

FAL 8

Interviewee: David Lawrence, Jr.

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

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P: This is Julian Pleasants and this is June 12, 2003. I'm at the Oral History office in Gainesville, Florida, speaking with David Lawrence. Would you talk a little bit about why you chose to attend the University of Florida and what you intended to major in?

L: I was so eager to get into journalism that, if somebody had said, "you can start working in a newspaper right away," I would have done it. My father, who was a long-time newspaperman, said, this would really be a dumb stunt, don't do that. I'm one of nine children. We certainly came from a family with no significant money. I grew up on a farm [and] moved to Florida when I was fourteen. I'm the second oldest of nine, and the fact of the matter is that, if we went to college, we were destined to go to something that was a state university or a state community college. Therefore, all nine of us went to either the University of Florida or Florida State, but it was really a question of we couldn't afford to think of other places.

P: You were a journalism major and you finished with that degree in what year?

L: I graduated a half-year early. I graduated in December of 1963.

P: Did you ever consider any other major or any other interest?

P: Yes, actually I did. I started out in political science. My first vision was [that] I would get a degree in political science. I then went to work for the *Alligator* beginning in my freshman year, and it ended up being a very consuming sort of thing. I don't like my answer, but my answer is that journalism would be easier than political science. Actually, if I had to do it over again, I would major in something like history [or] English. I do think one of the saving graces of journalism school was, to be accredited, you had to take 75 percent of your classes outside of that discipline.

P: How important is a journalism degree for a successful career in the newspaper business?

L: Not incidentally, I think this school is truly one of the nation's best. I don't think it was regarded anywhere near one of the nation's best when I was here forty years ago. This is maybe a bit heretical, and I love this place and love this school, but I don't think a journalism degree is in any way "necessary" or "mandatory" for somebody going into journalism. At least in my experience, an extraordinary number of people who go into journalism don't have journalism

degrees, and they [have] history degrees or English degrees or political science degrees or some other area of liberal arts.

P: So you think you could learn on the job just as well?

L: Yes. Now, the great advantage is that, if you're at journalism school, you do learn specifics of the discipline, and it may also be a good connector to internships and so forth. I think having summer internships is a really wise thing to do.

P: You had one every summer.

L: Oh, absolutely, sure.

P: Did the journalism school arrange that for you?

L: No.

P: You did that on your own?

L: I did it on my own, but I think the world has become more patterned than that. I think folks [now] really do go out of their way to help folks doing that.

P: The first time that I noticed your byline, or you were listed on the masthead, was September 16, 1960. You were, I guess, a cub reporter.

L: I'm interested it's even that early; I didn't realize that. That shows you what memory does, because my memory is that I went to work in [my] second semester at the *Florida Alligator*.

P: Well, what I understand is that when you were first rewriting news releases and getting information, and helping at the paper and didn't have a lot of bylines, you were listed in the paper as working there.

L: I'm getting old; I don't even remember that.

P: Did you, when you went to work for the *Alligator*, have a formal interview with anybody?

L: I don't think there were any formal interviews back then. If there were formal interviews, I don't remember. What they did was, they would give you something really junky to cover, and it's something that, if you failed on it and you didn't come back with it, there was no big deal. A lot of folks, I assume and, as I recall, didn't come back with it or turned in unacceptable work. Well, [it was] no big deal, [because] we hadn't invested in anything really at all. So, it was your willingness to do that sort of scut work that let people see you over a period of time.

- P: So what you did is, you just went up and said, "I want to work on the paper," and they said, "okay."
- L: Sure.
- P: Were your parents pleased that you were working on the *Alligator*?
- L: You know, I can't remember specifically, but surely my dad was. My dad was excessively proud of his nine children, and the fact that one of them went into newspapers gave him some very special pleasure.
- P: When you joined the paper, was there a faculty member or someone who advised the paper and the staff?
- L: You know, I guess there was, but I don't remember. There was certainly at that point a Board of Student Publications, which, as I remember, had four faculty members and three students. Don't hold me to this. They didn't need to be journalism folks. John Webb was one of those people who was not in journalism, but Dean Hale, who was a very powerful figure.
- P: Dean Lester Hale.
- L: Yes, as the dean of students. He was a significant figure in all of this. The administration was very interested in what happened.
- P: Yes, we'll get to that a little bit later on.
- L: Okay.
- P: Now when you joined, and *The Alligator* particularly as you were on the staff a little later, what was the relationship between the BSP [board of student publications] and the *Alligator* staff?
- L: You know, my principal recollections of the Board of Student Publications frankly come later, certainly after I became editor of the paper and certainly in the time that I directly got in trouble with the Board of Student Publications. I can't remember the Board of Student Publications in any daily kind of way.
- P: We'll get into it a little more specifically when we talk about when you were editor, but was there throughout your time at the *Alligator* a lot of conflict between the *Alligator* staff and the administration?
- L: Oh, sure. These are very different times. Remember that this was a time when the university was just being desegregated. That occurred, as I recall, in the fall

