

FAL 11

Interviewee: Dennis Kneale

Interviewer: Mark Ward

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W: This is Mark Ward with Dennis Kneale for the *Florida Alligator* oral history project. We're in Tampa, Florida, and today is September 13, 2003. Mr. Kneale, where are you from originally?

K: [I was] born in Hialeah, Florida.

W: Did you live there prior to coming to the University of Florida?

K: Yeah, I was in Hialeah until I came to the University of Florida at age eighteen in the fall of 1975.

W: Why did you pick the University of Florida?

K: [I picked the University of Florida] because of the *Alligator*. I knew by age ten [that] I wanted to be a journalist. I knew by age fifteen that the University of Florida had a really good independent newspaper that came out five days a week. My mentor in high school, who was two years older than me, Brian D. Jones, now deceased sadly, had gone there and had just torn up the place in his first quarter. It was quarters, not semesters back then. So I knew I kind of wanted to emulate him and go there and work on the paper, and that's why I picked the University of Florida.

W: You ended up working under Brian Jones when he was editor.

K: Yes, I did. I covered two beats at the same time, city and county commission, for Brian Jones.

W: We'll get to some more of your beats in a second. Why did you major in journalism when you came to the University of Florida?

K: Yeah, I majored in journalism. If I had to do it over I would major in something else and then minor in journalism and learn more of an expertise in business and economics or political science or something. But yeah, I majored in journalism. It was a good college of journalism, awfully good.

W: Were most of the people working at the paper journalism majors also?

K: Yeah, plenty of them were, but probably two-thirds were.

W: Describe the first day you came into the offices of the *Alligator*.

K: Well, it was really kind of riveting and very intimidating. You had all of these self possessed young journalists on deadline; this row of typewriters against this long Formica covered desk jutting out along the long side of the room with a former refrigerator from a former restaurant behind a pinball amusement parlor, [you've] probably heard that a dozen times by now. You had a little copy paper kind of through the carriages and some of these Smith Corona typewriters were easily fifty, sixty, seventy-years-old. There was a little clackety-clack cacophony of typewriters and photocopiers and people buzzing about and no one having much of any time to be able to direct you to the right person to talk to, but there's those two central news desks right there for the news editor. I just kind of walked up and said hello. It was scary because all those kids knew each other. I didn't get to go over my very first quarter, so I didn't go over until January, 1976. I remember worrying gravely in the fall of 1975 that I was falling behind all the other kids who had started that very first quarter. So it was harder to break in because by then they all knew each other and had been doing it for a quarter, so you had to go through a certain amount of hazing.

W: Did you fall in line pretty quickly with the others there or did it take a full semester?

K: Yeah, you really do. My very first story was a two or three paragraph brief on the student copy center raising the prices of per page copies. I was going after it like it was some kind of investigative [piece]. I remember the young woman who was running the center that I called. [She] said look, don't beat a dead horse over this, I know what the *Alligator's* going to do. I realized for the first time, within my first week, that the *Alligator* had this reputation as a bit of a loose cannon and a tough paper. So that stuck with me, but within a few weeks you're there, you're one of the crowd, and you're instantly in there. The next thing is, because kids have class, they always need you for something. There's always going to be something else. Even if they didn't want to rely on you because you're new, they had to.

W: How many hours do you think you put in in those first few semesters?

K: At first [I put in] twenty [hours], then thirty, then easily forty when I was a full time reporter covering the top beat, the administration beat. Then by the time I was editor in chief, [I was putting in] fifty or sixty [hours], sometimes more.

W: What was the pay like at that point?

K: Well, I was getting rich. When I started out I got \$15 a week for the city commission beat, and then I became the highest paid reporter on the paper by also taking the county commission beat. I had two beats, two people's jobs. I got an extra \$15, so I got \$30 a week. By my third year, because of a labor

department ruling; I think Ed Barber [General manager of the *Florida Alligator*] later got unraveled, the little exploiter; then they had to go to per hour wages. But what you did was you said this beat, news editor, is worth thirty-five hours a week. So you got paid minimum wage for thirty-five hours, which was quite a bit of money. You were making a lot of money. I mean, it helped put myself through school basically.

W: Currently, it's an honorarium system that everybody's on. But the *Alligator* at this time was also in dire financial straights. What was it like working there? I read an editorial about how the roof leaked when it rained.

K: Oh yeah, the roof did leak when it rained. We were always hand to mouth. You know, by the time I got there it was 1976, we'd been independent really only four years. This was a brand new experiment, but it didn't feel that way. It felt like it had been independent forever. It felt like, therefore, it was just going to keep going on. I think that Ed Barber kind of shielded us from how tenuous it was. I covered the meeting where editor-in-chief Brian D. Jones had to actually go to the student government, the student senate, and request funding. He had been instructed to do so by the board. [They said] we're going to request a special stipend to keep us alive. I think \$30,000 might have been a **gout**, a short fall that we were in trouble with. We were getting university advertising at the time, but it wasn't enough. I remember Brian hated the idea of going to the university student government and being beholden to them. So while he followed the board's orders to go request the money, he made secret deal with **Sandy Chism**, the president of the senate. He told him look, you ought to defeat this; this is bad precedent for government to be funding the independent watchdog of government. And so it was voted down, and I covered the meeting. I remember it primarily because I screwed up. Dan Lobek, the student government president, did a speech where he criticized the senate for turning down the *Alligator*. He said, I'm mad as hell and blah, blah, blah. He said this is off the record to me so I'm sitting there not writing, but this is a public meeting of the student government senate [and] he's the president of the government. He can't just say this is off the record, [but] I didn't know that. Brian said, why aren't you writing? I said, he says it's off the record. Brian said, he can't do that, and I realized, oh. It turns out you have some power whether to grant "off the record." It's not their power to insist on it, it's your power whether to grant it. Lesson learned.

