

B: It's August 31, 2005. I'm at the offices of the Bayfront Health Foundation in St. Petersburg, Florida, interviewing Eugene Williams. Mr. Williams would you tell us please where and when you were born, and tell us your full name?

W: Eugene Lamar Williams, Jr. I was born at Mound Park Hospital, on February 11, 1924. My father, Eugene Lamar Williams, Sr., was born in Arcadia in 1886, and he lived to be ninety-four years old, and died here in St. Petersburg. My mother was born in Perry, Florida, in 1896, and she died here in 1974.

B: So you were born in St. Petersburg, and did you grow up here?

W: Yes, I grew up here. I was the middle one of five children: two older sisters and two younger brothers.

B: What are your siblings' names, please?

W: My oldest sister, who died two years ago, is Mary Juna—of course [her surname is] Williams Parker—and my second sister is Kathryn Elizabeth Williams Bryan, she's the wife of Robert Bryan of Gainesville. My next brother is James Norman Williams, and he lives in Jacksonville, Florida. My youngest brother, Charles Edward Williams, lives here.

B: Where did you grow up in St. Petersburg?

W: Well, the neighborhood you mean?

B: Yes.

W: We grew up near St. Petersburg High School. I went to West Central Elementary, which was adjacent to the high school, West Central now doesn't exist. The school system took it over and made it part of St. Petersburg High School. We always lived out in that general area. My parents built a house in 1938 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue at 25<sup>th</sup> Street. I was fourteen and I helped build it a little bit, a two-story house, and I helped paint it, and did a few things like that when I was fourteen years old. I learned to do a few things that paid off in later years.

B: At that time that property and area was considered really pretty far west in St. Petersburg.

W: Yes, it sure was.

B: You said you went to West Central Elementary School?

W: Yes.

B: And where did you go to middle school?

W: There was Mirror Lake Junior High School.

B: Mirror Lake. And then I know from your curriculum vitae that you're an alum of St. Petersburg High School, is that right? Graduating in what year?

W: 1941. I'm involved right now in planning our sixty-fifth reunion, which is going to be next May 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006.

B: I hope you get a big turnout.

W: Yeah, we're getting a good preliminary response. We already have about thirty classmates coming from out of town that will be staying at the Holiday In--Sun Spree.

B: I'm here to testify that a high school reunion can change your life. If you're not careful. [laughter]

W: Right.

B: When you were growing up, I wonder if you had thoughts about what you wanted to do with your life when you became an adult.

W: No. My father had a small lumber yard, and I was fortunate in that each summer I was able to have a job there. When I was sixteen, I drove a lumber truck delivering lumber, and I worked unloading box cars and that sort of thing. I just thought I would major in business and would end up in business, whether it was in the lumber business or some place else, but I didn't have any long range objective after I went to the University of Florida. I just took the general courses that were required at that time for freshmen, and then I got drafted. When I came back, I will tell the story, maybe I'm jumping ahead here. When I was in the service I ended up in the ASTP program at LSU [Louisiana State University] for nine months. It was called Army Specialized Training Program. After I had basic training in the medical corps, they said I could go to Medical Administrative OCS, or, by the way, there was this ASTP program if you wanted to choose that one. I chose that program and went to Baton Rouge to LSU for nine months, until they shut that program down. During that period, I always had avoided math, and so during that period I had analytical geometry and differential calculus, a lot of engineering-type courses. Then I ended up in the Engineer OCS and went to Europe for a short period just as the war was ending. When I got out of the service in July of 1946, I got back to the University of Florida, and I was being interviewed at the Registrar's Office, and they said what do you want to major in, and I said oh, I guess business. They looked at my transcripts from LSU, and they said you're a junior in engineering. I said okay. [laughter] So I got a degree in industrial engineering, which is a little bit related to business, you know some of the courses in IE are focused on business. We had to take economics, for

example, we had to take business administration in the IE program and so forth. At that point, I had an engineering degree and so then I had to consider what I was going to do.

B: When you were in high school, did you always expect and plan that you were going to go to college.

W: Yes, yes.

B: And did you always expect that it would be the University of Florida?

W: Yes, in the back of my mind. At that time it was customary for most of the people, it was the end of the Depression, and most people went to junior college for a couple of years, like Bill Emerson, and Jim Lang, and some others. I had planned to go to St. Petersburg Junior College. About a couple of weeks before school was to start, I got a call from Dr. Clyde Anderson, who was an alum from the University of Florida. I hadn't met him before, but he asked me to come to his office and he said, the track coach wants you to come up there, and is willing to give you some help and such. I said, well, that sounds pretty good. So I had wanted to go up there, but I thought I had to go to junior college first because with five children and, at that time, I had two sisters who were up at Florida State College for Women and that sort of thing, so cost-wise I thought I had to go to junior college until this offer came along. So Percy Beard and Clyde Anderson persuaded me to go up to Gainesville, and Percy got me a job in the cafeteria. I got all my meals there and he gave me a room in something called the F Club, but it was a dump, and I ended up moving to Buckman Hall instead. So that was how I happened to go up there as a freshman.

B: You would have gotten there in the fall of 1941.

W: That's right.

B: And then, of course, at the end of that semester came Pearl Harbor.

W: Actually, it . . . .

B: December of 1941.

W: Yes, that's correct, that's correct. I was a freshman in Buckman when I heard on the radio about Pearl Harbor, yes.

B: Did you go back in the spring of 1942 to school?

W: Yes, I went back and it's interesting—I was working in the cafeteria—and so many of the upperclassmen had gotten drafted or left for the service, that all of the

sudden as a first semester sophomore, I was student manager at the cafeteria, and then I got drafted in February of 1943.

B: 1943 or 1942?

W: 1943.

B: Oh okay, so you got in another semester of classes.

W: I got in a year-and-a-half, and then I got drafted. They deferred some of us, and then they finally stopped doing that when they needed more troops.

B: So you had been on a business track right up until you got the news that you had to go in. Did they take you right out of the middle of your semester and how long did it take?

W: The semester ended in January and I had notice that I was leaving. Actually, I think I left on February the 18<sup>th</sup>, but I knew that I couldn't continue the next semester, so I left. I was involved in the fraternity there at Florida.

B: You were the president of your fraternity.

W: Yes, well later, after the war.

B: Oh, back at UF later. Was it the same?

W: University of Florida.

B: It was the same fraternity that you belonged to your freshman year and sophomore year?

W: Right.

B: Had you made any other plans for your life by that point as far as work or your career, or how about your family plans? You had made acquaintance with the woman who would wind up being your wife, I guess.

W: Well, I had a couple of girlfriends during the war, but in December of 1946 at the Phi Delta Theta Christmas dance here, I met a young lady who had a date with someone else, and then a few months later I met her again at a wedding at a church, and then I started courting her. She told me she already had a boyfriend up at Miami of Ohio, and was going steady, but here's my phone number and so forth. This went on for a couple of years, and we were married on July the 9th, 1949, here in St. Petersburg.

B: That's your wife, Miriam?

W: Yes. She was born here, and her father was born here.

B: What was her maiden name?

W: Gilbert.

B: She's also an alum of St. Petersburg High.

W: Yes, class of 1944.

B: It's a small world.

W: Yes.

B: Well, you left for the service in February of 1943, tell me where you went and what you learned.

W: Well, since I'd had a year of field artillery ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at Camp Blanding, Florida, they shipped out a group to go to field artillery basic [training]. But then, illogically, they sent me to medical basic in Arkansas. So I went to Camp Robinson in Arkansas, and had medical basic. I already mentioned what happened there. After basic training they said I could go to Medical Administrative OCS or ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program], and I took that course and I ended up, after I got through there, I ended up applying for Engineer OCS and went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Then later, just before the war ended, I went overseas as a replacement and joined an engineer combat battalion. We were maintaining a floating Bailey Bridge on the Rhine River at Duisburg, and then we got orders to go the Pacific for the invasion of Japan. We went by convoy down to Marseilles, got on a troop ship, headed for Okinawa, they dropped the atomic bomb—that saved me from being in an invasion of Japan—and they diverted our ship to New York. I didn't get out for another year. I had a lot of points, but they just didn't let me out, so I didn't get out until July of 1946.

B: Were you in Germany when the Germans surrendered?

W: Yes, I was. Very interesting celebration. I was right on the German border at Aachen. I remember going through Aachen and it was nothing but rubble. Terrible battle there. Artillery bombardment, and it had destroyed most of the town. I remember going through there in a Jeep and I think I saw two human beings. Then I read a year later there was sixty thousand people that had moved back, and they were rebuilding it. But it was quite a celebration there on the border, particularly the Belgians. They had been through so much, and they were

so happy that the war was over.

B: Was your impression of the German people? Something that you remember after the surrender? Did they seem to be an embittered population or glad to have the whole thing over? Were they hostile toward you Americans at the time, do you think?

W: Probably no extreme. They just kind of accepted us. I do vividly remember being at the bridge we were maintaining at Duisburg, and seeing just hundreds of refugees, Germans, coming across the bridge going west. They wanted to get away from the Russian sector. They were carrying whatever they owned on their backs, and walking, just walking, pouring across the bridge heading west just to look for some place to live, because they didn't want to be under the control of the Russians. The German people that I dealt with in Bonn, I lived in apartment houses in Bonn, Cologne, Monchengladbach, and such where we had taken over quarters from the Germans. They just accepted us, not with open arms, but they didn't show too much hostility.

B: It probably made a difference that they had always in mind that if it weren't the Americans, it might have been the Russians they were being occupied by in that sector.

W: One thing that took me a while to figure out is that the unit I joined, the 1285<sup>th</sup> engineer combat battalion, had been there for a few months. They didn't think too much of the French, I didn't know why.

B: Meaning the Germans didn't, or your combat battalion [didn't]?