of 1962, [in the] undergraduate division people, literally, on this campus chose which side they were on. There was a significant number of people who were clearly opposed to the integration of this campus and so forth. This is also a time, I can distinctly remember, where the Americans for Democratic Action [ADA – liberal group formed in the 1950s] chapter, people would talk openly, [saying,] “I’m sure [the ADA] must be a Communist-front group.” Remember the Johns Committee [Florida legislative committee founded to root out Communists that had repressive effects on Florida universities] was not that many years before, in which you had purple pamphlets and Charley Johns. History tells us of really despicable McCarthy-like moments. So people were not looking for rebellion on the part of the students and, of course, this is before the Free-Speech Movement at Berkeley, and these are the very early 1960s.

P: As a matter of fact, you did write an article about the investigations by the legislature of the Johns Committee and some of their more evil manifestations and, particularly on this campus, ferreting out people for their sexual tendencies or their political views. Also, you wrote about the integration of the College Inn [Gainesville restaurant]. Do you remember writing that article?

L: Not at all.

P: As a matter of fact, you came out in favor of integrating the College Inn and you mentioned in the story that there was a counter-demonstration, people who were picketing the demonstrators.

L: I mean, it’s easy, forty years later, to say [it’s] a liberal-college campus and everybody is for the same thing, [but] it wasn’t at all. People fiercely felt on each side of this issue.

P: When you were editor in particular, was there a lot of conflict between the staff in the *Alligator* and student government and/or Blue Key?

L: Oh, sure, significant conflict. Blue Key was *the* establishment group on campus, and this was a time when, if you wanted to be in the Florida legislature, it would sure as heck help that you went to the University of Florida and probably went to law school. So, it was a very button-down group of people, and very much in tune with the college administration. The newspaper was seen as, this is the *time in-memoriam* sense of kings and messengers, but the newspaper was seen as sort of a what are you folks doing? Why are you upsetting things? This place runs pretty well. You shouldn’t be writing about these things. I would say there was quite distinct conflict.

P: What about conflict or disagreement from alumni? Did you ever hear from them at all?

- L: If I did, I don't have any recollection at all.
- P: What about faculty? I know that at one point that you came out in favor of faculty pay raises.
- L: Radical fault that that would be.
- P: But did you have some faculty who strongly disagreed with some of your editorial positions?
- L: I don't want to testify as to things that I don't recall, and I simply don't recall.
- P: When I know a couple of times that Hugh Cunningham thought that the paper had gotten a little too off-track and a little too critical of the administration.
- L: Hugh Cunningham happens to be a person whom I have enormous respect. Remember Hugh Cunningham was, at one point, the right-hand person of J. Wayne Reitz. Believe me, to this day, I think Hugh Cunningham is one of God's good people. I have lots of great things to say about him. He's probably flawed like the rest of us, but he, of course, was paid, in a significant period of his career to make sure the administration line held up. That was his job. My job was something, quite frequently, to the contrary. J. Wayne Reitz, for whom I have and had ultimately a lot of respect, as far as he was concerned, he didn't need some students and "radicals," although that's sort of foolish. If you look back at it, it wasn't very radical at all. But he wasn't looking for help to run this place, and he wasn't looking for help for revealing certain things. He wanted a nice, placid, pastoral even, campus.
- P: I talked to Tom Julin, who as you know, was the editor after you were, and I asked, what was your main job as editor? He said, mainly to stir things up. Now that was a little bit later time, but he said, I thought that that's what an editor of a college newspaper ought to be doing.
- L: I would say that the greatest single value my father taught, which is really sort of a very old-fashioned value, is, what's fair. My father is still remembered by people, and he's been gone twenty years, for a sense of fairness. I've always tried to live in that, and so I've got to sort of check it out. Does this make sense? Is it fair? I'm [not] actually a flaming liberal myself, but I do have a progressive soul and do have a sense of, is this fair or not. So, when I think of subjects like desegregation, integration, etc., to me, it's all a matter of what's this country supposed to be about, what is fair. The lessons of history, you know far more than I do. I don't know of any progress in the history of humankind that wasn't done unaccompanied with conflict. You've got to have people shoving and

pushing each other. The newspaper plays, I think, a good newspaper, a major role in not stirring up things for stirring-up's sake, but saying, "what about this?" Or, "let me give you the rest of the story." People frequently don't want the whole story covered or believe that they already know what whole story is.

P: When you were editor, what did you see as the main purpose of the *Florida Alligator*?