W: Knowing the story now it's quite bizarre because in the actual newspaper they talk about funding. I remember Brian Jones had a plan for maybe a penny a copy the university would pay, and they're very positive about getting funding from student government in the editorial.

K: Yeah, Brian told me that. I'm not sure exactly when he told me. I can't remember whether he told me at the time or years later, but he kind of played

both ends against the middle there because he thought it was wrong. We survived without it, but we were always constantly aware of how thin the margin was of survival. We were paying kids for ten hours a week when they were clearly working thirty or forty. We were cheating on the labor law, but it was because it was a whole bunch of hungry kids who were working for more than income. They were working for a shot at something big.

W: Tell me about some of the people who were working at the time, your reminisces.

K: At the time was Tom Julin, who's now a very, very top First Amendment lawyer in Florida and was involved in the Florida recount for the Gore/Bush presidential election. I remember seeing him on C-Span. Robert Rivas, who's a really top notch lawyer in First Amendment and death and dying cases, he was there. **Bill Wax**, a brilliant photographer who is to this day a photographer, [was there]. [His] photos from my editorship sometimes appear on best selling books. Andrew Froman, who's a lawyer in Sarasota, [was there]. Let's see, what other journalists became big during my era? David Klein was kind of an elder statesman. He was an idol of mine. He was two years ahead of me and he became an associate group publisher of *Advertising Age* over in Singapore Magazines, he's huge. Tom Shroder [was there], [and he] went on to run *Tropic Magazine*. I think now Tom maybe runs the *Washington Post Sunday* rotogravure magazine. David Finkel was there. He won a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing [found listed as a nominee in 1995 on www.pulitzer.org]. **Keith Moyer** runs the *Sacramento Bee* or another paper out in California. Laura **Shweat**, who went on to do good things in Gannet, was there. Kathleen Pellegrino, who went on to be in charge of recruiting and mentoring at the *Sun Sentinel*. We did an internship together in 1977, so she was there. **Lin Calber**, who went on to be a big time layout person at the *Palm Beach Post*, [was there].

W: Everybody seems to be successful from that era.

K: Lauren Stoddard, who then ended up marrying the editor-in-chief of the *Ft. Lauderdale News*, **Jean Crier**, then divorced him. [She] then ended up as a public relations official for the environmental department that protects the wetlands here in Florida.

W: As a group did you hang out together while working at the paper?

K: Yeah, the newspaper was everything. It was your social setting, it was your clique, it was your job, it was where you went to hang out even if you weren't working and you were already done. You would eat your lunch there. You would bring breakfast in in the morning to work at your little piece along the long desk. Sure, the *Alligator* defined my entire existence. I barely went to class at all the

more deeply I got involved in the paper because I realized that the real education I'm getting is not in the classroom, the real education I'm getting is running the paper [and] working for the paper.

W: You mentioned at one point earlier about the off the record comment. What other lessons did you learn while working there?

K: You know, I'm introducing Ed Barber tonight for his award, he's getting a lifetime achievement award. The shtick I'm going to use [is stolen] from David Klein, because when David was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the *Alligator* he said in a speech [that] everything he needed to know in journalism in his big, lofty position running Crane Communications [and] his big magazines, everything he needed to know he learned at the *Alligator*. He learned about off the record and on the record. He learned about the importance of accuracy. I learned about the power of the written word. I mean, we made mistakes, and the *Alligator* kind of believed that you've got to let them make mistakes and then you do the best you can to fix them and learn from them. So we learned. I learned about off the record.

One kid was flim-flammed out of \$700 in loan money. I never reached him, and we ran the story anyway and identified him. Well, it just destroyed this kid because when you get flim-flammed it turns out you were trying to make some ill gotten profit, [and] that's how they ripped you off and got your money. His friends were laughing at him and he came to the paper threatening me, wanting to do violence. I learned that you might want to get that comment before you run with a story. I learned [a lesson] when I was editor-in-chief and there was a Nazi/anti-Jew attack in a dorm or something. **Jack Collins** got them to talk to him off the record and then he took their names and put them on the record because he didn't realize [you couldn't do that]. I was editing the story and I told him, we need the names, you've got to get the names. He thought oh, I'm just going to print them. He didn't realize you've got to call and talk them into it. When the brother and sister came in terrified that Nazis were going to come after them because they were published, I learned how careful you have to be with people's lives. To this day it's a lesson I'm still learning. You get so absorbed by the story that you forget about the person. I learned about accuracy. I learned about double checking titles. [I] learned everything at the *Alligator*. I also learned how to motivate without simply giving an order. Because it was a democracy and because it was all students, you couldn't just do what a boss in a real newspaper would do, which is [to say], hey come over here and do this. You had to instead get them to want to work for you, get them ignited and excited because you're excited. That's a management technique I've continued to use throughout my entire career.

W: Other people have talked about this issue, about how a vast majority of journalism students don't work at the *Alligator*. Was that true in your day also?

Do you have any inclination why?

K: Yeah, the journalism college, to its discredit I believe, was almost negative about the *Alligator*. You know University of Florida professors would say snide things about the *Alligator*. [They would say things] about the *Alligator* being sensationalist, about the *Alligator* being liberal, [and] about the *Alligator* being inaccurate, when what they should have done was be telling those students, you all should go over to the *Alligator*. Every story that you have to write, no matter how long or how short, every story is an intersection between knowledge and experience, and you should be writing more stories, not fewer. People would jeer at it and it used to really piss me off because I felt like professors were letting jealousy get in their way. I mean the *Alligator* led the way in the Hearst contest and won thousands of dollars over the years. The journalism college got matching grant money because of the *Alligator* and Hearst, and it wasn't the University of Florida that won the Hearst, it was the *Alligator* that won the Hearst. So I really disliked that a lot. There were some professors, of course, who were very helpful to the *Alligator*, Jean Chance, John Roosenraad, Buddy Davis; but others were not generous.