W: My combat battalion. They didn't think too highly of the French, the people they'd been in touch with when they were in France before they went on into Germany. They thought better, in a way, of the Germans than they did of the French. I don't know what happened in their background that caused them to feel that way, because I didn't have that feeling.

B: Was your unit already across the border or on the border in Germany when you joined them?

W: Yes. The unit was on the Rhine River.

B: Right on Aachen there you said.

W: Not Aachen. Aachen's not on the river. They were up at Duisburg when I joined them.

B: Did you ship through England or go straight to France?

W: We went to Le Havre. We went in to port at Weymouth, England and waited till dark. There were still German U-Boats [submarines] in the English Channel. We heard the depth charges during the night and such. We had [an] escort going across, but we went in to Le Havre. From there we went on up to Belgium and into Germany.

B: Did you travel by truck?

W: No, we had one interesting trip there. I was a replacement, so there were quite a few other troops in there with me. They put us on forty and eight boxcars, and we went by train up to Liege, Belgium. It took four days because we kept getting held up. The engineer would abandon ship and then they had to find somebody else to run the train, and so we slept on the floor of the boxcars, and for four days we had just K rations, and one bucket in the corner of the boxcar for use if the train wasn't stopped on the siding, and that's what we had for four days. We had to take turns lying down because we had too many troops in there and we couldn't all lie down at the same time, so we'd take turns sleeping and that was a four day trip till we got to Liege. It should have taken just a few hours, but they kept having delays. Maybe some of the tracks were damaged and that sort of thing.

B: When you were in Germany did you see any evidence of the concentration camps or any of the survivors of that?

W: No, that was further east across the Rhine. That would have been probably in January, February, March, and I didn't get there until April of 1945.

B: Okay. So you were there just a few weeks when the surrender was announced, which must have been a considerable relief, welcome news, and cause for celebration, I guess.

W: Right.

B: How long was it after that before you got the news that you were bound for Japan or the Pacific theater?

W: In early June we got orders, and my first major job was to do the order of march to Marseilles for our battalion because we had, oh, maybe forty or so vehicles and bulldozers and graders and bridge-building equipment and all that, and it was kind of a challenge to try and plan the route, because some of those towns are just [filled with] narrow streets that we went through. I do remember that we knocked off corners of buildings occasionally, because our bulldozers and such couldn't navigate without going down these narrow streets to get through the towns.

B: Even your track vehicles had to travel on their own steam.

W: Sometimes. Some were flat-bed trailers.

B: And so you were out in the Atlantic when you got word about, well, first you heard about the atomic bombs exploding, and I guess it still wasn't a hundred percent clear that the war was over then, but I guess you were there when you heard the announcement.

W: Well, I heard [about] Hiroshima. Then four days later was Nagasaki. The Japanese] didn't surrender until the second bomb. They didn't know that we only had two bombs, they thought we had a lot more. After the first bomb they just said, no, we'll fight to the end on the beaches, and then the second bomb changed their mind. I've always been grateful for [President Harry S.] Truman's decision, because I have written letters to my grandchildren and my great grandchildren to be delivered to them as they are sixteen years old or older, explaining Truman's decision and how it affected me, because we expected to lose at least 250,000 troops in the invasion of Japan, according to articles I've read. The Japanese were prepared to fight to the end on the beaches, until the atomic bomb changed their mind.

B: Truman himself declared that he never had any second thoughts about that decision, and I guess it sounds like you're of a similar opinion.

W: It was certainly appreciated, and it probably saved a lot of Japanese lives, too, in the long run.

B: It's a historical debate that continues to have legs, but I think it helps people in the present day and in the future understand a lot better to hear the perspective of somebody who was not only living at the time, but who actually had his life and future on the line if the Japanese had not surrendered when they did. Well, your ship was diverted from the South Atlantic to New York City, did you say?

W: Yes.

B: You and your colleagues and your combat battalion were all traveling in the same vessel with your equipment?

W: No. Our equipment went on an earlier freighter and it had already gone through the Panama Canal toward Okinawa, so I don't know what happened to it. At that point we lost interest in it. [laughter] We landed in New York. I ended up being sent to Camp Bowie, Texas, right where I had left to go overseas.

B: Were you able to have a little celebration in New York before you departed for Texas?

W: Yes. I had a little celebration, or just visiting, because I had never visited around New York and New York City. Then we got a few days, so I was able to go home to St. Petersburg for a few days before I reported in Texas.

B: Although this was after the announcement of V-J Day, so you weren't there for the whole ticker-tape festivities.

W: Yes. No, I was on a troop ship when the Japanese surrendered.

B: You got back to St. Petersburg and then went back to Texas. Did you continue with your engineering battalion in the rest of your service?

W: Yes. We were there for a while doing kind of needless training, and then they disbanded the battalion, but they kept several of us on as officers of the disciplinary barracks. We had 1300 American prisoners. It was a rehabilitation center and I was one of thirteen officers, and our job was to try to salvage some of them. These were just bad guys, desertion, AWOL [Absent Without Leave], maybe some of them had done murder, I don't know. Anyway, they were American soldiers, but bad guys. I was there for several months, and it was a new experience for me. We had bloodhounds, because we occasionally had escapes, and we tried to rehabilitate the prisoners. We even promoted them from the "H" group, which was solitary confinement, and if they were good guys we eventually moved them up to "A" group and trained them. I remember one time I marched the "A" company out in the field to train them on firing the M-1 rifle. So I had 200 prisoners and they all had M-1 rifles, except me. I didn't have any rifle or ammunition, so I trained them in firing the M-1. None of them turned on me.

B: It must have given you a little something to think about at the time.

W: Right.

B: What else did you do before you finished up your service and got discharged, which I understand was in July of 1946?

W: I came back to St. Petersburg, and my two younger brothers and I and a friend, Billy Reynolds, who I had roomed with up at Florida—he and I were both on the track team there—we built a house, and my two brothers helped. My father had a lot and so I drew the plans, and we built a little cottage and sold it to a lady. We paid ourselves seventy-five cents an hour. We had no power tools, it was all hand tools. We sold her the house and went back to college.

B: Where was the house?

W: It was near 46<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue North.

B: Is it still there?

W: It's still there. I drove by it, and it's still there.

B: By that point you were a trained engineer and it sounds like you had a taste for entrepreneurship, too.

W: Yes. That way we created our own jobs.

B: I was going to ask you about the Great Depression. A lot of the people that I've talked to who are veterans of World War II grew up during the Depression and some of them remember it as a time that was particularly harsh for them. Others had a really not bad memory of it. I guess a lot depended on the circumstances of the family you were growing up in. Your father was self-employed in the lumber yard business and it sounds like he must have done reasonably well for himself, not only to stay in business, but to consider sending his kids off to college.

W: Well, it really wasn't that easy. He was a co-founder of what was Pinellas Lumber Company in 1921. He and my uncle, Lonnie Hendry, sold it about a year later, and then my father stayed on for a couple of years as office manager, and then he left with some others to start a new company, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Lumber Company, on the south side of St. Petersburg. The Depression hit and the company folded. They had several boxcars of lumber on order that were arriving, and they couldn't pay for it. Dad picked up the pieces, and business was so bad that, for a while, he had no employees, and if he got an order he would just lock the office and deliver it himself. So it was not easy, and we also lost our home. We had a new home over by St. Petersburg High and we lost it because the banks closed, and he lost whatever money he had [in the bank]. It was a balloon mortgage, and the bank wouldn't refinance it. So we lost the home and we moved to apartments above the office of this lumber yard, and we lived there for about three or four years until business recovered some. Dad ended up with about three or four delivery trucks and about five employees, and we built the new house back over by St. Petersburg High. It was difficult. We had a kerosene stove, [and] we had an ice box. We had a block of ice delivered each day. I remember one day we apparently didn't have money for bread for the next meal, and my brother, Norman—he always squirreled away money—they found out he had a quarter, so we were able to buy some bread for supper. They were rough times. However, I was just never aware that we were suffering that much. I'm sure my parents must have felt pretty badly, but I look upon it as a pretty nice period of my life.

B: Just life.

W: Yeah.

B: The Depression is often measured in terms of the decade of the 1930s. Of course, the stock market crash, what we call the crash now, was October 1929. Things got worse and worse over the next several months. They continued to get worse through the 1932 presidential election, and of course that seems to be what tipped the political ballots toward FDR, but in Florida there was a real-estate crash in 1926, and times got a lot harder for people in Florida than they did in the rest of the country through the late 1920s. I wonder if, now you were quite young then, but I wonder if you recall whether or not your family experienced those tough times in the late 1920s even before the stock market crash.

W: No, but we had a bungalow built for us near St. Petersburg High and we moved into it in 1926, and it was about 1934 that we lost it. So from 1926 to 1934, when I was just getting started good at West Central, at the time it seemed fairly normal. The only thing I do remember is for a while to keep the schools open, we had to take fifty cents a week to school. That went into a pot to pay the teachers.

B: You don't remember what the name of the bank was that held the note on your parents?

W: No, I sure don't. I wish I did know.

B: That was before the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and before the Federal Housing Administration and before loan guarantees and that sort of thing, Fannie Mae and all of that. It's interesting to think about somebody like you, who wound up in the banking and financing business, who had this early memory of a foreclosure and pretty tough times. It must have been something you've thought about from time to time, too.

W: Yes.

B: You wind up back at the University of Florida after a stint as a homebuilding entrepreneur in St. Petersburg, and find yourself in engineering school, which wasn't at all what you'd set out to do back when you enrolled in 1941. You finished up in 1948, I believe, is that right, with a Bachelor of Science and Engineering?

W: Industrial Engineering. I did graduate with honors, but I didn't tackle a dissertation. I could have graduated hopefully with high honors, but I would have had to do a dissertation.

B: A thesis.

W: A thesis, okay. At that time it was in the middle of track season, and I was president of the fraternity, and I was president of a couple of other campus

organizations, Society for Advancement of Management and things and I said, I don't think I have time to do the thesis. In retrospect, I should have worked it into my schedule.

