

FNP 51

Interviewee: Thomas H. "Tommy" Greene, Jr.

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

Date: June 27, 2000

P: This is Julian Pleasants, and I am speaking with Tommy Greene, in Madison, Florida. The date is June 27, 2000. Would you tell me when and where you were born?

G: Yes, sir. I was born here in Madison County, Florida, in the city of Madison, October 28, 1938.

P: Describe for me your early life. What was it like?

G: I grew up in the shadow of my daddy's sawmill. My daddy was a big timber merchant, the largest crosstie distributor in the southeastern United States, and so I grew up in the crosstie swamps and the turpentine woods. As I got older, [Daddy put me in the] pole [and] logging [woods], the big timbers for the big poles like went around the football fields and these big utility poles.

P: Was working with those logs pretty dangerous work?

G: Yes, sir. In fact, it's one of the most hazardous businesses in America, as I understand.

P: And you had one bad incident where you got trapped under some logs. Would you tell me about that?

G: Yes, sir. After I got out of the military, I came back and married my childhood sweetheart. We went all through school together. I was logging by day and farming by night, and we [were] top-loading. We did not have the big equipment then, and that's when you put a tickle up in one of your tallest trees. Then you take a tractor or mules, and I had a tractor, and then you [would] pull the logs up on top of the load of logs that you [were] going to [haul] out of there [on] the truck. The load shifted on me and pinned me under it, and I thought I was dead, but the good Lord saved me. I promised myself that if I could ever get out of farming, I'd never go back to farming, but I promised God I'd never go back to logging if he'd get me out of those woods [alive. He did and I kept my promise].

P: Who found you?

G: Some of the crew found me. In fact, there was one there on the tractor who was working with me when he saw it, and he came running up then. I was worrying about one of those great big poles coming on down over because I was hanging upside down, and I was afraid for them to move the poles. I was caught, but I

was afraid to get un-caught because I was afraid the rest of the poles [were] going to shift. So, they got some help in there, and several hours later, they got me out without the load shifting and, after[wards], [blocking] it up and secured everything enough that nothing else would [move]. [The pole] crushed my foot, but that was all it did to me.

P: So, other than that, you were not badly hurt.

G: No, sir, that was all. That was on April 1, 1964.

P: Tell me about your work with turpentine. What did you use that product for?

G: The turpentine was actually brought in by the English back in their occupation of Florida before it [be]came a state. Turpentine was used [in], I guess, a thousand different products, from cosmetics to automobiles to paints, you name it. The last year that I worked turpentine, I had three crops of faces, and there's 10,000 faces to a crop. We would gather it and then put it in these great big swell-belly [fifty-five gallon] drums and haul it up to the still, and that is where we sold it.

P: And who did you sell it to?

G: I was selling to two companies. One of them was Langdale there in Valdosta, and the other one was another company out east of Valdosta.

P: Was that a pretty profitable business?

G: It was labor-intensified, and that's what eventually [ran] the turpentine business out of business. They're still extracting turpentine, or gum, but they're doing it with these papermills now. When they're bringing in pulp wood, that's one of their main byproducts.

P: Who did you hire to do that? Because that is a tough job.

G: You hire only turpentine folks. There's a certain, you can call it, a breed or certain [kind of] people that just [do that]. That's what they want to do, carrying those one-sided buckets. You go through and make your rounds, your trails, all the way through these woods, and a lot of it is down at the edge of the swamps. But you cut your trail; it looks like animal trails, but it is big enough for a man to walk through. It depends on the size bucket of how many [trees on a round], so that you try to make your rounds so that when you get back to the wagon, you've got a full bucket. So, if you're working [few] faces on this trip, then you take [a smaller, twenty-five pound] size bucket and your large buckets [on longer rounds]. It took [strong] men to do this because it's hot down there. You're