W: Do you remember any particular incidence where you might have been helped by one of the journalism faculty members?

K: Well, sure. Look, while they pissed me off and my affinity and affiliation and loyalty were to the *Alligator*, not the college, the fact is many of them were incredibly helpful. Buddy Davis gave me counsel on editorial writing even though I couldn't take his class. Ralph Lowenstein wrote me a wonderful recommendation letter for a *Washington Post* internship that helped me get it because he said to the managing editor, "Dear Howie," because they'd known each other for twenty or thirty years. Griffith was just encouraging and was a good listener. Jean Chance kind of [helped me] learn to avoid jargon, because we used to write police briefs with exactly the police lingo. Hugh Cunningham, the president's spokesman in the late 1970s and a former UF journalism faculty member was exceedingly helpful, was a mentor, and wrote me recommendations to a couple of different internships. So sure, plenty of them were helpful.

W: Let's talk about some of your particular stories, and then I'd like to talk about the time when you were the editor and certain events during that era. First off, do you remember the reaction you got when you first started publishing the paper?

K: I remember especially the first page [of] one story [that was] published because it was on drugs. It was on taking nitrous oxide canisters that you use for whipping cream, you screw it into this canister and it goes shoo. Some kids in my dorm were inhaling it straight without the whipping cream and it gave you this intense rush that apparently was harmless so long as you breathed enough oxygen

quickly after and didn't asphyxiate yourself. It gave you this intense buzz, and so I wrote a front page story about this new, safe drug craze sweeping the campus.

And yeah, I got a huge reaction out of that. The very first story I ever wrote was a two paragraph or three paragraph brief. It was either on raising the photocopy thing or it was on something else, and I got something wrong and it had to be corrected. A friend of mine, who I just saw last night [and] who was a dorm mate said to me, I saw your first byline story for the *Alligator*, and I also saw the correction that ran two days later, which was a humbling experience. But the impact was huge because of the sphere that the *Alligator* was the center of. It kept a watch on what the *Alligator* did and said. Whether you liked the *Alligator* or not, you were always keeping a watch on what they were up to.

W: One set of stories that you worked on a little later in your career was the auditing and the misuse of HEW funds.

K: Yeah, that was a gold mine of great stories that I continue to mine to this day. Whenever I counsel young reporters who are going to do an internship, I'll always tell them [to] call the state, federal, and city audit offices and ask what recent audits have come out in the last six months, and chances are you'll find some misspending of money and everyone missed it. This was a division of the University of Florida. In the late 1970s the university was under real pressure. The state was cutting back and not giving much funding increases, collective bargaining was coming in and putting upward pressure on salaries or trying to, so federal grant money was a way to offset budget shortfalls. So the university had a division expressly aimed at raising grant money. The problem was [that] they were taking that grant money and using it for state purposes that really state money should have paid for, so they were misspending millions and millions of dollars. There was a hundred million dollars, if my memory serves [me correctly], where sponsored research loans were called illegal because they loaned it to state purposes. They said we'll pay it back later after we finally get money from the legislature, and that was found to be wrong and they had to redo it. And they were kind of using some money for personal purposes. There was one professor, last name Soar, maybe Robert and Ruth Soar, [who] was employing his wife, which while legitimate, was nonetheless against the rules. It was a huge impact. I remember one day looking for Robert Soar, Professor Soar, going into the Department of Education wanting to interview him. After a couple stories had broken we were stripping him across the top of the front page everyday. [I went to interview him and said] I'm Dennis Kneale of the *Alligator*, I'm looking for Soar. [The person answered], no, he's not here. [I said], okay, alright, thank you. I'm leaving, and as I turned and walked out the door I hear him whisper to another faculty member, that's the reporter who's doing the stories on the sponsor research. I remember feeling these goose bumps and this rush of excitement and power that they knew who I was. There was a federal auditor in Washington that I'd never met, and I got him to start telling me some

stuff on the phone. He gave me this one quote, "This is the tip of the iceberg, that is all hanky panky my friend, and someone's going to get burned horrible." Now, if you look at that story, I'll bet you that that quote that's in there is damn close to that. This is like 1976 and I still remember it. I thought, first of all, that he invented the phrase "tip of the iceberg." It turns out no, it's a cliché, even back then. Second, I just remember getting this chill up the back of my neck, I felt like [Bob] Woodward and [Carl] Bernstein [*Washington Post* reporters who broke the Watergate scandal]. You know that had only happened in 1972, and so a lot of us in 1976, 1977, 1978 were still incredibly driven to find out is there wrongdoing, what's wrong with this picture, they must not be telling the truth here, there must be some extra layer. [We were] searching for the conflict point. Today I tell my writers, what's the conflict point, and the *Alligator* just naturally was teaching us that. I mean I did big stories. When you look back, the scale of it is impressive. I did a story that questioned the validity of a city loan program funded by the feds for helping poor people fix up their homes. They were kept waiting months and months and months for repairs. I went into the black neighborhood, the poor neighborhood, interviewed people, and tried to shine a light on that. That one got like seventh place in the Hearst or something. I wrote about the failure of a credit union. We wrote about the illegal loans. We wrote about athletes getting an easier sentence than other students did.

W: You wrote a number of pieces on affirmative action.