L: [There are] several things: One, to give folks a fairly good sense of what's going on in, particularly on campus. This campus was then 11,000 students and not 48,000 or whatever. Frankly, to give people a chance to have their say is something I have felt strongly all my life. My obligation, as old-fashioned, again, as it sounds, that you keep a democracy basically by letting a lot of people have their say and then thinking that the people are smart enough to decide for themselves. I had this vision that my job was to mix it up, to let a lot of people have a chance to have their say, to sort of look into things that other people might not want me to look at and then folks can decide what they think and life will go on.

P: So you saw yourself, to some degree, as a voice of the students?

L: Oh sure, yeah. I think people would have been happy with a voice of the Inter-Fraternity Council, or something of that nature that would be what some people would perceive as a voice. Well, I belonged to a fraternity, and that was one voice, but there were an extraordinary number of people who would be voiceless if that was the definition.

P: Other than just being a voice of the newspaper and providing information, did you try to be entertaining as well?

L: You know, I don't think I ever even thought in those terms. It is only later in the evolution of the newspaper business and the evolution of the media that I think people have thought in those terms. No, it wouldn't even cross my consciousness. Now, I'm sure there were things that inadvertently or purposefully entertained people, but I didn't see my job as entertaining people.

P: I just remember you had one April Fool's issue.

L: Oh yeah, but that's sort of a time immemorial. I would hate to look at it now. It was desperately sophomoric.

P: I have it right here.

L: Whatever you do, don't show it.

P: Did you ever have a confidential source?

L: As an *Alligator* [staff member]?

P: Yes.

L: You know, I can't tell you specifically, but what I do remember is an awful lot of people telling you things that they clearly told you on the basis that it wasn't going to go somewhere else. Now, whether I used that in some fashion. You know, most of the time, I see no need whatsoever to quote anonymous sources of any sort, and I think you ought to have vast protections. But I think human relationships and human nature in the world is going to work [where] you're going to tell me something and you're going to say, "this didn't come from me but you ought to go look at that." I've been aware of that all my life. I think that's part of the fundamentals of journalism and getting information.

P: If there had been a situation where you did have a confidential source, how far, when you were editor of the *Alligator*, would you have gone to protect that source?

L: Oh, totally. I don't know of anything much more sacred than saying, "I accept that information on that basis; you should know that you'll not be revealed at any point." I think that I have a total obligation in this world to keep that confidence. Now, [this is] with the clear exception that if somebody's life subsequently is in danger, I think there are... I would like the world to have a sense of significant moral ethics, but I also think life is some[what] situational, and you can give me a circumstance where I would override something.

P: But that would be unlikely at the *Alligator*, I would suspect.

L: Maybe totally unlikely.

P: When you worked for the *Alligator*, how much were you paid as you went through the ranks, because you were managing editor at one time and then you were editor?

L: You know, I think I was paid ultimately, and I'm relatively sure of this, it must exist, I think I was paid ultimately, \$30 a month.

P: By the time you were editor?

L: Yes, by the time I was editor. I clearly wasn't working for the money. Then again, I started at my first newspaper job out of college at \$95 a week and had a

baby nine and a half months later, and we were then making \$105. So, \$30 a month doesn't sound like a heck of a lot, but it was more than it might seem today. We were in the basement of the Florida Union, I used to play a lot of pool, and played pool for money. You weren't supposed to play pool for money, but I played pool for money, and I think I won more than I lost.

P: That's good.

L: There was a lot of poker being played on campus, too.

P: While we're on that, describe what the offices were like and give me a typical day when you were editor. When you would come in, because while you were there, you went to one issue a day and you needed to get the next edition out.

L: If you checked today in Miami, and I'm not even in the newspaper business anymore, people would tell you I work hard. When I devote my energies, I really devote my energies. I clearly had a girlfriend and ultimately a fiancée, and we've been married forty years this December, so part of my time was spent with her and part of my time was spent sleeping and a little bit of time was spent eating and a little bit of time was spent at the fraternity house. A relatively limited time was spent in class, and I spent all the rest of the time at the *Florida Alligator*. I mean, we would be there at any hour of the day or night, and it was part of the joy of being on-campus. You'd be really tired, but you were sort of in it together. There is immense camaraderie, and then remember the scene is, this isn't some fancy office, this is in the basement of the old Florida Union, in which you're below ground. You can look up and see out, but you're below ground. I recall this as a low-ceilinged, wide, long room. I mean there was immense romance in all of this, of people in together. I affected a pipe for a significant period of time and then I smoked. I mean, I smoked until I was thirty-five years old, one of the dumb habits known to humankind, but I did. It was, you know, you're young, you're going to live forever, you're doing important work. I was doing work that directly connected to what I most wanted to do in the world, which was the newspaper business. It was a wonderful time.