B: You can only do so much. What was your fraternity?

W: Phi Delta Theta.

B: Did you live at the house? Did they have a house on campus at all?

W: No, the house is right off campus, on 13<sup>th</sup> and it would be a block south of University, that would be about Southwest 2<sup>nd</sup> [Avenue]. I moved into the house my senior year. See, I had just gotten back from the service and all of a sudden I was a junior, so in terms of athletics, I really only had a chance to be on the varsity [squad] two years, because I missed out. I picked up all those credits during the war. My senior year, though, since I was president of the fraternity, I decided I'd better live in the house, so I did.

B: What was your event in track, by the way?

W: Principally pole vaulting. I did some high jumping a little bit, occasionally, I wasn't very good at it. My senior year, Percy Beard had me running the low hurdles, and actually I tied the varsity record in the 220 lows. I had hurt my back during my junior year, and it never healed, and my senior year then I focused principally on the 220 lows. I ran in the Florida Relays. One time I ran a 3:30 in the sprint medley and got a silver medal for it. But principally pole vaulting, and then later low hurdles.

B: You must have stayed in pretty good shape through your military service.

W: Oh, I did. During the period I was in LSU and ASTP, there were about 400 troops there, and we did have testing on occasion, like a 300 yard sprint and things like that, and I had the best score among the 400 for that. One little incident I'll tell you about, when I got up to basic training at Arkansas in March of 1943, they had a little track competition between battalions. We went out on a little plateau and we had to run races and do some things, so they stuck me in the 100 yard dash. Well, I had never run the sprints in high school, and even as a freshman at Florida, I had never run sprints, but you'd have to run pretty fast to pole vault. I lined up and looked at the starting line, and it wasn't real straight, so I chose the lane that seemed to be a few inches further forward than the other, and I won the 100 yard dash. The *Post* newspaper had an article about it, because the guy that was second behind me was a sprint champion from Ohio State University. [laughter] It said in there that I was a freshman sprint star at the University of Florida, which wasn't true because I had never run a sprint at the University of Florida or in high school. So anyway.

B: Percy Beard was your coach there. Of course we keep his name uppermost in our minds around there on the campus now. They've got the track field named after him. I guess they've got the track closed for some major repairs and renovations.

W: Right, that's what I read.

B: You were president of your fraternity. Tell me what other campus organizations you were involved in.

W: Well, there was a Benton Engineer Society, I was an officer, I can't remember what I did there. I was president of an organization called the Society for the Advancement of Management, SAM, because at that time there was no chapter of Industrial Engineering on the campus. Later there became a chapter of AIE, but at the time I was there, all of us in IE, Industrial Engineering, joined the Society for the Advancement of Management, which was akin to Industrial Engineering, so I was president of that one. I'm trying to remember what other organizations I was involved in, I have a little problem thinking back that far.

B: That's alright. That's a while back. Let me ask you this, was your department headquartered in—they didn't call it Walker Hall then, but it's now Walker Hall—and it was the Engineering building just there.

W: Most of the engineering classes were in Benton Hall. I think it was one of the older buildings there.

B: I don't know that building.

W: Maybe it doesn't exist now, I don't know.

B: It doesn't ring a bell with me.

W: Most of my classes were in Benton. Now that's after the war.

B: Yes, right.

W: Before the war it was Bryant where they had the basic courses for freshmen. A lot of classes were in Bryant Hall.

B: Bryan.

W: Bryan Hall, yeah, Bryan.

B: Up there on the corner of University and 13<sup>th</sup>, pretty close.

- W: Yeah, right. See, there were only about three thousand students here before the war.
- B: Bryan had the Law School in it too, I think, at that point, but apparently didn't use the whole thing for law. Of course now that's where the College of Business Administration is. Are you still involved in any of the University of Florida organizations, or the Gator Support Group here in St. Petersburg?
- W: Going back a few years, John Nattress, he ended up as EVP [Executive Vice President] of the University of Florida, but at that time he was in the Engineering Department, IE Department, and he called me and said, we have a lot of Industrial Engineers working in the Tampa Bay area, and we think we ought to have a chapter there of the American Institute of Industrial Engineers. So I called a half dozen friends who were IE graduates, and we organized and got a charter. John Nattress, I think I called him Jack in those days, came down and met with us and we applied for a charter and got it, and we started the Florida West Coast Chapter of Industrial Engineers, and I was the charter president of it. This would have been about 1957 or 1958.
- B: When you were still with the phone company?
- W: Yes. Then two or three years later we had over 200 members, but we started out with about a dozen. There were quite a few IE's. Some of them working for Honeywell, and some of them working in Tampa.
- B: Right.
- W: But after that, thinking about the university, I've been a booster all along, and I've had season tickets for all these years. I was involved when they had the capital campaign in 1989 and 1990, I was involved in helping raise capital at that time, and I ended up helping enough to get a parking pass in the O'Connell Parking Garage, which I still receive each year.
- B: You don't want to let go of that. [laughter]
- W: No, I don't want to let go of that, I just got the permit last week in the mail.
- B: Those are mighty scarce, especially these days. That's a treasure. You graduated in 1948 with your Bachelor of Science and Engineering with honors. What was next for you? Did you have an idea of what you were going to do by graduation?
- W: No. I just wanted a job, hopefully in Florida. I had a professor named Martinson, and he preached to us, he said, when you guys get out of school you need to do what you can to improve the business climate in Florida to attract new industry to

Florida. It's a tourist state, and we need to get manufacturing facilities and such. So I kept that in the back of my mind. I looked at a bulletin board. I interviewed with three companies. I interviewed with American Bridge Company, which is a subsidiary of U.S. Steel; Westinghouse; and Southern Bell Telephone Company, and that's all. I didn't go any further than that, and I had an offer from all three. I accepted the offer from Southern Bell, because it was gonna start me in Jacksonville in Florida, and the other two would have taken me to Pennsylvania. So I just chose the telephone business, which seemed to tie in okay with an Industrial Engineering background. I spent seven years with Southern Bell, and then I had an offer to go to work for Peninsula Telephone Company in the Tampa Bay area, and that sounded and felt like it was attractive.

B: Closer to home.

W: Closer to home, and then additionally Peninsula in those days didn't have many college-trained people in their management ranks. They had a lot of old-timers that knew the business well, but I thought well, there might be a pretty good future there, so I made the switch. Then GTE came in and bought Peninsula, and then all of a sudden they wanted me to go to Sarasota, so in 1959 they sent me to Sarasota to be manager of the Southern Division of the company, which was Manatee and Sarasota Counties. I was down there for a year, and during that period Oscar Kreutz, who was head of First Federal of St. Petersburg, and interestingly enough I had met him once back when we had our IE chapter going, I mentioned that chapter, and we had him as a speaker at one of our meetings. I don't know that he really remembered me, but anyway, Raleigh Green, Jr. called me one day and said, Oscar Kreutz would like to talk to you. So I drove up from Sarasota and was interviewed by him, and he made me an offer to come to work for him as his executive assistant in the savings and loan business. I agonized about that, and I know Miriam was very uneasy. She said, you don't know anything about the savings and loan business. We have two mortgages and no savings, and that's your only qualification for going into that business. [laughter] But after conferring with some friends, I had a friend who was president of a savings and loan at Sarasota, I talked to him and got his perspective on it. I had also, at the time, at my own expense, gone to an industrial psychologist, Byron Harless and Associates. I went through three days of testing just to see what my skills were and what my weaknesses were and what I ought to be doing, and I just had that under my belt when I'd gotten this call from Oscar Kreutz. So I presented him with the report. I said, I don't know if this is compatible with your needs or not, but here it is. He hired me, and that's the way I got into the savings and loan business.

B: What did you do when you worked for Southern Bell in Jacksonville?

W: I had started out as what they called traffic manager. I was in the traffic department, and all the telephone operators were in traffic. We also did a lot of

work in assigning trunking within dial telephone exchanges. I was a traffic manager for a couple of years. They sent me to Fernandina Beach to train people to use a dial telephone, because they were changing it from manual to dial, and I had to hire twenty people to go from house to house and show people how to turn the wheel on that phone. Then after that they sent me to Panama City for six months to handle the traffic department job related to converting that exchange from manual to dial.

Then I went to Orlando as a traffic manager, under a district traffic manager, and after almost about four years there in that capacity, I got promoted to Jacksonville to be Florida Force Requirements Manager, which, in the traffic department was a staff position where it was up to me to keep track of how many telephone operations we needed in each exchange all over the state, based on the demands for traffic and such. I was doing that. We had a telephone strike in 1955, that lasted fourteen weeks. I was in various exchanges trying to keep calls flowing. My boss in Jacksonville called me, and they said I had to travel around the state, and settle revenue settlements with independent companies, so I joined four others doing that. In the course of it, I spent two months in Tampa, doing studies on the Peninsula Telephone Company equipment. I had to hire people there to do some studies. A few months later after it was all over, I got a call from Peninsula and they offered me a job. That's how I happened to move to Tampa.

B: Sounds like a lot of the work you did for Southern Bell had as much to do with the human side of the business as much as the technical and engineering side.

[End of Tape A, Side 1.]

B: I was just remarking about how your work with Southern Bell was the human side of the business. I don't know, it sounds like your training as an industrial engineer was, would you say, pretty relevant to what you wound up doing?

W: Yes, very much so. I had like five hundred and fifty operators in five cities reporting to me when I was with Peninsula Telephone Company, and then GTE before 1959, and then when I moved to Sarasota, I had several hundred employees under my supervision there. I will just mention one quick case here in 1957, my boss in Tampa—who was the general traffic manager—and I interviewed some [potential employees], he wanted me to have an understudy, and all of my employees at that point were women. So he and I interviewed several [candidates] and we jointly agreed to hire a young man named Payton Adams. Payton worked with me some, and then later when they moved me to Sarasota, Payton took my job as district traffic manager. To make a long story short, years and years and years later, he had been transferred around the country, and he ended up back in Tampa as the president of GTE of the South. Then he retired in the mid-1990s. After that, we spent a lot of time together, we went fishing

together in Alaska and such. But I knew he was going to do well, and he was willing to move to Chicago, and to Lexington, and to Connecticut, and to Durham, and he and his family just kept moving, and he kept going up the ladder and did a great job for them. [That is the same Payton Adams who has been active on the Bayfront Hospital Board].