K: Yeah, and it was a huge controversy. I buried it when I pointed out that black professors were already earning 20 to 30 percent more than white professors. This was incredibly controversial, but I buried it in the middle of the story. I didn't even lead with it as a conflict point; I kind of missed the point in that one. I questioned the tenure system. [There was] incredibly aggressive stuff. [I'm] really very proud of the stuff [we did]. I wrote about the Baker Act, the mental health act that was really flawed, because sometimes kids who were just wild, their parents could use it and get them committed against their will. So I wrote about that, which ended up changing my life because that led, in 1982 or 1981 when I was at the *Ft. Lauderdale News*, [to] this woman [that] I realized was committed to mental hospitals [because] she had total amnesia and she'd been beaten up. I knew from the Baker Act stories at the *Alligator* that I could invoke Florida law [and] I could interview her. I interviewed her, we write a story, she goes on Good Morning America, she's reunited with parents that she ran away from home [from] thirteen years ago. The story is nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. A *Wall Street Journal* editor is judging category stories entered and it doesn't win anything, but he writes me a letter and that leads [to] me going to the *Wall Street Journal*, where I was for sixteen years. [This is] all because I knew about the Baker Act, all because of my time at the University of Florida on the *Alligator*.

I remember hearing, after I wrote a story about **Denise Lindell Daniels**, a young

woman that I had a total crush on. She was beautiful. [She] had been committed, [but she] was clearly just sort of wild and a little crazy. I sometimes wonder how she turned out. Her father and mother were all the way in Lake City, Florida. It was a long drive away and I was trying to get this story out. I called for a quick phoner, when what I should have done was gone to interview them. I learned from that that the story was way too one-sided. It was all in favor of the kid without putting up the dilemma of the parent. The father called me after the story ran and said, the doctors say she's a schizo, or maybe he actually called before the story ran. So, I used that sound bite, but I don't realize, wait a minute, this guy's going through hell. He's worried about his daughter. What must that be like? The story would have been so much stronger if I had reported both ends of it. So, by messing up you learn a lesson you never forget. Now I'm always telling my reporters, did you call back for counter-comment? Did you find out why the CEO made this mistake? Do you think he meant to screw up? Of course he didn't, he probably was devastated. Let's see it through his eyes. [I got a] huge lesson from that one.

W: That's all thanks to the *Alligator* and all the faces of it?

K: Yeah.

W: While you were covering the HEW story, you wrote up a story, and I assume it's you, [about] a reporter who was forced to leave a meeting between the UF officials and auditors.

K: That might have been about myself. **Grady Ray** was the HEW auditor from Tallahassee. **William Elmore** loved him. He was the vice-president of administration; a pipe smoking, sterling haired guy who I kept expecting to die of cancer but he just kept living and living and living. He may not be with us anymore. **William Elmore** may be alive. I asked [**William Elmore**] to sign a piece of paper saying he had indeed asked me to leave the story. Brian Jones felt like when you have no power and you're just a bunch of students you hit them in the paper, so we ran that story. That's me in third person I believe, and that's when we were first beginning to throw down the gauntlet over the Sunshine Law. Now it turns out, on later interpretation, we were utterly and entirely wrong. I think that when some university administrators and some auditors sit down to negotiate and talk, that's not two members of a board or a commission that holds regular meetings that were meant to be in the Sunshine Law. We were clearly extending it vastly farther than we really ever should have.

W: But it was about making the challenges at that point.

K: Yeah, and it probably got us into more meetings overall than we otherwise would have. The university in some ways, I have to admit, was very generous. The

president had a president's council, and the university was a little bit afraid that maybe that does count as a board or commission under Florida law. So when you're the administration reporter, it's the top, it's like covering the White House for the *Post*. You go to that weekly meeting where he's talking to all his big department heads and the deans of the colleges and you're getting story ideas. We were allowed access largely because they didn't dare keep us out, and because we were so assertive and aggressive. It started maybe in Brian Jones' tenure, but Tom Julin really ended up a year later making it even bigger.

W: Just to back track a bit, you were also there when the election day *Alligator* were stolen. What was your reaction to that?

K: That was the most amazing story because you realized how central the *Alligator* was to campus life. Students really realize, oh my God, the *Alligator's* gone. For them to steal it on the morning of election day because we were endorsing the outsider slate was just one of the headiest, most fantastic, wonderful experiences. Yes, we lost \$25,000 in ad revenue, blah, blah, blah, but the cool thing was, they thought we were worth stealing. I mean, it was free. You sometimes felt like no one cared, no one watched, no one read, but of course they did. It was kind of great, and then you got to investigate the entire caper. That lead to a wonderful investigation. We filed a lawsuit against the conspirators, some of whom now rose to assistant attorney general of the state. [They are] big guys with big companies, and we sued them. But the court ordered that we had to reveal our secret sources, and we wouldn't, so they threw out the lawsuit. I was editor-in-chief by the time they threw it out, so I came out in the editorial and I named the guys by name; Jim Eaton, **Toby Lobeck**, and a couple other guys, and I called them rat fuckers. [That's] the Nixon administration era phrase for political dirty tricks. I said, well these rat fuckers, James Eaton, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I said that **Judge Carlisle**, I think his name was, through his motion and his ruling had condoned the Nixonian art of rat fucking. The one concession I made, after some real deliberation, was I changed the headline from "Rat Fuckers" to "Nixonian Art." The judge later told someone that he came that close to throwing me in jail for contempt, which of course I was praying for because it would have gone on the state wire [and] would have made my career in Florida journalism.

W: I knew about confidential sources in that case, but were there other confidential sources you had? If so, did you protect them the same way?

K: You mean for other stories? Nothing comes to mind. If you heard it from someone else then I'd probably be able to remember it, but nothing instantly [comes to mind].

W: Let's talk about when you became editor.