P: I expect that, as you were getting the paper out, it was pretty frenetic.

L: Oh, absolutely frenetic, but it was the old days of, it wasn't computers, it was sort of like this office. It was kind of slopped-up, but you know where everything is and people would rip things out of the typewriter, and the wire service machines actually had bells that signified certain kinds of stories.

P: Do you remember your first story with a byline and your reaction to it?

L: It wasn't at the *Alligator*. I can remember when it was. The first story as a

newspaper reporter was for the *St. Petersburg Times*. I was eighteen years old as an intern there and it was the summer after my high school, and it was, believe it or not, about the tomato crops in Palmetto, which is across the river from Bradenton. It's not exactly the high romance of journalism, but I remember it.

P: How did you feel about it when you saw it?

L: Oh, thrilled. To have your name on top of the story...to this day, I still write Op-Ed pieces. I think it's a big deal being in the paper, writing a book, or whatever. I think it's a very big deal.

P: Could you carry me through your various positions at the *Alligator*? You were a reporter, then you were an assistant managing editor and then managing editor. What was your job as managing editor?

L: The editor of the paper was responsible for the editorial pages and overall. The managing editor sort of was the day-to-day ramrod of the news operations. In many ways, it was sort of like a super city editor, although you were also in charge of sports and features and whatever other areas there might be in the paper. It was sort of the day-to-day, ramrod, get the paper out and make sure the stories are accurate.

P: So you would assign reporters to special stories?

L: Yeah, although I am sure that we had the equivalent of a city editor and others who would actually assign stories. But yeah, you'd be deeply involved in that. You didn't write the headlines, but you would be deeply involved in what the lead headline said and other headlines and so forth.

P: Talk about the process you went through to be selected as editor, and who do you think actually made that decision? Did the Board of Student Publications decide at this time?

L: Oh yes, there's no question the Board of Student Publications made the decision. It was very clear that those votes had the power to hire and fire. Remember, until I was fired, there had never been an editor fired in the how-many-year history of the university. It subsequently became a relatively common occurrence and ultimately, the paper moved off-campus. No, it was very much the Board of Student Publications. It was thought of as a body that had been somewhat significantly politicized. To be on the Board of Student Publications, you had to be a political figure on campus. In fact, I think if you went back and checked, you had to be elected to the Board of Student Publications as a student; that's my recollection of this. My recollection is that they had seven

members, three students, [and] the three students got elected. The campus at the time was an intensely political campus and had major parties and people ran under banners of certain parties. I couldn't even tell you what they were named. You knew very well that those folks were making the decisions.

P: One of the parties, you might remember, was called The Vote Party.

L: The Vote Party [chuckles].

P: Now, did you go through an interview and who was your competition for the job?

L: I don't remember. I literally couldn't tell you.

P: When you look back at your term as editor, and we'll get into some of the details later, what would you think were the most important editorials you wrote, and what would you say was your most important contribution as editor?

L: I think I have had all my life a fierce sense of fairness. I think I helped to bring some sense of the independence of the newspaper, a willingness to look wherever something was and a willingness to stand up for things.

P: We can get into some of the more specific issues in a minute. Where did you do the pre-press and where was it printed when you were editor?

L: At the *Gainesville Sun*. The pre-press was done in the Florida Union.

P: Did you supervise layout or have anything to do with the business side at all?

L: Well, layout, I did supervise. The business side, no. I think there was a very significant divorce of news editorial and business. I ultimately ran newspapers later where I was responsible for the business side [too], but I had no interest [back then] in the business side.

P: Was Ed Barber at the paper then?

L: Yes, and don't tell me exactly how, but he was a figure I knew, even back then. I think it was because he was on the business [side].

P: Was there ever any influence or complaint from the business side because they didn't get ads or ads were canceled or anything like that?

L: You know, I don't remember any. These are quite different times, and I have seen the newspaper business evolve into something quite different. But it simply would not have worked in the slightest to say an advertiser is not going to like

this and so forth. I mean, that wouldn't have even entered my definition of what I'm thinking about and putting in the paper.

P: Would you say that the staffers at the *Alligator*, as you indicated earlier, were very close? Did you party together, and have you kept in contact with some of the people you worked with at the *Alligator*?

L: The answer to the first part is a resounding yes. People were very close, did things together, thought they were in it together. There are some people from that era whom I have kept up with in some ways over the years, and some ways even to this year. There's sort of a celebrated dust-up involving Walker Lundy, but even in the last [few] weeks, Walker Lundy and I were in touch with one another. This is a long, long way back. There are a few other people I have kept up with over the years; but you move on and there are other things to do, you live different places, you're raising a family and you've got a career. I can name five, six, seven people I worked with. I couldn't tell you more than that; I wish I could, but I can't.