working the [trees] in the summertime. You're constantly pulling and chipping, and then when you're dipping, you're carrying that [heavy] bucket. You're down in that tie-tie and heavy overbrush. There is zero wind blowing, no wind. You got the sun bearing down from the top, and it's like cooking in an oven down there. So people that turpented were an unusual breed. They were just turpentine folks. One of the things that I learned from way back, if it wasn't right, don't do it. My daddy stayed hellbent for leather all the time, and I guess maybe that's where I got my having more energy than control [lifestyle]. I remember one problem that we'd have was that with my daddy's big sawmill, we built a lot of houses. [I had to collect the rent anyway I could get it.] At that time, he was working over 300 blacks, probably about half that many whites, [that mostly lived in these houses], and they were just scattered all over. He called [his cross-tie territory] a triangle. It was from Sneed's Smokehouse in Jefferson County to the Okefenokee Swamp up in Georgia all the way down to Gum Swamp, I believe it was, down below Chiefland. One problem we would have is stealing [families], where the other turpentine woodsmen would come in and steal your help through the middle of the night, just load them up, because all of these people that [were] turpentiners would wind up getting heavy in debt. They were kind of a hand-to-mouth people. So, you would go to pick them up the next morning, and the house would be empty. [Once,] We hired a woodsman, before I took over the operation. He was the one that rode the woods and made sure everything . . . kind of the boss, the labor boss. He pulled up to my mother and daddy's house about eleven o'clock one night and [said], come ride with me. I said, okay. So, I went out to get in his truck—he [drove] a big flatbed truck—and he [told me], bring your gun. So, I went back in and got my rabbit gun and started back out. He says, no, bring your pistol. I knew then [he] was having some problems, and this was not really unusual. I thought we was going to stake out one of our houses where he had found out somebody was coming, and we [were] going to wait on those people, which we did, and we [caught] them. It wasn't unusual when they backed the truck up to unload one of our houses; we'd just walk up there and shoot the tires out from the truck and send them walking. Then they would have to come get the truck the next morning, and that's when we'd have the law waiting on them to explain our law. So that's what I really thought we [were] going to do, when he started off and headed on up through Madison and headed towards Jasper. I asked him—his first name was Coby, I think—Coby, where are we headed? He said, just ride with me, we got something we got to go do. By then, I realized—and he had been with us probably six months—that he was going to steal a family. And I was telling him then, that's something that we absolutely just do not do. Now, we can buy a family—and that is when you go in; if this family wants to move and if they owe the crew chief or if they owe the man—and it was usually the man that owned the operation—if they owe him \$400, \$500, \$600, then you would pay out their debt, and then you would load up their family. That was the right way to do it, but that was not usually the way it was done. So I was riding with him, and we went on up and went into Fargo, Georgia, that night. We must have gotten up there sometime around one o'clock because he kind of took his time going. He went down there in the quarters of a black section of town and turned in there and backed up to this house and got out. Just as soon as he backed up, these people started bringing

their stuff out, their belongings out of the house. Well, I got under the wheel and drove off, and drove up and made a big circle and came back and hollered to him out the window that I was headed back to Madison with the truck. And so nothing doing, but he just said, no, come on, we are going to do it. And I said, no, no, no. So, I drove off down the road, I guess about 100 yards, and stopped. And I [said], you come on, go with me or else. So, he finally got in the truck, mad, and we started back. So, he said, stop, stop, stop. And I stopped the truck, thinking that maybe he needed to relieve himself, and he said, back up. So, I said, well, what's wrong right here? It was a long dark stretch of road. He said, back it on up, back up there a couple hundred yards. So, I started backing down the road, and that's probably two o'clock in the morning by now. He says, now, cut it hard to the left, back it in there, there's where you can back it in. Well, I looked back. Then, there [were] some beehives, but I backed in across this little culvert pipe. I thought maybe that's where he was just going to stand there a minute. He got out and proceeded to start to load some beehives, and I pulled off again. He was just absolutely determined to steal something that night. So I told him, I'm getting ready to leave you here halfway between Fargo, Georgia, and Jasper, Florida, and there won't be [anything] coming through here till daybreak. So he got back in the truck, and we came on in. The next morning, I told my daddy what happened, and daddy went down to his house and gave him his walking papers. This was the type stuff; there's so many interesting stories that went with the turpentine business, and the crossties. I remember the crosstie business. We'd be down there belly[-button]-deep in the swamp water and all these hewers. The first remembrance of the crosstie business, they were hand-hewing crossties, and they'd cut off what they called sticks [which were big cypress logs], and these sticks would be the length of the tie. When somebody got ready to hew out a cypress tie, they'd stand there and get in rhythm with a chant because you could hear this song, this chant, all over that swamp where all those hewers was chanting the same chant, and they were all chopping together. You know, I grew up eating out of their lunch buckets. As hard and conservative as I am today, which came, I am sure, out from my daddy's shadow, I got what some would consider an extremely liberal education extremely young in life. That made me a better man to get into the newspaper business, of which I knew absolutely nothing about, because I knew that failure was not an option in anything I went after.

P: Talk about your early education and where you went to school and how far you got with your education.