- K: Here's the thing, first day of school, freshman year, September 1975, and I meet this friend of mine that I just saw last night, **Rob Cohen**. Within ten minutes of talking I said to him, I'm going to be editor-in-chief of the college paper, of the *Alligator*. He said, oh, you are you? He kind of sneered, like who was I to think I could do that, and I had a chip on my shoulder. I've realized, running Forbes magazine, [that] much of greatness, much of excellence, is driven by a chip on your shoulder. You're really pissed off, those guys don't realize how good I am, they doubt me, they dissed me, they don't think I can pull this off. I wanted to be editor-in-chief of my high school paper in Hialeah, Miami Lakes, but **Laurie Brown**, who was my year, started the year before in ninth grade instead of tenth grade on the paper. So, she got editor-in-chief and I was the number-two guy, [and] that drove me crazy. So I went to the *Alligator* vowing that I would run it, it was my dream. So by the time I finally, fall 1978/winter 1979, [won] as editor, having run once or twice before and been rejected . . . I still remember the vote, it was like six to one or five to one or four to one. The one lone dissenting vote was John Roosenraad, who never quite admitted, even twenty years later, that he was wrong to vote for Robert Rivas instead of me. But he was wrong, dammit. He didn't vote for me because he thought I was too flashy, too maverick, too "show me." [He felt] I had a show me attitude, I'm going to show you attitude, would be my guess. So when I became editor-in-chief, it was the culmination of three or four years of extremely hard work.
- W: Robert Rivas talks about, in his interview, you're going up against him. He said it was a very close vote and he felt very intensely about it. We both really thought we were going to win. It was a really head to head thing.
- K: It was, and it wasn't a close vote, it was five/one baby. Robert, [that's] not a close vote, first of all. Second of all, that was 1977 or 1978, cut to roughly 1985. Robert Rivas comes to New York and we go out to dinner. He says over a beer, you know what, there were some times when I was just so angry. I just hated you so much I wished you were dead. [He said this] because I got editor-in-chief and he didn't. It was such a nice thing to say.
- W: You must have somehow reconciled because just a few months later he became a news editor for you.
- K: Yeah, what I did with him, because he was managing editor before we ran and I was news editor. Managing editor [is] a higher position, so you're in danger of him vaulting past me. So I became it, and boom, once again [I was] learning management. [I was] learning to take an elder statesman and unharness him, let him work on super-star stories, don't make him have to tow the line, don't make him into your little bitch to show that you won. I think that we made him [a] special projects editor. Barry Klein was my news editor. But yeah, he came back

and won the Hearst Award for a page one story he did on **John Spinkelink**, who was likely going to be the first American executed against his will [since the death penalty had been declared Unconstitutional]. This is during my editorship, and then Robert wrote the accompanying editorial. So for the editor-in-chief to let him write the editorial that was a big deal, because that is your space, that belongs to you. I could have easily said, no, I want to write it, but I let him do it because it was his. The **Spinkelink** story was wonderful, and **Bill Wax** took this jarring photo, black and white, of **Spinkelink** looking through the bars. We ran it across the full center of the page and he took some sodium ferrite and he brushed it on the eyeball to make the eye jump out. You know you do all this with digital imaging now and people don't think anything of it. Cut to 1992, **David Vondraly** of the *Washington Post* has a new book out on the death penalty and there's these bars and one eye across the cover. I said, oh my God, **Bill Wax** took that photo. Sure enough, from 1976 there it was. That was a brilliant piece. I got great stuff out of [Robert Rivas] even though, supposedly, he should have been vanquished under management theory.

W: In your role as editor, did you take control of a lot of the editorials? I know you used your own editorial notebook space on occasion to explain some things.

K: "Editor's Notes," yeah, I wrote that. I wrote most of the editorials, sure, you always did.

W: On the first day, your first editorial called out the administration, comparing the relationship between the administration and the paper as being volcanic at the time.

K: Right, that was because of the open meeting thing. Tom Julin had been editor the year before and he was the one who really made it and got Barry Klein arrested and all of that. Then Andrew Froman kept it going. Then I just thought, I've got no other issue. My real issue when I went in, I didn't have an ideological issue, [was that] I wanted to do great big special reports. I wanted to do holy shit clips. I wanted to do big stories, and we did a great job with that. We had some really good stuff [that] I was hugely proud of. We did one of the first big stories on South African disinvestment that Gail Epstein did. **Melanie Simmons** did some really good stuff. Where am I going with that? So volcano, yeah, I really proud of that. I was basically the new editor. I had covered the administration, they knew who I was, and I was letting them know, don't be messing with me because we will come after you on this open meeting thing. I showed it to Buddy Davis and I asked him what he thought. He said, well it would have been good if you didn't mix your metaphors. I had used [words like] volcano, cauldron, and chemical concoction or something. I was all over the map with those metaphors, but you know what, I never ever again mixed a metaphor. I tell my writers not to do it all the time.

W: Four days later you wrote an editorial pretty much calling for former student body president, Terry Brown, to be thrown out of school.

K: I did that?

W: It was an editorial. I'm not sure if you wrote it, but it was under your reign.

K: That might have been Brian Jones, who was my mentor and I was going to let him get away with anything he wanted, or Tom Julin. It probably was Brian Jones. I kind of liked Terry Brown, I wouldn't have been that mean.

W: I'm going to list off a couple editorials that were done that first quarter under you. In one, you challenged Gainesville's reputation as a university city "based on its treatment of citizen students."

K: Yeah, the headline was "A University City?" I pointed out that they have a landlord law that makes it illegal for three unrelated people to live together, and here this is [a] student [town]. [I said] that that was openly hostile. Yeah, I remember that. I can't believe I remember that.

W: You called out SG, in fact anybody involved in SG, but in particular the vice-president Chris Kenward for drawing his salary during a trip to China for five weeks.

K: That's just so petty of me, but I can imagine. I can't remember that one.

W: What was the relationship between the *Alligator* and student government while you were there?