P: When you look back on your time at the *Alligator*, what did you gain from this experience?

L: Oh, boy, I think I gained an enormous amount, including frankly getting some mistakes out of my system. I'm not telling you that you can't hurt things and damage things and damage people with a college newspaper. I remember one thing [from] when I was the editor of the paper that you could find easily enough, and of course the paper clearly had to retract it. A student was killed and I didn't understand the definition of homicide etcetera, and we had a headline that would indicate somebody was murdered. It was clearly a grievous error, but you got to allow people some license to make some mistakes. You hope you don't make them at the expense of other human beings, but you're going to make mistakes. It is critical to, on the one hand, understand that, and, on the other hand, not accept it.

P: One of the stories you wrote about was the humor magazine the *Orange Peel*. They put some bawdy jokes in there and the school decided to close it down. You ended up defending it, but I think Reitz appointed a sort of supervisory board over the *Orange Peel*, but eventually closed it down. *The Alligator* ran an obituary for the *Orange Peel*. That's a pretty strong example of violating First Amendment rights, isn't it?

L: Yeah, and it's interesting. Again, you have to see the tenor and climate of the times. The great figure of the *Orange Peel* was Don Addis. The *Orange Peel* was regarded as one of the two great humor magazines in this country, the other was at the University of Texas. But, boy, the people in charge of this place.

They weren't bad people, they simply didn't want any kind of this coming... For some reason my wife, in the last year, showed me an old copy of the *Orange Peel* and, my God, is it tame.

P: [Laughing.]

L: It's stunning how tame it was.

P: At the time, of course, it was very controversial.

L: That's right.

P: One of the guidelines the university set up for the *Orange Peel*, was that they would examine the publication for any lewd, obscene and libelist content, and that material would have to be deleted if the supervisory board decided that it met that criteria. This magazine had been around for thirty or forty years, hadn't it?

L: Oh, yeah it was around a long time.

P: This had been an institution.

L: It was a great institution.

P: Let me go back and talk a little bit about integration. There's some indication, when you were writing about integration, that you reported on James Meredith's attempt to gain admission to Ole Miss. Did you go there?

L: No, I did not personally go there, but this was so much in my consciousness at the time. This is happening, is it not, if I remember my history and moments correct, this is both happening in the fall of 1962. At the same time as Meredith, they're trying to get him in Oxford, the campus is being desegregated. While Meredith has ended up sort of a pained and almost strange figure, he was an immensely symbolic and important figure at that time to people like myself. To me, at least in retrospect, I can't tell you what I said at that time, but my God, those were painful, challenging [times].

P: Another issue that you wrote about was that the university decided not to invite a Communist Party speaker to campus to debate one of the faculty members. Of course, this is still during the Johns Committee [with] this carry-over from McCarthyism on this campus. How did you view that kind of attitude from the administration? Again, if you can't present your views at a university, where would you present them?

- L: I'm a work-in-progress, I hope, all my life. I would hope that I would, but I don't, [have] an unsullied record of understanding what was fair and right throughout my whole life. I just think it's fundamental that people ought to be able to hear what they want to hear. We're not going to be tainted.
- P: Another issue and I think this must of been something that everybody in America was concerned about in October 1962, was the Cuban Missile Crisis. In reading some of these old *Alligator* articles, they were talking about bomb shelters on campus.
- L: I can remember people distinctly talking about the Florida [Union]. While working at the student newspaper, boy, one of the great advantages of working at the student newspaper is we're so far down in the depths here, this is going to be a great place [for shelter]. You recall, Julian, that, at that time, we had grown up with the sense of, if you hid under a chair when the atomic bomb hits, you're probably going to be all right. The radioactive dust wouldn't come on top of you. So, these were, in some ways, foolish times.
- P: On December 9, 1962, you were selected editor and you took over the reins, according to my source, on January 6, 1963. When you started out, was there one particular goal that you wanted to accomplish? It's very clear that First Amendment rights and fairness, as you indicated earlier, are important to you. Did you intend to take on the administration on some of these issues?
- L: I don't recall ever saying that a stated goal of mine was to take on the administration. I fully understood that Dr. Reitz had his job and he was in charge, but I also thought, and have always thought, that my obligation was not simply to be respectful to the people in charge.
- P: One of the things you did, and I thought was very interesting, you began printing the *Rockwell Bulletin*, which of course is by George Lincoln Rockwell, who was an American Nazi. You printed some of those bulletins, and then you printed the rebuttals.
- L: Well, I had genuinely had a feeling all my life. If you went around this college campus and said, who's George Lincoln Rockwell, people would say, he's an artist, wasn't he, he had Vermont connections or something like this [meaning, confusing him with Norman Rockwell]. He was a very, very hateful person. Well, notice where we are today in America, we've got probably a higher percentage of hateful people in the wilderness and whatever else, but, boy, I think we're a lot safer in a democracy when George Lincoln Rockwell can speak up and somebody can say, "this is a load of crap and let me tell you why." I would rather have George Lincoln Rockwell's words out there for people to judge for themselves.