B: You mentioned a telephone strike in about 1955, it was when you were still with Southern Bell in Jacksonville. I guess I remember a telephone strike that affected Tampa's general telephone in the early 1960s, but I don't remember one in the 1950s. What was . . . ?

W: That was just Southern Bell.

B: What was the union?

W: IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] was the one in Tampa. The Communication Workers of America had the contract with Southern Bell. The big issue was that Southern Bell was tired of wildcat strikes during a period when they all had valid contracts. They said this time we are going to have a contract, and it's going to have a no-strike clause. During the term of the contract you're not allowed to strike. They had had a lot of nuisance strikes in different places. That was a big issue, and so for about fourteen weeks the union held out and said we don't want a nice no-strike clause, and then they finally gave in and accepted it, but that was the big issue.

B: When you received your education in industrial engineering and in your training, did you have any education or experience or training that prepared you for dealing with unions and union work actions?

W: I don't remember a specific course in it. We had wage and salary administration and things like that, but I don't think we were prepared for what lay ahead of me.

B: Did you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion about the union and its leadership during the time you worked with Southern Bell?

W: Well, that was a pretty rough strike, and we had some supervisors who were actually shot at. I don't think they were wounded. They were trying to maintain service. I know one supervisor was shot when he was up on a pole trying to connect some cables. It was a pretty rough situation, and so I didn't have a very favorable impression. I had gotten along pretty well with some of the union leaders when I lived in Orlando, and that was one of the reasons, the night before the strike started, they sent me down to Orlando, because I knew the union leaders. When I was with Peninsula and then later GTE, I had good relations with the business agent that represented the telephone operators under my supervision. Her name was Glatys Harsen, and she was pretty reasonable. I

had a tough time because the president of Peninsula Company was regarded by the IBW as the ideal company president because they had his ear and he was very cooperative with them and such.

B: That was Carl Brorein?

W: Yes, Senior.

B: Senior, right.

W: It made it a little bit tougher for some of us out in the field, because if they complained about some decision, that say I made, the agent could go directly into Carl Sr.'s office and tell his side of the story, and I wouldn't get a call asking me for my side of the story, and he would just make a decision, and quite often it would go against the managers in the field. So what I had to do, I had to win over Glatys, and convince her that when we made a promotion, it was in the best interest of her members for me to pick somebody who might not be the senior person, but who would do a real good job and be a good supervisor for those people. And so I was able to operate fairly well on that basis, but when I arrived there everything within the telephone operator group was automatically [assigned] by seniority, and very often we promoted people that weren't supervisor material. I got along well with Glatys and others in the leadership of the union there, I didn't have any particular problem, but I had to do it through salesmanship.

B: Who recruited you to Peninsula from Southern Bell?

W: George Rose was the general traffic manager, and when I had been down doing studies on revenue settlements—I had to do studies to help decide how the revenue was going to be divided between the Peninsula Company and the Bell System—I had gotten acquainted with George because my work involved the traffic department, and he was their general traffic manager. He's the one that called me months later and said, we'd like for you to come to work down here.

B: Did you meet Carl Brorein Sr., or Jr.?

W: Yes, both. When I was in Sarasota I reported to Carl Brorein, Jr. By that time GTE had taken over and they agreed to have Carl, Jr. as the executive vice president of the company, so I reported to Carl, Jr. I still have the letter I sent Carl explaining why I was leaving the company. I had a transitional experience there that I'll mention briefly, but I had written him in August of 1960 and told him I had accepted this other position and explained why and so forth, and thanked him for all the years of service there with him. He said, well, don't tell anybody until I'm ready. School was about to start, but my wife moved back to St. Petersburg, but she couldn't tell anybody according to Carl, Jr., and so I think

some of the neighbors in St. Petersburg thought we were getting a divorce. [laughter] He insisted that I stay on until he was ready. In the meantime, Hurricane Donna came through, so the last week I was there before he finally agreed to make an announcement, and announce a replacement for me. I was still in charge when Donna came through, and we had a rough time with Hurricane Donna. I remember we sent a couple of maintenance men down to Long Boat Key and we sandbagged the door to keep water from coming in the exchange. They couldn't get out, but the water couldn't get in. We had a rough time during Donna, and that was my last week on the job with the telephone business.

B: You must have been relieved to get away from that.

W: Yes, yes.

B: What did you tell Carl, Jr. were your reasons for making the change that you did then?

W: I did tell him that I was interested in staying in Florida, and I realized for me to advance with GTE I was going to have to be prepared to move beyond the state of Florida, that was one of the considerations. I think it focused really on my love of being in Florida. We were willing to live other places than St. Petersburg, but we really didn't have much interest in moving all around the country. At one point with Southern Bell, I was offered a job in Louisiana to go to Lake Charles to be district traffic manager, this was 1953. I turned that down because we didn't want to move to Louisiana, and then spend the rest of our life there. All of our family was in Florida. I kept thinking about what Professor Martinson said, and a couple of years later I was very active in the Committee of 100, and I was involved in helping to recruit new business and industry into Florida.

B: You became involved in the Committee of 100 in the 1960s after you had joined Florida Federal, and of course your community service covers a lot of territory, and a lot of different civic organizations and institutions. Did you have any attraction to that or did you move in the direction of any of that civic activity when you were still with the phone company, either Southern Bell or Peninsula or GTE?

W: Yes. Well, I hadn't done any in Jacksonville with Southern Bell to speak of. I had been in Orlando, I had been involved in helping a couple of people in political campaigns and I was in the Junior Chamber of Commerce back in the early 1950s. Then when I was in St. Petersburg in the late 1950s. Before moving to Sarasota, I was involved in a couple of organizations. For example, disease fund-raising, and that sort of thing. Then when I was in Sarasota for just a year, I was about to be inducted into [the] Rotary [Club] and I was asked if I would be campaign chairman for the next United Way Campaign. I was hesitant because I

had only lived there for nine months at that point and such, but also they had a Chamber of Commerce in Sarasota that had asked me to help out. Related to what Professor Martinson had said, I was chairman of the Business Climate Committee of the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, and my committee came up with a series of recommendations for improving the business climate of Sarasota County, to attract new business to the county. I was on the verge of being very involved with the United Way and I was already involved with the Chamber until I ended up back in St. Petersburg. Now back in St. Petersburg, Oscar Kreutz, who was a strong business leader, but he was really the strongest civic leader in St. Petersburg in the 1960s and 1970s, and he just sort of set an example and so all of a sudden I found myself [participating], and I was interested in Committee of 100 because of this business climate project in Sarasota. I got elected to the board of the Committee of 100 in about 1962 or 1963 and of interest Bob Sheen was the chairman of the Committee of 100 in 1962 or 1963.

B: Is that how you met him first?

W: Yes. And so I sat on the board with him. The following year Bill Emerson was the chairman of the Committee of 100, and then the next year I was chairman. The year I was chairman, we decided to go county-wide. Up to that time we had been the St. Petersburg-area Committee of 100. So we went county-wide and we got up to five hundred members during my year as chairman, and we recruited a few small businesses. We recruited Smiths Industries, which still has a plant. They service air craft instruments, and they're out at St. Peterburg/Clearwater Airport. That was one of them that opened up the year I was chairman. But all of it went back to Professor Martinson, I think. He said you've got to create more opportunities for people to go to college here in Florida, and then work and live in Florida.

B: Professor Martinson was in the College of Engineering?

W: He was the department head of Industrial Engineering.

B: Do you remember his first name?

W: Earl.

B: How do you spell that? Is it m-a-r-t-e-n-s-o-n, or i-n-s-o-n?

W: I think it was i-n, but I can't guarantee it.

B: I'll run him down when I get back to Gainesville.

W: Yes, he is, of course, long since deceased.

B: Well I'm sure he was, but your account of his influence on you, especially with this thinking about trying to stimulate industrial opportunity in Florida, that's very, very interesting.

W: Well to show how it's paid off, too, we have four children. They all graduated from college, two girls and two boys. Let's see, three of them have jobs in St. Petersburg, the other one, my daughter Finnette Fabrick, lives in Gainesville and is a family counselor, a Ph D Gator. But the three in St. Petersburg, one's a school teacher, but the two boys have jobs here because of what we were able to do to please Professor Martinson.

B: What jobs do they have?

W: Our youngest, David, had twenty-one years with Florida Power until it was bought by Progress Energy. After a few months he was released and he got on with Cox Target Media in Largo, so it's close to his home. It's a subsidiary of Cox Communications, and he's in charge of corporate communications there. And then Mike started out in banking with a couple of different banks, and then he ended up with Wallace, Welch, Willingham, which is the largest insurance agency in the area. He is sort of in charge of their securities area. He sells life insurance, other insurances, but he also handles the securities area.

B: Raleigh Green, Jr. telephoned you and said Oscar Kreutz would like to talk to you about coming to work for him. How did you know Raleigh Green, Jr.?

W: Well, Raleigh was a neighbor.

B: Growing up?

W: No. When we moved back to St. Pete, and we bought a lot, it happened to be across the street from a lot that Raleigh and Nancy had bought. They lived a block down the street, and they had bought this lot in order to build a larger home.

B: Hold up for a second. When you moved back you became neighbors with him, now which move back was that?

W: 1956, when we moved from Jacksonville.

B: Okay. Even though you went to work for Peninsula in Tampa you lived in St. Petersburg.