G: I started off at Madison Elementary, first grade and went all the way through. I failed [a] grade. I never was much [of] a student. Reading and spelling, to this day, I don't do well. Nothing leaves my desk that my wife [does not proofread], [she] majored in English; they say that's the reason I married her. I mean, I do not spell. I write. I have written stories. I wrote a short story that took second place in the nation on the freelance writers' deal. I've got some movies that I'm working on now and some short stories and a novel. But spelling is out of the question. Between my wife, we were in the same grade together and went all through school together, as best friends and running-around buddies. We had

our first dates together in 1954. Well, that's the first time we were able to leave the house together. Neither one of us had a driving license at that time, so I took one of my turpentine wagons—it's called a hoover wagon, it's with rubber wheels on it—and one of my [turpentine] mules that we used in the woods. So we started off dating in a mule and wagon. We had one date by ourselves, and from then on, we had a flock of our friends with us, and we'd go out. You know, back then, we'd just load up in that wagon, and we'd go off somewhere or another and build up a fire and eat hot dogs. She played one of these little ukeleles, and there [were] one or two others in the group that played one little old instrument or another, or we'd beat on a can with a stick. The old mule was named Smokie, and he got to learn to love hot dogs. He was the only hot dog-eating mule I'd ever seen.

P: You ultimately finished high school when you were eighteen? You finished high school in 1957, is that right?

G: I finished it in 1957. Well, my daddy's politics, he must have had something pretty heavy on the superintendent, and my wife slipping me notes, got me out of high school. So I graduated [from] high school, got a diploma at the last minute and graduated with my wife in 1957 and then went off to school, to college. I was captain of my football team and ran track in high school, so I went to South Georgia to play football up there. That is when Bobby Bowden [head football coach, Florida State University Seminoles] and Vince Gibson [were] coaching football at South Georgia. I played football up there and ran the 100-yard dash, took first place for the state of Georgia's junior college in the 100-yard dash division. And boxed. I was going into boxing as a career. Then, after that, I wanted to go into the funeral business because I had been working in funeral homes in Live Oak and got my apprenticeship in mortuary science in Jacksonville at Hartage & Sons. But boxing was my favorite. Anyway, I went through the Georgia, Alabama, and Florida school systems like I was taking a census, I guess. I spent four years at the college here in Madison, which was then North Florida Junior College. It's now North Florida Community College. Never did even get an AA [Associate of Arts] degree out of it. I failed English seven times in college. I just really wasn't smart enough to make it in college.

P: You also studied at one point criminal justice. How did you get into that and why?

G: After I got into the newspaper business, that was back before cameras were that popular with the law enforcement, I wound up doing all the photography work for all the various branches of law enforcement here and gave them the pictures. So I wound up being able to work crime scenes, in the beginning, just from what they told me to do. Then I studied it, and we knew what to look for. This was long before, like I said, cameras were so available to everybody, before the drug program. The drug program, when they started using drug money to buy equipment with, that's when cameras got so popular. Then everything got specialized. But, [in] the beginning, I was doing all the crime work. I

started buying up newspapers, and one of my newspapers was south of us in Lafayette County. Then I bought one over in Branford. Well, during that time, and this was back in the 1970s, they had a big cattle ring going on in the state of Florida. They were stealing cattle, which was big business, and it was big crime. And I've made front-page notes of this a number of times, [and] there's not a judge in this country that can get confidentiality out of me, when I tell somebody what they tell me is confidential, I would look forward to rotting in jail before I'd tell a grand jury or anybody else. Now I'm locked in on that solid. My word is absolutely my bond when it comes to somebody telling me something that's private, which has helped me. So this lady called [me] here in Madison, and she was in Lafayette County, and I went down and she [said], I got some information on this cattle ring that the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] has been looking for all over the state, but I do not want to get involved because I will wind up dying if I do. I [said], okay, where do we go from here? So she started telling me the story, and she was naming names and naming places and dates. She had started taking some notes in, kind of, her own little code type deal. So I said, well, I've got a friend with the FBI; I will call him. And so, we sat there, and then he made the statement [that] when I got her confidence, that he would be confident with her name. So, the three of us met, and she started trying to describe what the main man looked like. I sat there, had a yellow pad and my pencil, and I said, describe him to me. And so she started describing it, and I started scratching it out, and she said, well, that looks just like him. Then, I went and took a course in forensic [composite] art at the Florida Police Academy, and another one [demonstrative evidence forensic artistry], where I can build miniatures to [recreate] crime scenes and accident scenes, you know, in miniature. Of course, I had been testifying for years with my photography. That's kind of how I did it. That's how I got into forensic art.

P: But mainly through the newspaper business?

G: Yes sir. I had already taken, had gone into, facial reconstruction when I was in the mortuary business.

P: You went into the military service. When and why did you go, and where?