P: By the way, you called your editorials “Our Town” editorials, why did you do that?

L: Because my father, when he would run an editorial that he thought was so important that it had to be on the front page, it was called “Our Town.” There was no other reason than that. It was a way that I could signify that this was a particularly important thing to say.

P: As opposed to a regular editorial?

L: Right.

P: Once the *Alligator* printed a letter on “free love.” Apparently, you got a call from President Reitz, who was very upset about that. He said that this was only the second time he had called an editor about an editorial. Now, I know that that could not possibly be true, because I know from talking to other editors, he called them.

L: No, I don’t think it was true at all, but he was a man of enormous moral righteousness and rectitude. As easy as it would be for me to mock that, I think that he was a highly decent human being. I do remember that distinctly. This was huge thing to him, that how dare I run that point of view. Now remember again, this was before Berkeley and Mario Savio [instigator of the Free-Speech Movement] and people who are not even remembered today. J. Wayne Reitz thought that he had a very tough job, and frankly he didn’t need whippersnappers like me sort of stirring up the place; this needed to be a quiet, calm, reflective place for academia, and that was it.

P: I think he was concerned that it might hurt the reputation of the university with the legislature, which was obviously a pretty logical concern.

L: Although it may be pretty logical, it might be also pretty foolish that you think so little of [the university]. I would say it says that you don’t think a heck of a lot of the university when you’re worried about one letter to the editor in which somebody says, idiotically or not, we ought to have free love. The thing is, I am quite sure that I didn’t know what free love was. It wasn’t a term that was clear to me, so I’m not sure that I even knew specifically what I was printing.

P: Well, actually, in your editorial, you wrote, we needed to print the letter. You admitted that the letter was sophomoric and illogical, but you said in the editorial what you just said, that one letter is not going to damage the reputation of the university. Besides, nobody has paid much attention to it anyway, except somebody had called the administration.

L: My only recollection of this is that one man was upset about it.

P: There is a problem. At one point, the university was trying to stop the publication of some damaging humor article. The issue is pre-publication censorship. Do you remember any issues like that?

L: No, and I'm not even sure that I would have understood much of the concept of pre-publication. I have a strong feeling about that now, and there's, of course, great case law on this matter.

P: Another thing that came up is, while you were there in September 1963, Alachua County legalized liquor.

L: This was a huge thing.

P: Of course, the first thing that Reitz did was say, we've got to police this and keep it under control. What was your reaction to all this?

L: Well, I'm like a lot of other people; I hate to tell you that people did drink on the campus. I deeply remember keg parties and so forth. I remember that you needed to go over the hill toward Ocala, because Alachua was a dry county, and I think Marion County was not a dry county. The most you could sell, that I remember, was 3.2 [percent alcoholic] beer.

P: That's right.

L: Part of young people is sort of testing their elders, and drinking is a part of this, and rules are a part of this. The fact that this university was dry and this community was dry was a constant test for all students.

P: There is one little interesting story that came up that I thought was unusual. There was a mock presidential election on October 4, 1963. John F. Kennedy and Barry M. Goldwater were the two candidates and Kennedy won by two hundred votes. Of course, it turns out to be pretty prescient, because Goldwater did run in 1964, and I don't think at that time many people would have thought that he would have gotten the Republican nomination. I don't know who picked those two candidates to run in the polls.

L: Yeah, see, my memory in history is something different, but we'd have to go back and look at it. Kennedy wasn't exactly flying high at this time. This was a month before he gets assassinated. There were the beginnings of a real tug-of-war in this country, a tug-of-war that is fully obvious today. My recollection is something different from yours, which is that Goldwater was a candidate that perhaps I did not take seriously, but I think a significant numbers of people did take seriously. Remember, we're on a campus not exactly populated by liberals at that time.

Kennedy was an immensely appealing person to young people. How old are you?

P: Sixty-four.

L: Okay, I'm sixty-one. You remember how appealing he was. My God, an extraordinary person. Have we ever had a better-spoken President with more class? He's got a whole set of minuses, but that [1960] Inaugural, you remember. There was a Camelot sense of all this.

P: He certainly had charisma.

L: Yes.

P: On November 11, you won the Sigma Delta Chi Professional Journalism Society Award. Do you remember what you won that for?

L: Yes, this was a national convention and all the student representatives competed against one another in Norfolk, Virginia. You competed by writing, on deadline, a press conference/interview with Glenn Seaborg, who was then head of the Atomic Energy Commission. The award was presented by Walter Cronkite. It feels like a bigger deal today than it did back then. He [Cronkite] wasn't the iconic figure [he has since become]. But that was a big deal. I like to win, I like to compete, and it was a real competition.