W: Yes. So I knew Raleigh as a neighbor, but it was in 1959 that he was aware of my involvements down in Sarasota, I think some of it in civic-type work and such, and I don't know, that may have prompted him to talk to Oscar Kreutz. May or

may not have, I don't know.

B: Up until then you and Mr. Kreutz had not met?

W: I had met him when he was our speaker at an AIEE meeting.

B: That's right.

W: Like I said, I was president of the chapter, but he probably didn't remember me at that point. He may have.

B: He may have remembered you, but probably not enough to make up his mind [that] I want to hire that guy some day, or might have planted a seed. You never know. Evidently he was a pretty astute observer of human beings.

W: Yes.

B: And it must have particularly struck him that you had already shown that you had a taste for civic involvement, which was something that you say he encouraged.

W: Yes. I guess being in Sarasota for nine months and wanting me to be head of the United Way Campaign, maybe that might have impressed him, I don't know.

B: The Chamber of Commerce in Sarasota that you were a part of, or head of the committee I guess, that was responsible for looking into ways to improve the business climate in Sarasota. Do you remember now what any of the ideas were for improving the business climate that you and your colleagues came up with?

W: Well, we of course looked at a lot of factors, the tax situation.

B: Property taxes.

W: Property taxes, the educational system, the human relations, union relations, that sort of thing, the general climate. We just looked at about six or seven different categories that were important for companies. Prevailing wage rates, transportation, all the factors that if a company is considering moving, all of the factors that they are going to be looking at. We looked at them and we said, now how good are we and where are our weaknesses, and where do we need to improve. For example, how good is our K[indergarten] through twelfth grade school system? That's what we came up with. I can't remember now at the time as to how we were able to make comparisons to show how competitive we would be with Atlanta, Georgia, and Jacksonville, and other places, but we just wanted to do a better job and look better in any kind of comparative analysis that might be made.

B: Was health care one of the things that you looked at?

W: Yes. Definitely.

B: Was that something that you, as an individual member of the committee, thought about much at that point? The value or the importance of health care to a communities prospects?

W: No more probably than looking at the quality of education and wage rates and things like that.

B: Sarasota's public hospital at the time and for a long [time] afterwards, probably still is, was Sarasota Memorial Hospital.

W: Right.

B: Did you ever have any dealings with that hospital when you were there?

W: No, I didn't. I have a cousin that later ended up in charge of their security at the hospital, but that's all.

B: How about in Jacksonville? Any dealings with the health care system there, their major hospital, the name of which escapes me now?

W: No.

B: Or in Tampa? Tampa General Hospital?

W: No. I didn't because when I got down here I worked in Tampa for a while there under George Rose, the general traffic manager, but I lived in St. Petersburg, so I commuted. My focus was in St. Petersburg. Of course I had had the experience with Mound Park. I had my tonsils out at Mound Park in 1940. I had my appendix out in 1956 at Mound Park. I had, let's see what other, well, I had been in Mound Park several times.

B: In addition to being delivered there.

W: Right, right.

B: Oscar Kreutz hired you as his executive assistant?

W: Right.

B: What did you do in that job?

W: Frankly, what he wanted me to do was to first of all, get acquainted with all the departments of the company. He assigned several departments to me. Then after about a year or two, I was made vice president, and I was given responsibility for human relations for all of our locations, all of our branch buildings and such--economic research, some areas like that. He just started expanding my responsibilities until in about two years I was Vice President of Operations, which was data processing, finance, and office services--all under my supervision after about two or three years. As his assistant, let's face it, he just wanted me to learn the business.

B: And he encouraged you to get involved in the community?

W: You know, I've thought about that, and I never remember his pushing me in that direction, but he just set an example. You got to thinking he was so committed to helping St. Petersburg be a better place to live and work. He often said that we need to pay rent to St. Petersburg for the opportunity to be here. He had moved here from Washington D.C. in 1953, and he just thought it was a great place, and he said well, I'm going to help make it better. He did it by example, and so we looked at what he was doing. I guess people knew what his philosophy was and so I would get a call [that would] say, "Gene, would you head up a division of the United Way for me?" I'd say, "well what division do you want and so forth, and how did that division do last year?" Then somebody says, "would you be willing to serve on the board of this Committee of 100? Somebody told me that they thought you might be ideal for that." It wasn't Oscar Kreutz, somebody else had called me. It was like when I got involved with the United Way, Steve Puffer called me and he says, "you know I want you to be chair of a division here, and I did that." Then he called me later and said, "we want you to be Campaign Chairman next year."

B: These were people who knew you, they knew Gene Williams. In many cases maybe people that you had known even before you came to work for Florida Federal?

W: Some of them, yes.

B: Because you had a lot of roots here in the community here already, a lot of ties to St. Petersburg and to people who lived and worked here. Of course, it probably did not escape their attention that Florida Federal was a corporation that didn't discourage its people from being active in the community, so they probably had an idea that to call Gene Williams at Florida Federal meant that there was at least an even chance that he might say yes. At least he wasn't under the gun to say no.

W: Right, yeah.

B: Okay, fair enough. By this point, you are a full time resident again of your home town, St. Petersburg, Florida, and got a job with a pretty important company in town, Florida Federal Savings. Was it called Florida Federal at the time?

W: No, it was First Federal Savings and Loan. Actually, at that time, it only had two hundred and fifty million [dollars] in assets. When I retired in 1987, the assets were five billion, and ninety-something branch offices. When I joined them they had five locations.

B: Being a part of St. Petersburg in its corporate life, and a resident, and children in school I guess, going to school here, and getting involved in community affairs, I guess it's time for me to ask you how you viewed Mound Park Hospital at the time. Let's see, I guess you moved from Jacksonville back to St. Petersburg in 1956, and then took your job with Florida Federal in 1960, right?

W: Right, September of 1960.

B: September of 1960. Now the context for Mound Park Hospital was at that point, I'm trying to think of some chronological punctuation marks that I can use to sort of help give us a point of reference. The administrator, David Kenerson, had just been fired by the city manager of St. Petersburg, over a controversy to do with some black nursing employees at Mercy Hospital, which was a division of Mound Park Hospital, and all under the hospital division of St. Petersburg. Do you want to pause for a moment?

[Break in Interview.]

B: Well, before we paused I was asking you since you're back in St. Petersburg full-time now working for Mr. Kreutz at Florida Federal, Mound Park, as an institution in the community, how much did that matter? Did that come to your attention as you settled in and became a full time St. Peterburger?

W: Well, I think I had felt some loyalty to Mound Park. Again, I was born in Mound Park, I had been in surgery three or four times at Mound Park. My father, when I lived in Orlando, my father had diverticulitis with peritonitis. He was in Mound Park for seven weeks, almost died from it, recovered, lived thirty years more. So I was over from Orlando visiting him a good bit. Another tie-in is that my next door neighbor, I recruited him to live next door to me, a playmate from when we were four years old, living over around the corner from one another near St. Petersburg High, but when we were in West Central, Lynn Feaster was my doctor. Lynn had just gotten out of the Navy and had moved back here in about 1955, and when we came back in 1956, we bought a lot, I bought an option on the lot next to me. I went and looked up Lynn and he as renting, and I said Lynn, you're supposed to live over here. So Lynn built and lived next door to me and was my doctor. That was a special interest in the medical field because of Lynn.

Over the years, I just felt committed to Mound Park over St. Anthony's and others, even though they're fine hospitals, but Mound Park was special. I remember as a kid, climbing up the steps on the mound, the Indian mound on the east side of the hospital. That's in some of the pictorial books that shows the Indian mound.

B: I've got a picture of it in that file folder right there, except it's underneath our microphone right now, but I know the mound, yes, sure enough. And you know it from first hand experience.

W: Yes, yes.

B: Not there anymore, lamentably. It would be down here at the end of this block.

W: Right.

B: Did you have an impression of Mound Park as a business man in St. Petersburg, as something that affected business in St. Petersburg, or affected the quality of life?

W: I felt that Mound Park was *the* hospital, even though again that St. Anthony's was a fine hospital, but I just felt that Mound Park was a very important part of our life in St. Petersburg. Now at that time you had the Mercy Hospital, and of course in the late 1960s Lynn Andrews, the city manager, felt like that wasn't a good idea to have the two hospitals, that they ought to be consolidated. That did happen under his administration, and the patients were moved to Mound Park. I was aware of things that were happening in that regard, and by then of course, I had become acquainted with Lynn Andrews, the city manager, and I appreciated his position on the issue and I supported what he was doing.

B: Let me ask you about that transition, because it's a question that urban historians are sort of curious about. A lot of public hospitals in cities in the South in the 1960s consolidated their black municipal hospital with their white public hospitals. In Tampa it happened in 1962, Clara Frye Memorial Hospital, the black hospital there, closed down and their patients were migrated into a separate ward at Tampa General out there on Davis Island. In St. Petersburg it happened with Mercy and Mound Park in 1966. Now, of course the decade of the 1960s is when the civil rights movement really reached its peak, and there was a lot more consciousness in the United States about trying to maybe bring more balance to the relations between the black and white races. It's a question as to whether or not these consolidations happened because it was the right thing to do in terms of racial justice and social justice, or was it really sort of a bottom-line decision where just city council, city managers just started doing the math and thinking, you know, this is stupid, we can't afford to run two public hospitals in this city anymore. It's getting to be too expensive for the taxpayers. Or maybe was it a

little bit of both? Maybe the finances gave a little extra leverage to a decision that maybe might have been the right thing to do, but not as attractive had it not been financially sensible.

W: Yes. I wish Lynn Andrews were here with us to answer that question. Lynn died about a year ago here in St. Petersburg.

B: That's terrible.

W: I don't know what his thinking was. My thinking was that the primary thrust should have been to give all patients, regardless of race, quality care. If I had been on [the] city council at the time, I probably would have come to the conclusion that Mercy Hospital just wasn't equipped in terms of the medical staff, nursing staff, the building itself, wasn't equipped to provide quality care. I would have said, well, why don't we just combine it now and make sure everybody has quality care.