K: [It was] exactly what it should have been, it was acrimonious. We were the watch dog, they were evil. They got \$23 million in student fees every year to spend on concerts etc., but they used it as a very elaborate, sophisticated patronage system. If you weren't Greek, if you weren't in the fraternity system, you couldn't get the appointments, you couldn't get the service on your resume. We thought that was wrong. They did sophisticated block voting to get people elected. No other students were organized in that way. I just always assumed that government was up to something bad. **Dan Lobeck** came in and he was an outsider, and we liked him a little better. But that was a healthy relationship. We were all sort of playing house. We were all sort of getting ready for what it was going to be like once we got into real journalism. Even though a lot of people didn't go into politics, didn't go into journalism, that adversarial relationship was a hallmark of the student paper. We were just so virulently aggressive. We were so certain that we were going to save the fucking world. We were like there. [We

wore] rose colored glasses, [we were] totally ideological, anti-death penalty, pro-choice, pro-right to have an abortion if that's what a woman wants, that of course is the entire ethos of the paper which got us started [in being] independent. Yeah, so we were like that. Also, [we were] against the university; we were sure that the university somehow was going to make decisions that made it easier for them to do their job instead of necessarily making it better for the education of students.

W: Was it definitely an us versus them kind of mentality while you were at the paper?

K: Sure, and a part that might have been infused [is that] the strength of the *Alligator* is the ethos' hands along from student to student. So when I was there all these big heavyweights who were kind of moving into the last semester or two of their time [such as] David Smith, David Klein, David Finkle, the three David's, and Tom Shroder kind of taught you this swaggering, in your face, no, no, fuck me, fuck you. [They taught] this amazing aggressiveness to where you're always punching back. Bob Bryan was Vice-President of Academic Affairs. He used to love the way I would wave and argue [about] are you increasing class size or not? Well, [he'd say], we're not, but yes, if this and this happen we may have to. Then I'd do a story saying, they may have to increase the class size if certain things happen, you'll have to read the bottom to see what those extra things are. We were always trying to push the envelope farther. I still do that to this day. I do this with my writers and I try to get them to come out and really call it and put the expertise into it. The other thing I was proud of as editor, is that I did an editor's notes column that was sort of this separate thing. I did one column saying that we were lily white, that the *Alligator* staff didn't have enough blacks on it, and as such, maybe we were culturally insensitive sometimes.

W: I think the local NAACP chapter came out and supported that call with a letter to the editor.

K: Yeah. Then we did another one that really upset Larry Turner, a superstar lawyer in town. I said that basically the *Alligator's* guilty of a conflict of interest because he is like the top attorney. We cover his drug cases, we cover all these other things, and at the same time we're paying him money and he gives us counsel. That means we can't really do a very tough job. Well, as a result he ended up resigning the account and he had a lesser partner of his take it over. He was genuinely injured I think.

W: Well, the final quote on that editorial was you ended up asking if any highly qualified constitutional law specialist was ready to take Turner's place.

K: I feel bad because I learned later that Larry was hurt by that because he had

done a lot to help the paper. I meant no disrespect, I was just probing the interesting idea that as much as we were constantly looking for conflicts of interest and looking for bad behavior. I thought we were daring to come out and call it out. I wish I would have called him and said, listen, I'm about to do this, but I want you to know we love you and we think you're the best lawyer we could ever have. I wish I had done something like that. I'll bet you that Larry Turner, if he is still among us, I'll bet you he still remembers it. Maybe he doesn't, maybe it was a really little thing, but I heard he was upset and I felt bad about that.

W: I know after you became editor, he came back in a more administrative role in the September of 1979. You also had pieces then. You kept your editorial notebook pieces where you went behind the front page and you told people about the inner workings of the paper.

K: Did I do that?

W: There were two separate columns. One talked about former editors and how all of them had something that they championed. One was a homosexual, and so [he championed] gay right things.

K: **Brian P. Jones**, yeah.

W: One was an ardent feminist.

K: **Minnie Karen** was the first woman, yeah.

W: What would you say would be yours? You didn't mention anything about yourself. What would be your slant, your bias, while you were editor?

K: [My bias was] great, great journalism. I mean it lacked some ethos, it lacked some political bent like Tom Julin did with the First Amendment, but I think I had splashier, holy shit clips. [I had] big, big stories, bigger than any editor around my era. I thought that we were really top notch. I was really proud of that. I didn't find one issue and go after it and really hit it and hit it and hit it, because as a kid back then I wasn't really ideologically motivated. I was journalistically motivated to tell compelling stories. I tried to always go for the underdog, tried to always find what's wrong with this picture, but then tried to really set it out on a scale and sweep, [so] that when the reader opened it up the reader just said, holy shit. Then when an editor who's going to hire you opens up your clips when you left the *Alligator*, the editor said, holy shit. That, I hope, was a hallmark.

W: Well, besides straight news, also under your tenure there was the inside section which covered such diverse topics as porn in Gainesville, hypnosis, modern witches, coffee, child convicts, disco, [and] working morticians.

K: [I wrote about] the legacy of cancer in a family. **Jeff Carnis** was the inside features editor. Jeff, to this day, is a brilliant writer. He writes on fishing. He lives in the Keys, he chose a life instead of a career, was a fishing guide, [and] owns a high-end fishing tour [and] tackle shop. [He] is famous in the fishing world [and] has written two lovely books. He was the feature editor for *Inside* magazine. We ran this one great story that Kevin Turley wrote on porn. *The Art* was a nudie magazine with a plain brown wrapper and a pair of hands like ripping it open with a wedding band on the hand. Those hands were **Jeff Carnis'** hands. There's all these little hidden things that are nice. In my life, I'll say, I like to think I opened up the *Alligator* more to outside public inspection by writing about it with some of those editor's notes. In my debut column, I wrote about the lineup coming up in the fall and who was doing what as a way of paying tribute. **A.C. Harbor** was this amazing figure in the history of the *Alligator* at that time. He put in six years in the production. By the time I was editor, he and I were arch enemies, because **A.C.** really had the power. If A.C. didn't want to change a headline late at night, the headline didn't get changed. If A.C. hated a layout, he would just change it. He was like a civil service bureaucrat you could not get rid of, but once I was editor I realized I got to get this guy to work with me. So I gave **A.C.** a plug that he had an eye for art and a pension for the bizarre. I can't believe I remember these phrases, I'm telling you, it's there. So I gave homage to him, which really touched him. He and I talked a few years ago for the ninetieth reunion. He couldn't come, but we were quite warm to each other even though we were at each other's throats [while I was editor].