P: Let's talk about the process whereby you ended your term as editor. As I understand it, Walker Lundy was picked as the editor to follow you.

L: There were two candidates.

P: Right.

L: Walker had earlier worked at the paper and I think he was a sports editor.

P: That's correct.

L: He and I had known each as freshman. He was from Hillsborough County and I was from Manatee County. He had left the newspaper. If he left it under angry circumstances, I can't remember that, [and I] don't think he did. I had a managing editor, and I don't even remember his name now.

[End side A1]

P: Bob Wilson.

L: Bob Wilson, I was going to say Bill Adams, that shows you what the mind will do. He was my managing editor. He was older than the rest of us. I think he was in his early thirties, so he seemed like a significantly older person. I thought he had worked hard and deserved the job. I then wrote an editorial that appears on November 22, 1963. Thirty-five years later, somebody sent me the editorial. Don't show it to me again, because I think it is awful, immature, peevish and I'm embarrassed that I wrote it. So, the editorial appears and, boy, this was the last straw for the Board of Student Publications. The editorial appears that morning and that afternoon the [wire service] bells are ringing, literally. We had United Press International and Merriman Smith is reporting from Dallas that the President is dead. It was one of those wonderful moments where everybody is working his butt off, and we're putting out an extra and so forth and so on. The Board of Student Publications, in the midst of all this, summons, and I think summons is a fair word, me to a meeting that Monday.

P: Which was officially a day of mourning.

L: And it was the day of the funeral, the national funeral. It's hard for me to capture it now, but I think I clearly realized that my goose was cooked. But in any event, I said that I would not dignify the proceedings by showing up there on the day of Kennedy's funeral, and I didn't. They didn't have me to respond to anything, but I don't think they needed me to respond to anything.

P: You think your responses wouldn't have made any difference?

L: I know they wouldn't have made any difference. No, these were folks who had been upset over a whole bunch of things during my tenure. I was seen as, and believe me, I don't think I was, but I was seen as a radical. I'm not sure you can trust this person, probably some unstable, doesn't have the best interest of the university at heart.

P: In retrospect, was your firing justified? They claimed violation of publication policy, breaches of sound journalistic practice and irresponsibility.

L: Oh, I think that's significantly ludicrous. You can't know how much I wanted to be in journalism, how much I cared about it. I care to this day intimately and totally about my own integrity. I will certainly acknowledge mistakes in my whole life, but I sure knew what journalistic responsibility was and what my job was.

P: So, you were fired, you think, because you criticized the board?

L: Yes, but I think there were a whole bunch of things that were troubling to them.

P: So that the letter about free love and the election of a new editor you opposed.

- L: There was the letter and there was a very big concern about my interest in running a column from the state NAACP. This was a big thing in their mind. This was another, what's this guy doing stirring up this place with a radical organization? I happen to be a life-member of the NAACP, and I have been for many, many, many years. It was, we know what we're supposed to do and we're in charge here and why is this person stirring up trouble? That was much of the tenor of the times in the South, and elsewhere, people stirring up trouble. My God, we wouldn't have made much progress if people hadn't stirred up trouble.
- P: I don't know if you're aware of this, but Buddy Davis wrote a letter to the *Alligator* defending you. I can quote him here. He said the principle of firing an editor for publishing information that was either controversial or critical really upset him because, in the future, student publications would simply be a mouthpiece of the administration. They would not be the voice or advocate of student causes.
- L: Then what did we come to read about Buddy Davis? Subsequently, over the years, he won a Pulitzer Prize. This is a man of enormous moral courage and has had it all his life. Of course he was prescient as well, because in fact what he kind of telegraphed there clearly ultimately came to be so bad, that ultimately the Board of Student Publications doesn't exist and the university says, *Alligator*, get off my property.
- P: Then this is one of the factors that ultimately leads to the *Independent Alligator*.
- L: Oh, I absolutely think it was, yeah. Then there was a whole string of people.
- P: Did you take any courses from Buddy Davis?
- L: Yes, two.
- P: Editorial Writing?
- L: And failed one. The only course I ever failed, I failed from Buddy Davis. Who said, like my mother would say, he was doing it for my own good.
- P: Was he?
- L: Oh yes, absolutely. I took from him what was called Journalism 301. It was a basic writing course and he was legendary as one tough-ass professor, a showman, I mean good, legendary. There were two great professors there, one of them was named Cunningham and one them was named Davis. They were reputed not to like one another. I never have known whether that was so to this day, and they're both living, and I guess they're in their eighties. The other

course I remember taking, and I actually took at least three courses from Buddy Davis; you had to take a course in law and journalism and he taught that, and I probably took Editorial Writing from him. The course I failed was in photography. I was scared of the camera. I was very comfortable in writing things. I have been used through the years for doing that; you develop confidence in yourself over time. I was not very good with my hands and I would screw it up in the darkroom something fierce and so forth. It turned out to be a wonderful break. The wonderful break was that I was forced to take another photography course and I took it from Jerry Uelsmann.