B: Yes. You never heard Lynn Andrews speak about his rationale about that?

W: No, I didn't. I visited him on occasion in his office, but it didn't happen to be at the time that the consolidation had been taking place.

B: Did you recognize that public medicine and public health, as it was done at Mound Park Hospital, was becoming a financial consideration for the city council and the mayor and city manager? In other words, becoming a public finance problem.

W: Well, Mound Park was considered to be the charity hospital in the area. I think all of us as taxpayers knew that that was a financial burden on the city. I don't think we had any solution to the problem, we just knew that a lot of people from lower income groups had to go there and didn't necessarily pay for the services they received, but it had to be done.

B: The city council had to allocate a certain part of its budget every year to supporting the public hospitals.

W: At one point, you'll remember, in the history of the hospital it was called, I think it was in the early 1920s before it became Mound Park, it was called the City Hospital. That was the name of it.

B: Yes. Same name in a lot of cities that they just put on it.

W: Right. So it was regarded as the charity hospital.

B: Yes. Well during this time, you're becoming increasingly involved in public affairs

in St. Petersburg generally. You become a part of Pinellas United Way. Red Cross doesn't come until a bit later, it looks like. [Then the] St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce; you were at various points a member of its board, an officer, a treasurer, and on lots of committees. When you got involved with the Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of 100 and institutions or groups like that, did health care or medicine come up at all in your discussions about the quality of life in Pinellas County?

W: I don't remember, only to the extent that, for example in the Committee of 100, again we were interested in the business climate, and health services had to be a factor. So in comparing St. Petersburg area with places competing with us in North Carolina and Georgia and Mississippi and so forth, we certainly looked at the quality of health care in the city as being an important factor in trying to attract someone like Bob Sheen's company that was up North and was considering opening a small operation here in Pinellas County, actually in St. Petersburg.

B: Mr. Sheen, having discovered St. Petersburg, made that move, at least put his foot in the water tentatively in the early 1950s when you were still living in Jacksonville, I guess.

W: That's correct, it was 1953. I think what's interesting in his story, he just talks about the fact that in flying around the country he had visited St. Petersburg and was impressed with the area. Now I'm sure there was a lot more involved than just saying [that] he was impressed with the area. He must have considered a lot of factors about business climate before he decided to open a plant operation here. It would be very interesting if he were living today to quiz him on that, how that decision was made.

B: I would like to ask him that.

W: Unfortunately in the book it's about one sentence, but there was a lot more involved than this one sentence.

B: Oh, yes. I'd like to hear him elaborate on what motivated him at the time. Well, as you got involved with groups such as the Committee of 100 that Bob Sheen headed before you did, did you ever find yourself talking to visitors from other parts of the country or world who were considering Pinellas County as a place to do business, relocate, open a branch?

W: Yes. In fact, I was with a task force, we flew to New York and visited with some companies up there that were considering locating a plant in the South. My memory dims a little bit about the names of any of them and such, but we went up to make a sales pitch and tell them what a great place it was for locating a plant. I can't tell you what some of the details were about our main pitch, and I

can't remember exactly what we might have said about health services, but it had to be a factor.

B: You are educated specifically in this business about industrial engineering. You have experience with some companies whose future and whose prosperity depends on growth, public utility, the telephones, banking and finance, the savings and loan business. When you would talk to somebody from outside the area about Pinellas County, and I'm keeping in mind you're influenced by Professor Martinson on this, too, what would you tell them it is about the South or about Florida, in particular, or about Pinellas County, even in more particular, that really ought to make them pay attention and consider making that move? It might not have been health care at the top of your mind, but if you were to talk to somebody for example that you hadn't met before, and they'd say well, how about the Tampa Bay area, Pinellas County? Why should I be interested? What would you have said to them back then in the early 1960s?

W: It reminds me of some of the early history of Pinellas County, back in the 1800s, and some of the people that helped found St. Petersburg, said they came here for health reasons.

B: Yes.

W: Because it was a healthy place in terms of climate.

B: Yes.

W: So in looking at the business climate and making a pitch to anybody we would certainly want to talk to them about the climate itself. It's a healthy place to live.

B: By that you mean temperate climate, clean air, the beaches, salt water and sunshine.

W: Right.

B: Of course, we know a little more than we used to about what the sun can do.

W: But the picture would be that you will be able to attract skilled people to work in your plant because they are going to be attracted to this area which has this wonderful climate. They would like to come here and they would like to live here, and they would like to have their children go to school here and grow up here. It would make it easy for you to recruit skilled personnel to work in your plant. That would be an important pitch that you would make. Then beyond that, of course, we would go into our school system, which over the years has been a pretty good system, going back into the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, because I was involved in working with the school system back in the mid-1970s, and helped,

with two other close friends, persuade the superintendent of the schools to create an economic education program within the Pinellas school system and such and such. We were able to promote our school system as being good for families that live here. Of course the tax climate in Florida and Pinellas County has been favorable compared to other states like South Carolina, North Carolina and such.

B: You're talking about property taxes?

W: Property as well as income taxes.

B: Absence of the state income tax, right?

W: Right. Then of course the political climate is important, too. One of my high school buddies—in fact, he asked if I would be a speaker at his funeral when he was on his death bed here a little over two years ago—Bill Cramer [William Cramer, US Congressman, 1955-71, Republican], was our congressman for many years.

B: Bill Cramer.

W: He helped to create the two-party system in Florida in the late 1950s, and he's credited with making it a two-party state in there. Again, I think in terms of political climate, I think that's healthy.

B: Could you elaborate on that a little bit as to what you would tell somebody up from North, who maybe didn't have as much first hand knowledge about the political situation in Florida?

W: When you have a two-party system, you have competition between the parties trying to please the electorate. That means they're going to do their best to hold taxes down. They're going to do their best to have an efficient government. They are under pressure to accommodate the electorate more so than if it's a one-party system.

B: Fair enough. You could certainly say that was true about Pinellas County, especially even if you couldn't say that about a lot of the rest of Florida. Pinellas County had a vibrant, growing Republican party starting in the late 1950s, as you say, with Bill Cramer.

W: Right.

B: How did he do that, by the way, do you think?

W: You know, the story is that he first thought he would be a Democrat, and I don't

know who he talked to, now this is just hearsay, but they didn't really welcome him with open arms or such, and apparently people in the Republican party took time to talk with him and open the door for him, and so he just decided that he would become a Republican, and see what he could do within the party. So that's the way it started out. I used to double date with him in high school, and we were friends over the years. Sara told me that Bill asked if I would join some others in speaking at his funeral, and I did. I was honored to do that.

B: Yes, that would be no small honor.

W: I had to follow the Attorney General of Florida on the podium, but that was no small task.

B: Yes, indeed. The federal building they named after him I guess doesn't have that name anymore. Did they name another building after him after they sold [it]?

W: No. Not that I know of. The next thing we've been working on, and some of my classmates and I have communicated with City Council, but they finally came up with the plan to name I-275 through St. Petersburg as the William C. Cramer [highway]

[End of Tape A, Side 2.]

B: We were finishing up talking about Bill Cramer and the political climate in Pinellas County, the two-party system, and still sort of discussing the prospects of a community like Pinellas County as a place for industrial development and growth, and people just wanting to move here and live here. I'm wondering if you found yourself thinking anymore about Mound Park and medicine and public health as the 1960s move on. It's 1968 when you become a member of the Bayfront Medical Center Board, and that changed from a public hospital, Mound Park Hospital owned by the city, to really a private quasi-public institution, Bayfront Medical Center. [This situation] rose out of the finances of the public hospital, and I guess rose out of a decision, correct me if I'm wrong, but rose out of a feeling on the part of the City Council and I guess the voters that we don't want to be in the hospital business anymore. Does that sound fair enough?

W: Yes, I think particularly since as long as the city was in the hospital business, it would be regarded as sort of a charity hospital. I think the feeling was that they could do a much better job serving everyone, even low income, regardless of their economic status, could do a better job if it was not run by the city. I think the other factor is that city government is not really trained to run hospitals.

B: Sure.

W: You recruit somebody like Charles Bissett to be a chief financial officer of the

city, and he was, and he did a wonderful job, but he had a lot of areas to supervise, and the hospital was just one little department, even though you did have a full time administrator. Charles was the person at City Hall who was responsible for medical services at Mound Park. That kind of arrangement would have some long-range limitations when it came to expanding the hospital to meet the needs of twenty, thirty, forty years later.

B: You supported Lynn Andrews and his decision to consolidate Mercy with Mound Park. Were you supportive as a citizen and business person in St. Petersburg of the decision to spin off Mound Park and make it a private institution?

W: Yes. I thought it sounded like a very good idea, but I got this phone call right out of the blue one day from Mayor Goldner [Herman Goldner] and asked me if I would go on the board. I was sort of honored to do that. One, because I had known Bob Sheen for several years, I had served with him on board of the Committee of 100. I knew that he would be a very strong, effective leader. And the fact that I was born there and had had surgeries there, I felt loyalty to Mound Park. I said, well, if I need to repay the city for all the things they've done for me, that might be a good place to serve.

B: Fair enough. Herman Goldner was the mayor of St. Petersburg at the time. It was he who called and asked if you would serve?

W: Right.

B: And you promptly said yes, thought it over a little bit?

W: No, I think I promptly said yes.

B: Ok. Who else do you remember was on that board of directors at the time when you went on?

W: I was afraid you were gonna ask me that, because I've had to struggle thinking of some of the names involved there, because over time there were changes.

B: People come and go.

W: They come and go. They set it up to where there would be turnover and I was, for example, I was limited to two four-year terms, and so I served them and went off. I can remember some of the doctors, Dr. Ackerman, and Dr. Rast, and some others that served on the board.

B: Ackerman's name I'm familiar with, what was the second one you mentioned?

W: Charles Rast.

B: What was his specialty?