W: Did that warm your relationship, when it got to _____.

K: Yeah, that helped. It was kind of more when I was coming up the ranks that he talked to me as a real maverick, full of myself, and he was going to break me, which he never did. We got in a fight over a struggle of tenure because it made the whole newspaper run late. Instead of writing early and then stuffing stuff in later, I'm waiting for my key interview and then I finally start writing right around six o'clock, and it's front page, it's all they have. A.C.'s upset, and Andy Newman, the managing editor, takes me outside because I'm upset at A.C. He's going, have you got the story? I'm saying, fuck you, and A.C.'s standing outside watching. I said, I [am] so glad that when I'm editor of this place he's going to be so gone, when I'm editor, he's gone. I was that sure I was going to be editor, and indeed A.C. was not gone. He stayed around for my first semester, and then he left and we gave him a going away party that I arranged. We gave him a tribute and we raised a bunch of money and we gave him a really nice gift. It was a \$300 bag of incredibly good Gainesville-green marijuana in a hermetically sealed plastic with a pair of white cotton gloves for him to handle it. Should I not mention that on the oral history project? [laughing] I think it's color worth repeating.

W: One thing that I was surprised about, just going through some of the clips while you were editor, you published this story on the inside on the Miss Nude World who had won in Florida.

[End side A1]

K: . . . amazing institutions in American journalism, certainly in journalism education, and I would like to do whatever I can to really get across more of that story. We should either do email, or do you ever do phone for this oral history?

W: I will look into it, definitely.

K: You should just come [up to] New York. [You can] get a cheap Jet Blue ticket and see New York. If you want to crash in my basement you could. Okay, so **Nancy Blin** [was] a reporter on my staff that I had just had such a crush on. She was so beautiful. This was 1976 or 1977. She remembers, because she just called. I talked to her for the first time in like twenty [or] twenty-five years. She called, and she remembers me sending her to a *Playboy* centerfold interview for candidates, and she wrote a story on it. She remembers me sending her there to do some reporting on it or editing it or something. She remembers me having her do the porn story, you know, with the wedding ring. She wrote that. Yeah, there's some racy little stuff there. We just loved the f-word in the *Alligator*. We just thought, hey man, we're independent man, if we want to use the f-word we can man. It turns out like twenty or thirty years later [that] the *New Yorker*, under **Tina Brown**, started using the f-word. So we were really like the forerunner.

[interruption in recording]

W: Are you still involved with the paper? I know you've been to more than one Hall of Fame banquets.

K: I've been to a couple of those. I mean, I'm not actively involved, none of us really is actively involved. Tom Julin [is involved] because of the lawyer stuff. Ed Barber keeps that thing running. That the *Alligator* exists today is testament to the life work of Ed Barber, so I kind of read it now and then. I always am going to give extra consideration to anybody from the *Alligator*. Class men that came on years after me ended up following me right to the *Wall Street Journal*. The *Wall Street Journal* has Ian Johnson. He won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting in China. He came in probably eight or ten years after me. **Phil Koonst** is in the *Wall Street Journal*. I was in the *Wall Street Journal* for sixteen years. [He is] in the *Wall Street Journal* Washington D.C. bureau. Bobby Block is a superstar foreign correspondent. He's still writing for the journal and living in Washington and traveling the world.

W: As *Alligator* alumni, do you see any difference in their writing style, or you just know they're quality people because they came from the *Alligator*?

K: I know they're top notch, quality people willing to work their asses off. The work ethic at the *Alligator* was fierce. I mean, don't whine about your classes, don't run out on something at the end of the semester, stick with us and work.

W: What were your grades in college?

K: Oh they were fine, a B [average], a 3.4 or something. But you know what, in the interviews I did nobody ever asked me about my grades. They wanted to know how I got that fantastic story or how I got four internships.

W: You interned at the *Miami Herald*. Did you do any before that period?

K: I interned in the summer of 1977 at the *Ft. Lauderdale News*, then January 1978 at the *Herald*, the summer 1979 at the *Washington Post* working directly for Bob Woodward, and then I graduated and I put in six months as an intern with the Lexis Team at the *Detroit News*.

W: What did your parents think about your work at that paper?

K: My mother, who had worked on her high school paper, was really especially proud. My father died when I was fourteen, so he never got to see any of that. I started on the high school paper by the time I was fifteen. My mother was just always extremely proud. I created a huge controversy in my family that my brother mentioned just last night. Our Uncle Johnny, my mother's brother, **Johnny Olinger**, was an engineer at Pratt-Whitney. He was working on a laser and he'd seen laser technology like basically disintegrate a toaster. He said, they're trying to get this amplified up to where you could put it into space and zap missiles. Now ten years later this would be Star Wars, but I ran a front page story after hearing this. I called him, [but] he wouldn't really help me. I called Pratt-Whitney, they confirmed some things and we ran a front page story about laser research in Florida to zap and disintegrate things. Apparently my uncle got in trouble with the company about it, and he didn't even tell me. He told someone else and the relative had told me. I didn't think twice, man, about hurting my uncle. This was a great story and we just threw it in.

W: I'll just ask you some general questions now. Did the Board of Campus Communications ever influence the editorial side of the paper at all?

