically. Clearly, he went after the newspaper itself, but he held me up as a human prop and he squeezed my shoulder so I wouldn't walk away. It's not like I got to speak at that news conference he held the day of my arrest, but he made it very clear that he was going to punish me for disobeying him, and if the law didn't do it he was going to do it. Fortunately, the attorney general's opinion didn't give him the authority to do that.

P: Let me quickly finish up with a couple of other issues. You did a fairly long article when Steve O'Connell had the sixty-seven black students who were protesting arrested. What was your reaction to all that? Did you see O'Connell as, number one, a racist, and, number two, as having made a poor decision in having them arrested?

S: I think [in] that era almost anybody who was a university president had a difficult time because it was such a volatile, tumultuous time on campuses all across the country. In the South, which [is] where the University of Florida is, that it reached that level shows you how much this was rooted all across the country. I think that he was not well served by his own background. I think he evolved his philosophies and views as we all do. But I do recall I had the knowledge, even as a student, that when he served on the Supreme Court he helped write a majority opinion on a ridiculous thing, which was the refusal of some county in Florida, I don't recall which one, to issue a marriage license to an interracial couple. I recall [that] it was a law student who told me that the language in the opinion actually almost was like this, that duck marry duck and geese marry geese and white folk should marry white folk. Knowing that he was a party to an opinion like that, no matter when it was, and it wasn't all that far removed from the time he was now president of the university, surely that was in my frame of reference and others. Just the exceedingly bad judgement of knowing that it's a volatile time, and the reason these students were arrested was because they refused to leave and they didn't have an appointment to see him. In retrospect today, even President O'Connell, who is a brilliant man, I think, would sit down on the floor in the lotus position face to face with those students and talk with them. But at that time, when there were protests all over and the response of authority at the time was tear gas and arrests, figures of authority did what others did.

- P: In fact they did use some tear gas in that, didn't they?
- S: Absolutely, I remember during that whole era of my undergraduate time at some point the police department in Gainesville got a riot tank, so at least the police officers wouldn't be out there on the streets sucking up tear gas with the rest of us.
- P: Another thing I think I remember from your story is that they had brought the buses in to arrest these students who were protesting, and the students let the air out of the tires.
- S: Yeah, that's rich. I don't actually recall that, but if I wrote it it must have happened.
- P: Talk about the Tom Sawyer Hotel incident.
- S: This story got far less attention but it had much quicker results, and I was very gratified by it. I got a tip one day, and this was deep into my time as editor, that a student who was working part-time at the Tom Sawyer Motel, which was some little tiny, rinky dink motel way up on 441, was discriminating against black customers. I said, well, how do you know this? He said, I work there. I said, well how do you know? He said, because the owners told the manager, and the manager does this too, that basically we have to charge a higher rate to black customers and we're not allowed to put the black customers in the newer wing of the motel. [He said], we have to make them stay in the older wing and we charge them more. I said, do you have anything that would prove this? He said, yeah. I said, can I have a copy of it? So, I met him. What it was was this vertical run sheet that almost lists all the room numbers, but I clearly remember there was handwriting on it from the manager that says put "spooks," and I remember he used the word "spooks," in whatever sections of the motel. We front paged the story. We reproduced that as a piece of artwork. The U.S. Justice Department came down. I don't know if they shut down the motel for a short time, but [they] investigated it, the civil rights folks from the Justice Department. I was amazed at how quick the delivery of justice was. This was certainly not the biggest controversy of the day, but I was very impressed that the Feds so quickly responded to this injustice. It was so blatant, and we had editorialized against it. I don't remember the ultimate outcome except that just pointing it out was I think a great service to the community.
- P: You were an integral part of what I see as a very rich tradition at the *Alligator* in defending the First Amendment. I think that it's absolutely remarkable. As we know, Tom Julin was participating in all of these activities, the Earnhardt photos and the stripper and on and on. Isn't that rather remarkable that a campus newspaper would be doing these things when other major newspaper were

reluctant to get involved with these issues?

S: I think that's a great question. That's my favorite question you've asked, and you've asked some doosies. The history of the *Alligator* [is inspiring]. While any young person at the *Alligator*, even veterans, alumni like me, don't know it all, we heard enough about it before we got there and once we got there, that it was inspiring. It only reinforced and inspired you more to want to be a part of it. It's a proud tradition. There is no other campus newspaper in the country that has as rich a tradition of covering the news and appropriately raising hell than does the Independent Florida *Alligator*.