W: I think he was internal medicine, I believe. I think both of those two were. And then of course, Milton Sheen, also served on the board.

B: Bob's brother.

W: Bob's brother, yes. I'm struggling now to remember some of these others that were on there initially. I know a little bit later, John Welch came on, but I think he came on about the time I was going off. I'll just have to tell you tomorrow. It'll come to me in the middle of the night, some of the other names.

B: No doubt. Bob Sheen chaired the board at the time?

W: Yeah, he chaired the board. The wife of Kanes Furniture Company, she was very active civically, and I'm struggling to get her name, but she was on the board with me. There was also Dorothy Ringer on the board. Her husband was an automobile dealer here. Then Clarence "Mac" McKee came on the board while I was on the board. He was Executive Vice President, Chief Financial Officer at Florida Power. I was chairman of the board's finance committee, and I got Mac to serve with me and take my place on the finance committee when I went off the board, rotated off the board. Mac chaired the finance committee of the board for several years, too.

B: Did you go straight onto the finance committee when you joined the board?

W: You know I can't remember if it was immediate or not, but it was early on during my term on the board.

B: And then eventually you wound up chairing.

W: Yes.

B: And at one point served as treasurer at Bayfront Medical Center.

W: Yes. But again, as treasurer there it isn't like being on a full-time staff position as treasurer. It was to oversee on behalf of the board the finances of the institution, and to report to the board.

B: Do you remember your first Board of Directors meeting? Was Bob chairing it?

W: Bob was chairing it, yes.

B: What was the atmosphere like? Did you feel as a group that you were setting out on an excellent adventure, or was there a crisis atmosphere to what was going

on?

W: No, I think it was more of a [feeling of] excitement, because I had served with Bob on the Committee of 1000, and he was very skilled, very diplomatic, very efficient, ran a good meeting. You're not going to waste any time at the meeting. But again, he was very diplomatic, and he was very skilled in surrounding himself with competent people. The people that were on the board to a large degree were hand-picked by Bob, and I named some of them.

B: Do you think the call from Herman Goldner's office came at the behest of Bob Sheen, perhaps?

W: Maybe. I'm sure that Herman didn't know much about me at the time, I don't know. I knew him, but I hadn't worked with him. So I'm sure that Bob had probably suggested the name.

B: I asked you this off the tape earlier, but just to get it on the record. You were not a charter member of the Bayfront Center board, but came on a few months after the corporation was formed and the Board of Directors was constituted, I guess?

W: I think it might have even been like two or three months. Maybe somebody moved away, or maybe there was a vacancy that came up. So I wasn't at the first organizational meeting.

B: Okay. Do you remember who the Chief Executive Officer was at the hospital at the time? What I guess we would call the administrator?

W: It was Turner, and I'm struggling with his first name, but Turner was the first one. Then we made a change after a year or two and hired Ken Swanson. Turner moved on up to, I think, one of the Carolinas to take a similar position. We thought, I think, at the time that it would probably be a good idea to make a change.

B: Okay. Were you involved in recruiting Ken Swanson?

W: No. I don't remember that I was. I think, knowing Bob Sheen, I think he probably had a personal hand in it.

B: I see. What kind of characteristics do you think the board was looking for that led them to settle on Swanson? Any recollection of that hire or his initial appearance?

W: My first thought is comparing him to the prior administrator, Turner. He was very outgoing, very personable.

B: Swanson or Turner?

W: Swanson, Swanson. Very outgoing, very personable, and it looked like the kind of person who would excite you about the future. I thought Ken did a very good job for us.

B: What was the big problem, not necessarily that it was all about problems, but to the extent that you had to respond to problems or troubles or threats to the future of the hospital, what do you suppose was the issue of the day at the time that you brought Swanson on board to serve as chief executive?

W: Well, I think there were two main needs. One, there was definitely a need for capital improvements, improving the quality of the buildings themselves that were inadequate. We needed new operating rooms, we needed to upgrade. Bob and the board--but particularly Bob before he accepted the job--got a commitment from the city that they would provide some money for capital improvements, because the city still would own the real estate, and got a commitment at least for the next five years, for some capital funds from the city that would permit us to improve the buildings and grounds and the medical facilities.

The second problem, as I saw it, at that time, was that again we were regarded as the charity hospital. It did mean that we had a lot of medical bills to write off, that we had absorbed providing free service. The big challenge was to increase the number of paying patients to offset and help carry the load for the indigents. In order to do that, you had to attract, as you call it, more business. I remember now that my next door neighbor, Lynn Feaster, did a lot of his practice at St. Anthony's, much to my dismay, because at Mound Park--which then had become Bayfront--if you were on the medical staff, you had to take a turn in the emergency room on weekends. There were a lot of doctors that sort of stayed away from Mound Park at that time, because it was a charity hospital. They didn't want to spend so much time in the emergency room on weekends and nights and such, and so the medical staff was smaller than it needed to be because of this.

B: So you had a little trouble recruiting?

W: Right. [We] had a problem recruiting. We had to make the hospital more attractive to the doctors, and of course to patients, but a lot of patients go where the doctor suggests. I think to show how well it changed over the years, and I give credit to the people who followed me on the board. My friend, Lynn Feaster, used to do most of his work at St. Anthony's. Years later, he started bringing more of his patients to Bayfront, and today we have a Lynn Feaster Chapel at Bayfront that was dedicated about a little over a year ago. His son, Lynn Feaster III, does most of his practice here, and has his office right around the corner here. So all of that changed. That meant that Bayfront had improved so much,

and it became attractive to doctors like Lynn Feaster.

B: You don't think Gene Williams can claim a little bit of the credit for that?

W: I don't know. Really, I do give more credit to the people that followed me, because we just struggled during my first eight years here. We just struggled in the early years trying to begin to change it. It's one of those changes that just can't happen over night, and it just took time to gradually do it. We had a lot of loyal doctors, I've mentioned Dr. Rast and Dr. Ackerman. I think there are some things named after Dr. Ackerman here.

B: All over the place.

W: Yes.

B: He was apparently a giant on the medical staff there.

W: Yes. They were very loyal to the hospital. They were able to attract other doctors to come on back to the hospital and such, and so over time it became very attractive, and now we have the Feaster Chapel and such as an example.

B: The city turned over a physical plant, a hospital, and its equipment and machinery, and I guess its population of professionals, medical professionals, who up until then had been city employees, but who then became employees of Bayfront Medical Center, the corporation. I guess when you took it over, you took over, I don't know how you would account for it in the health care business, did they give you a balanced budget? Were you taking over an institution that spent about what it took in?

W: No. I think we were taking over an institution that the city had to cover the loss at the end of the year, because of the number of indigent cases that the city had to handle. So I don't remember how much of a reserve we inherited from the city or what kind of commitment we had to begin with, but it was a tight situation the first three or four years. It was only later, really after I left the board, that it eased up a little bit and we started attracting more and more paying patients.

B: Did the City Council stay faithful to its commitment to Bob Sheen and the board in terms of not just the capital that he had insisted upon, but in terms of, for lack of a better phrase, feeding the kitty, on the annual operating budget?

W: As far as I know, the city's never reneged on it. I don't remember any complaint in that regard.

B: When I interviewed David Kenerson, who had been the administrator of Mound Park in the late 1950s, he said, in response to my question, I guess around 20 or

21 percent of billings were uncollectible back then from indigent care and that sort of thing. I said, "what did you do about that," and he said, "well, it's the same thing you always do. You charge the people who can afford to pay and use that to make up the difference." In 1980, after you went off the board, Ken Swanson testified before the St. Petersburg City Council that almost 29 percent of his billings were uncollectible at that point. He was looking for the city of St. Petersburg to help fund the shortfall at that point. It sounds like it was a constant challenge to try to close that gap somewhere along the way. I'm wondering what moves you and your board members to try to narrow that. You've said that one of the things you were always aiming for was [to] bring more practicing medical professionals in and hope that the paying clientele that they treat, and that they serve, comes with them into Bayfront thus stimulating your revenue that way.

W: Yes. We had to make it attractive for the doctors to practice here, and that was one of our main thrusts, but it was a constant struggle because when we took over the hospital from the city, we made a commitment that we would take care of the indigents, and that commitment still exists today, but over time we were able to attract more and more paying patients. So regardless of your percentage, if you can get more from your paying patients, more and more from them over time, I guess you can make it work out, even though you still have a big indigent load.

B: Ken Swanson made it sound as though he had sleepless nights over this budget impasse. I wonder if it affected board members like you the same way. Did you feel as though there were times when you couldn't see your way out of the forest?

W: I think we looked upon it as a challenge, and we recognized that as a problem, so we weren't in any position to celebrate, but we just felt like we had to stick with it and do the job.

B: Were there any months or years or fiscal quarters when you thought you were not going to be able to figure out how to come up with enough money to pay all the bills?

W: No, I don't remember that. Of course, with Bob Sheen's leadership, you felt like you were on a winning team, even though it was going to be a struggle.

B: No question you were going to figure it out.

W: Right. I keep going back to Bob Sheen because I think about how fortunate we were that one day he decided to open a plant here, 1953, and if he hadn't opened a plant here, I wonder where we might be today, see.

B: Who would have wound up with doing the things that he did?

W: That's a question of who might have been the civic leader to do that. I guess maybe somebody else would have stepped forward. I don't know whether you've picked this up or not, but I just heard that one of the reasons that Bob was so committed to the hospital is that he had a boating accident. Have you picked up on this at all?

B: I think he mentions that in his book.

W: In the book? Okay. Yes, he received such good treatment at the hospital, I think he had a ruptured spleen or something like that, and he was so grateful for the care he had here, that in the back of his mind he just thought, well, some day I'd be willing to help the hospital. And he did.