K: [The Board of Communications] never [influenced the editorial side of the paper]. The closest they ever came was a terrible spat between my predecessor, the

spring/summer editor of 1978, Andrew Froman, who is to this day a good friend of mine and I just talked to him yesterday, and the city commission campaign of real estate developer, **Jack Erwin**. **Jane Thompson** had written some stuff about Jack Erwin, including saying that he has a receding hairline and an expanding waistline, when actually the hairline was not receding at all. But it was a good line, so why let the facts get in the way of a good story? Then, Andy Froman had written an editorial endorsing **Jack Erwin's** opponent, who was probably **Aaron Green**, an African American. [He said] **Jack Erwin** was supported by developers such as, name a firm. It turned out that firm actually supported **Aaron Green**. We were wrong, and yet we came out on election day.

So **Jack Erwin** complains, and **Jack Erwin's** campaign manager is the guy we see across the street in the parking lot behind the old *Alligator*. He runs this parking lot that usually has got beer cans strewn all over the place and broken shattered glass. We're in there on the board, and I think at this time I'm in the board meeting but I'm not yet on the board, and Andy Froman's defending himself and **Jack Erwin** comes in to complain. The board members are listening and they're clearly concerned, because to write a factual error in an endorsement editorial on the day of election [is bad]. By the way, lesson learned, when I became editor I always did my endorsements the day before elections so that you could correct in time before the election. I learned that from Andrew Froman.

Why the board got upset was [because] after they came in and did it and asked Andrew Froman what his response was, and Andy should have said, we fucked up and I'm sorry, and from now on we're going to run the endorsement editorial several days before an election. Instead he told the campaign manager, listen, when you can run your parking lot and not have broken glass strewn all over the place and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah; when you can do that, then you can come here and tell me how to run the newspaper. I remember this woman named Robin Vesig or Robin Nesig who was a graduate student, kind of a mousy little thing, just said, look sir, I want you to understand, because they were fearing a lawsuit, we were always one suit away from being put out of business, [she said] this does not reflect the policy of the paper [and] we're sorry we got this wrong. Andy still laughs about it today and realizes that that was a rash way to respond and it wasn't exactly the best response. It was good though, it was very funny. I still to this day, twenty-three years or something later, tease him mercilessly about it.

W: Are you still close friends with a lot of people you worked with?

K: I'm still friends with Andrew Froman, **Sally Anne Stewart**, **Theresa DeFino**. Then there are others that, even if you don't talk to them much or that frequently, they are still positive friends in the world, positive acquaintances. We learned a lot together and did a lot together. I'm still very good friends with David Klein, who is Barry Klein's older brother. Barry Klein was my news editor. David was several years ahead of me and he never became editor-in-chief, which is

something I tease him about.

W: Is there anything else that I haven't asked that you would like to talk about?

K: [I would like to talk about] *Alligator* affairs. I don't know what, in this current politically correct environment, the *Alligator* does about interoffice romance?

W: They still go on.

K: I must tell you, it was just torrid. When the *Alligator* had the eightieth and the ninetieth anniversary gathering and I was calling all the editors trying to get them to come, I remember this one guy, this one editor-in-chief, just an incredible fire brand. He was just known for such fierceness. He kept saying he had to find this one woman. [He said], you've got to find her, you've got to find her. He had been asking, have you seen so and so? He said, you've got to get her there. Then I talked to David Klein about this ex-*Alligator* editor's request. David said, oh, that's just because she gave him a blow job in the dark room one night because she just wanted to get ahead on the staff, and that's why he wanted that. I thought it was so funny that twenty-five years later there were still pulsing remnants of that kind of thing. When you're editor, that's kind of something that you kind of did. There were these epic romances. [There were] Robert Rivas and Cindy Spence; Barry Klein and Donna Wares; who was truly this beautiful, luminous young woman. They were all over the place. [There were] **Kevin Turley** and **Laura Shwed**; Andrew Froman and **Lynn Calver**, they got married. Then there was this young guy, this short guy [named] **John Long**, an amazing photographer, who convinced some of the most beautiful woman to pose, and inevitably, they would end up disrobing. My managing editor one semester came to me one morning mortified that he had gotten her shirt off and he took these beautiful pictures, so he was quite a svengali. **Erica Burger**, she was this photographer, every guy wanted her. [Then] this one Belgium exchange student comes in to be on the photo staff and he's the one who gets her. She ended up taking photos for *Newsday*. I saw her in New York a few years ago, [and] she ended up becoming quite successful in the field. So romance was this really torrid element. It was really very fierce because there's a lot of creativity going on and these people are spending so much time together. They didn't have any kind of policies against intra-staff dating at that time.

Ed Barber, his role just cannot be underestimated. When I first got there in 1976, he had just come back and had just taken the job as general manager. He's got this ridiculous handlebar moustache that I thought was such an affectation, he hardly says a word, and he doesn't talk about himself. He doesn't even tell you, hey, you know what, in 1963 I was on the staff of this newspaper; he doesn't even tell you that. But I really grew to love him because he was this stabilizing force looking over your shoulder. He never interfered, but if you went to him and

asked questions, if you could sort of not be so insecure and afraid to ask, he would tell you, with enough pushing, what he really thought. He was this wonderful influence. The best gift he gave to the kids at the *Alligator* was he didn't get involved, he let them make their mistakes. He let them learn as they went. By him basically saying I have nothing to say about that, I'm not going to weigh in on that, he made us all more responsible because we realized it was up to us. If we screw this up and liable someone, we could shut down the entire paper. There's no one here stopping us, it's just us. That gave us more responsibility and let us learn a lot more about journalism than we ever would have if he were more intrusive. So it's truly the love of his life and is truly a labor of love. He's going really straight to a top spot in heaven, which will be his first new job in forty years. There's something about him; really he's extraordinary. You worry [about] what happens to the paper when it's time for him to move on. I just hope that time never comes.

W: Okay.

[end of interview]