P: That was good.

L: If there was a showman on this campus, Jerry Uelsmann was the showman. I take very good pictures now, because I have a very good eye about framing things and seeing things. But if Buddy Davis hadn't flunked me, I wouldn't have taken the second course.

P: One of the things that everybody I've talked to mentions about Buddy Davis is that he says, if you're going to write an editorial, you have got to take a strong stand, otherwise it's not an editorial. Did he influence your editorial writing much?

L: Oh, sure, absolutely. One of my thoughts generally about teaching is that I can tell you the most memorable teachers of my life, including Mrs. Soule in first grade in 1948, and I can tell you Buddy Davis, and I can tell you Hugh Cunningham, and I can tell you Sam Hayes from the Harvard Graduate School of Business, etc. These were frequently iconoclastic human beings. A good teacher has an enormous influence on other people. Buddy Davis was the best of the best in my estimation, and not a kindly, sweet, gentlemanly way of doing things.

P: I understand your wife also worked at the *Alligator*.

L: Yes, that's where we met. I think the real story is that, in September of that year, I needed to get a job. I worked at the news bureau for a while, which was run by a woman named Georgia something, or she was the number two, but I worked there for a while. I also worked in one of the dormitory halls serving food or selling food. I think that the first byline you might see actually came out of the news bureau. My recollection is that I actually didn't begin working at the *Alligator* until the second semester. My wife worked there beginning in the first semester. That's where we met and that's where we started going out. We started going out in, I think, the spring of 1961.

P: Was that usual? Did a lot of social relationships develop at the *Alligator*?

L: Oh yes, and there's probably a downside to all of this. You partied together, and you drank together, and you did everything together. You were surrounded by people as passionate about journalism as you were. It was thrilling.

P: Talk a little bit about this shift from twice weekly to five days a week. That certainly changes the responsibility of the *Alligator* staff.

L: I think it is humankind's need, and certainly my need, to dream what could be, to be the best. The best college newspapers came out, and there were only a handful of them, five days a week. Therefore, you were really serious about this and journalism. It was a very ambitious move in its time. A guy named Bill Curry was deeply involved in this, and was the first, I think I was the second, but he was the first editor when it went daily. There were initially under him three managing editors.

P: That's correct.

L: Dave West, I think, was one of them.

P: That's correct.

L: His father ran the libraries, and [Dave is] now an attorney in Alachua County. Jack Horrn was the other one? Who's the other one?

P: I don't remember that, I remember David West.

L: It's not important.

P: How have college newspapers changed since the time you were editor?

L: Well, I would say some of the change is good and some of the change is not good, but it's a reflection of society. I think college students would feel unintimidated by the president of the university these days. The fact that Chuck Young [President of University of Florida] would say something, well, that's all right, but that doesn't mean we've got the gospel here. It's no particular reflection on Chuck Young. It would be true for a whole bunch of people. So, on one hand, I think the college newspapers are more independent than they ever have been. The minus on that in my estimation is that you tend to have far fewer ties with folks who might know more than you do, for instance, journalism schools. There are really good people at this journalism school who could be of real benefit to a university. If you were thinking truly wisely and you were the editor of college newspaper I would say, let me go make a bargain with those folks over here and see how they can help me. Young people are pretty sure

that they know it all and why would they reach out for help from old folks? So, I would say that's a minus. A Buddy Davis, a Hugh Cunningham, et al felt much closer to the newspaper there and it wasn't because they were tied into some university administration apparatus. They saw experience on the college newspaper as, this is a plus. The second thing is, and I only know this from seeing college newspapers of my own five children, that I would say there is some looseness of standards, anything goes. The nature of young people is to test adulthood, but striking the right balance is critical. Then I would say the other thing is sort of the pain of media generally. You asked a question earlier about entertainment, it's way too entertainment-focused now. The definition of entertainment is very, very broad. But at the heart of what journalism does, whether it's on a campus or somewhere else, entertainment is not what it is, but because of the fragmentation of the media and people striving for their corner of time, you now have a world where Fox News Channel sets the agenda for an extraordinary number of things. As a consequence, it's far more entertainment-related than it ever was, and frankly ever should be. I see that in the so-called mainstream press, but I clearly see it in college papers as well.

P: On that note, let's go ahead and end. Thanks very much.

[End of Interview]