B: I think a lot of us have a similar feeling of loyalty to the hospital because of the experiences. My father was treated here in grave circumstances, and me, too. My family doctor practice is here, so I feel that similar loyalty. I'm wondering if you remember any of the other personalities from the hospital administration, and I'll mention one name that has come up to me in some of my other interviews. The man who served as the finance director or chief financial officer in Ken Swanson's administration, a guy named Aktin Shalou. Does that name ring a bell?

W: Yes, yes. I remember Aktin.

B: Do you regard him as being particularly important to keeping the finances of the institution on track?

W: Yes. I had a good relationship with Aktin, and I thought he did a good job.

B: What sort of characteristics did he bring to the job that made him effective at that, do you think?

W: Well, again, he was easy to work with. He was enthusiastic in his job, he was responsive to the directions of the finance committee, when we asked him for information, we got it quickly. He didn't ignore our recommendations, he was responsive in that regard. I don't know what Ken Swanson thought. I guess Ken maybe recruited him.

B: That's what I understand.

W: Yeah, but I thought he did well at a very difficult period.

B: Did you work more closely with him than with Swanson, do you think?

W: Both about the same I guess--yeah, both.

B: Some of the medical staff have said that one of the things that happened more and more through the 1960s and 1970s was this increasing trend towards specialization in the medical field. I guess in the 1940s and 1950s and [early] 1960s, doctors generally just became doctors and yes, they might have a specialty like cardiology, or radiology, or something like that, but doctors increasingly tended to sort of circle the wagons within certain narrow sub-specialties in medicine, and the first separate medical department at Bayfront Medical Center when it was still Mound Park in the 1960s, was neurology, where a doctor, and I believe his name was John Thompson, organized the first neurology department. It became the first department at Mound Park that had everything unto itself, its own nursing staff, its own ward, its own concentrated faculty of physicians who would just do neurology, I guess headed by him.

W: Of course we were very fortunate to have him because he was a tremendous person. As you know, he just passed away about two months ago.

B: Yes, very, very sorry to hear about that.

W: He was in my Rotary club, and I knew him well. He was a wonderful member of the medical staff here.

B: Yes. I had hoped to get a chance to interview him, and lamentably didn't get to before he passed away, and I'm very disappointed by that. He would have been a valuable resource. Do you remember talking to him about the formation of his department or knowing anything about the fact that that arose? I guess that sort of became the first really subdivision within the hospital, professional subdivision.

W: No, I can't honestly recall that.

B: Okay.

W: It's been about thirty years since I went off the board, so memory dims.

B: It's alright. My job is to see if I can stimulate it here and there with some of these things.

W: Some of this I'll remember about midnight tonight.

B: That's alright. Well if you do, we can revisit this a little bit. What I've heard from some of the administrators, is that they resisted to a certain extent having these departments proliferate within the hospital. For example, as soon as John Thompson got a neurology department going, then other doctors who thought they were specialists in other fields thought, well, why not me, I should have a department for myself, too, as well. That leads to additional layers of bureaucracy and employment and dedication of physical space. I wonder if those

were . . . .

W: Territorial battles and such.

B: Yes. Empire building.

W: I'm aware of the problems we had to deal with in a couple of areas, I don't want to name names, but where we had one doctor that didn't get along with the other doctors and gave us some problems there trying to keep him happy and at the same time be fair to the others and such. That was a problem, and I think some of it might have been related to this competition for establishing specialties.

B: Do you think it was driven by ego, or was it driven by the fact that people saw medicine as a changing field and saw maybe that they really needed to carve out more medical specialties?

W: I think, in the back of my mind, it's more of a matter of personalities and such, and stubbornness on the part of some people that didn't have the inclination to try to sell their ideas to other people diplomatically, and they just wanted to run all over them and say, do it my way or else. So some of it was related to personality conflicts.

B: Okay. What do you think changed about the way Bayfront Medical Center did its business in St. Petersburg during the time that you were a member of the Board of Directors?

W: Well, I think the big step forward was, if you compared it with cities who tried to supervise and run a hospital while they're trying to run a city, you know like Charlie Bissett, with so many other duties, that the hospital was just one little department there for him. Here you have a group of about ten or twelve civic leaders, not necessarily with medical backgrounds, except I guess about a third of the board members had ties to medicine, including medical staff members, but you had a team of people like that who were meeting as often as needed, to supervise what was taking place and to make long range plans. So all of a sudden you had some very talented people like Bob Sheen and Milton Sheen and others like that, giving of their valuable time, and who were strong leaders. The Sheens, in particular Bob Sheen, would have been successful as a hospital administrator, or whatever he did. When you get somebody with that kind of talent there with a team of people, and they're all enthused and interested in it, then look how much better supervision you have, and look how much more you have to offer in terms of long range planning and developing strategies for success. I think that was a big factor.

B: Did Bob Sheen go off the board at the same time you did, roughly?

W: No, I think he probably, I'm having a little bit of trouble remembering that, and I don't think his book covers that point. You'd have to look that up and see.

B: I guess I just was thinking about the development of that institution after you went off the board. You took over a hospital from the city, and I guess it was really up to the Bayfront Board of Directors then to come up with its own strategic plan for the future, its own long range plan as you refer to it. Did you do that?

W: Yes.

B: Did Bob task a committee with that?

W: Yeah, but I can't remember exactly what sub-committee he might have had on it.

B: Okay. Did you participate in any of that at all? I guess the finance committee must have taken at least . . . .

W: No, the finance committee was my area.

B: Okay, yes. Do you have a sense of how faithful the institution remained after your term to the hopes and maybe the designs you and your fellow directors had for it? For example, was Bay Flight part of your idea for the future of the hospital?

W: No, that came long after I had gone off the board.

B: Not something you had ever talked about.

W: No, no, but I think really the commitment to it even got stronger after I left. I really give the people who followed me on the board major credit for vast improvements. It looked like that we worked to get us through the transitional period, those early years that were very difficult, and then after that, things started smoothing out. Then the funds were available for expansion and improvement of facilities, and we began to attract more and more doctors back to the hospital and such. So I give major credit to the ones that followed me.

B: What doctors' names, if you recall any of them, that you saw as really sort of stars or important personalities that came to Bayfront during the years after it became a private institution?

W: Well, I'm struggling with that, and if you mention the names I'd say oh, yeah, yeah, I remember him and so forth.

B: Crayton Pruitt?

W: Oh yeah I remember Crayton Pruitt, and of course, we've already talked about John Thompson. The main ones I remember was Charlie Rast, and Ackerman, who were very much involved and very loyal. Ackerman was very involved in teaching within the hospital. It'll come to me a little bit later.

B: Was Sidney Grau anybody that you ever had any dealings with?

W: Yeah, I knew him, I had met him, of course he passed away a long time ago.

B: Oh, no, this Sidney Grau is still living.

W: Well, then this would be his son.

B: Okay, okay, gotcha.

W: I remember the father.

B: Okay. Well, let's see, I'm gonna pause the tape for a moment. Well, Mr. Williams as we resume and try to move toward a conclusion to the interview, I guess I'd ask you to reflect on your terms, your two terms as a member of the Board of Directors, reflect a little bit on the achievements that you look back on from that time, and maybe put it in the context of what came after.

W: Well, for the initial period that I was on the board, my eight years on the board, it was a transitional period, and we were dealing with some pretty difficult problems, and especially the need maybe to get new leadership in running the hospital and that sort of thing. So I don't think there were great strides forward, but I think the foundation was laid there that Bob Sheen had assembled a board with some pretty dedicated, competent people that had a lot to offer, and I want to give credit to those who followed me on the board, after I went off I think it was in 1976, because I marvel at the progress that the hospital has made since I went off the board. There are people there like John Welch, who was a very committed board member for many years. People like John that have done an excellent job, and all I say is my hat's off to them because they've made great strides, and I'm very proud of the hospital that we have today.

B: Ken Swanson was still the president when you left the hospital, or the administrator at any rate.

W: Yes.

B: Do you think he was significant in making a difference in the hospital that he took over in 1970 or so? He stayed on until about 1982 or 1983. So he would have gone off several years after you finished your service. But I guess you followed the fortunes of the hospital.

W: Yes, I followed it, because some of my close friends have served on the board. Like Dave Robbins, I'm very close friends with his father—he and I are in Rotary—Robby Robbins.

B: Oh, no kidding. How about that.

W: So through Robby, I've always been interested in Dave, and Dave really contributed an awful lot when he was chairman of the board here. In fact, when I retired from Florida Federal in 1987, I got a call from Dave asking me if I would serve on the holding company board that had just been established to oversee the entire operation.

B: Of the hospital?

W: Of the hospital. I declined, I turned him down, and the reason was that we had bought this summer place in Highlands, North Carolina, and we'd planned to be up there at least four months each summer. I didn't feel like it was fair for me to be up there for four months, while the board was meeting down here, and my chair was empty. I just felt like they would be better off to have somebody who, was still involved in the community in business, or in a professional field, and was here for the board meetings year round. I just told Dave, I said you'd be really better off to get somebody who doesn't have a place in Highlands, North Carolina.

B: That had to be a tough call, given the ties that you have to the institution and the people on the Board of Directors as well.

W: I've been interested in it, I've followed it. My late friend, Lynn Feaster, Jr., who passed away in the year 2000, sadly I was with him here in the hospital when they pulled the plug, and I watched the monitor go flat. The family had called me and asked me to be there. It was a tough thing, because he and I were both born in the hospital, and he was my doctor for forty years, and we were playmates from the time we were four years old. He received wonderful care here, he was in a coma for the last few weeks. He had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. So I had continuing ties with the hospital. I'm very close with his son, Lynn Feaster III, who lives right behind me. I still feel very much a part of it, even though it's been nearly thirty years since I went off the board.

B: You've had an amazing experience with that hospital and its people. Well, Mr. Williams, I'm gonna say thank you for your time.

W: I'm honored that you'd spend this much time on this lowly servant over here.

B: Not at all. I wish we had more time to spend on it, but you're on a deadline, and so is this project. So I'm gonna close it now and say thank you.

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[End of Interview.]