P: Let me change the focus a little bit. When I talked to Tom Julin, he said as an editor, I thought that was my job to raise hell. Is it easier for a student editor under these circumstances to make these challenges? If you were a major newspaper and you had all of the businesses who were taking out advertising with you, it would be a little tougher. It might be tougher sometimes for a major newspaper that might be in the Knight-Ridder chain to take those risks.

S: Actually, I think the interesting aspect to this question is that when you're editor of the *Alligator* you know how long you've got. It's almost like someone's told you how long you've got to live. This is such an amazing experience to be editor of the *Alligator*, and an amazing responsibility. You feel the burden of it, but you also feel this little clock ticking. You know that your term is for only so much time, and you really want to do the job well, responsibly. You really are aware, not every moment, but you are aware in the back of your mind of the rich tradition in history of this newspaper. You know that your time as editor is going to be meaningful in how well you do the day-to-day coverage of news in that newspaper. But also, and this is where we raise our game up at the *Alligator* way above what most college newspapers or maybe even some commercial papers do, you realize there's a deeper responsibility to use the First Amendment. Again, I think students maybe are more comfortable with this than professionals become as a change agent. Certainly in the editorials you can be an advocate, but even in strong reporting [you can accomplish this]. This is why I went into journalism instead of law and politics. I always thought I wanted to be a lawyer and an elected official, but my experiences at the *Alligator* showed me that my initial instincts were correct, that you can do as much or more to effect meaningful change in our society through journalism than you can through the halls of Congress sometimes.

P: The jail reform and the abortion, those were not issues you sought out. They were issues that came up as you reported and found out information.

S: I think what it is is [that as an] *Alligator* editor and staffer, but particularly as editor, you sharpen your skills for a finite period of time, which is great practice

for when you go out professionally. You say, besides the day-to-day stuff, what should we be doing? What breaking news stories need a deeper look? What issues need a deeper look? I think you are particularly motivated by knowing that you have a limited time in the job. If you're editor-in-chief of a major metropolitan daily, you don't know what your tenure there is going to be, but at the *Alligator* you do. I think that that is a great motivator because you want your time there to be significant. You want to certainly nurture young reporters and you want to do a good job on the day to day stuff in covering student government, but if there's an opportunity to right a wrong and to effect change by doing a great job of committing journalism, than that I think is where *Alligator* editors shine. They don't look for those opportunities, but they're sensitive that they're out there, and when they see them they do not go shyly.

P: So in that sense you didn't come with an agenda, per se, other than to inform and to promote change?

S: That's correct. Again, I did not give thought to what kind of job is this going to help me get. Frankly, after the Baugher stories my junior year in college, those stories helped land me my internship at the *Miami Herald*. During my summer internship in the summer of 1971, the *Herald* editor said to me, this is your hometown paper, we want you to work here when you graduate. [He asked me], do you want a job with us? I said, this would be the proudest thing I could ever do is come home and work for my hometown paper. That was my first job out of college. So I still didn't know if I was going to go to the *Herald* for sure, but it was nice to know that they wanted me. I didn't know if they would still want me, but the editorials of support off the abortion thing were unbelievable across the board. The *Herald* initiated a professional newspaper support, editorially and financially, of what we were doing after the fact. So I was very pleased the professionals were rooting us on. I would say to you, Julian, I really believe that *Alligator* editors have a sense of the history. They're not historians about the *Alligator*, but they have a basic sense that some important things have happened in the hallowed halls of that newspaper. A lot of fun has happened, a lot of bonding of young people, a lot of careers have been propelled forward and shaped, even as people took turns in their careers away from journalism. But I think you feel a sense of responsibility and duty to do something meaningful in your time there, not just to have the honor of serving, but to serve well. I will tell you, and we're at the end of our talk, [and] I tell Ed Barber, anything I've achieved today, anything, all traces back to my time at the *Alligator*. Working for Governor Chiles and Governor Askew before him, but particularly that governor, every professional skill I have [I gained at the *Alligator*]. What I tell young people in mentoring them today [is that] I owe it all to the *Alligator*. I mean, I really do.

P: Well, let's end on that note.