G: It was in the beginning of 1962, I believe it was. I was working at the funeral home in Jacksonville, and that is when the Vietnam War broke out. So, the day that I turned legal age for the draft, I registered. I still stand when the Star Spangled Banner comes on at home on television. Just no one there but me or my wife and I, we stand. I mean, I keep that Declaration of Independence there on the wall. I'm just a hardened American. I don't want [anybody] messing with me, or especially my country. So, I volunteered, went to Fort Jackson—that is where I took my basic training—and went into advanced infantry training, which was a piece of cake to me because growing up in the swamps and flat woods of North Florida, you know, it was kind of like a Boy Scout outing. Then I went on to Fort Knox, where I went into the tank division and became a tank commander.

Through a previous back injury, I got out of the service with that. I wound up having five vertebraes and my tailbone fused [May 6, 1966].

P: How long did you serve?

G: Almost six months.

P: Now, you come back, and what is your next plan?

G: Well, I came back to Madison, and my wife and I were already engaged at that time. Of course, we knew from way back in high school we [were] going to get married as soon as we got these obligations behind us. I guess we kind of sat down, and we never wrote it down on paper but we just always knew, kind of, our plan of action. We'd get out of school, and then I'd get my military behind me, and then we'd get married. I didn't know what I was going into. The only thing I knew was the woods. So I came back and fixed up some of the old trucks and got into the logging and pulpwood business. I put in three crops of faces, which is 10,000 faces to a crop of turpentine. So I was working three crops, 30,000 faces. I was turpentinizing and logging and pulpwooding in the daytime. Then I had lights on all my farm equipment, and I'd farm at night and then reserve Sunday morning for church and Sunday afternoon with getting all my equipment ready so I could [get] everything back in shape [for Monday]. Then, my wife would, you know, Sunday afternoon, she'd be right in there. You know, she'd be out there with me, handing me this wrench or doing this that and the other. After I got hurt on that April in 1964, I just got my crews to get the rest of the down timber out of the woods. Then I was going to get my [farming equipment] out of the field, and I was going to get out of the farming business, too, but I farmed that summer. On [June] 1, I was in the middle of a field, and my wife was there, and my brand new baby was there. He was in the backseat. That was my oldest son Harvey. I'm out there, hot and sweaty and dirty and grungy and all that, working on an old harrow that should have been in a junk pile. I stood up and I looked over at my wife, and she was trying, you know, she doesn't know anything about mechanics, but she would hand me that wrench when I'd finally show her the one I needed. But she was trying to help, and I just stood up and threw that wrench as far as I could throw it, and I said, there's got to be a better life somewhere. So I walked out of the field, left the harrow and the wrench. I didn't even go back and look for the wrench. I didn't know what I was going to do. But a few days later, about three-thirty one morning, I was sitting up in there as miserable as I've ever been in my life. No job, no work, no nothing [but] a wife and a brand new baby. I didn't want to go see anybody. Anyway, I [had already] been trying to get a job. I'd been hunting work after I got hurt, so I'd already exhausted all of my efforts of trying to find a job [even assembly-line work making hubcaps]. [No one] up here making hubcaps, a man told me. He was laying off. I won't ever forget. I'd always considered him my real good friend, Mr. Musser. I said, Mr. Musser, I need some work, and I was wondering if you'd hire [me], if you [have] an

opening for me. And he [said], no, we're laying off right now, but if we had an opening, if I was looking for somebody, I wouldn't hire you. I was quick-tempered back then, but I stood up and I said, Mr. Musser, I thought we were friends. And he [said], Tommy Greene, we are friends, but you [have] too much talent to be stamping out hubcaps the rest of your life, and if you get on that assembly line back there, you're going to wind up getting in a rut and you may never leave this place, and I'm not going to do you that injustice. Now, you get out there, and you can find something you can do. He said, but right now, we're not hiring anyway. When I left there, I didn't know if I was mad. At least, I said, well, he's not hiring anyway. So maybe if he was hiring, he would've hired me. Anyway, it's time to move on, I realized, and I thanked him a bunch of times before he died. But he was right. You know, the difference between a grave and a rut is that a grave has both ends closed on you, and the longer you stay in a rut, the closer those ends come. So I tore open a paper grocery sack one night and made a list of a couple of dozen things I wanted to get into, and I can assure you logging and farming [were] not two of them. I put down a short loan business, and I put down a meat-packing business where I would get me a [chain of stores and work] a route. I had a number of different things there. The theater was for sale at that time. The cold storage was for sale at that time. I listed a bunch of them, [about two dozen,] and then to the right, I listed all the items I need[ed] for each one of them. The meat business, I was going to need a refrigerated truck, you know, [each business needed] different things. [However,] I found office supplies and advertising in every one of the [businesses] that I wanted to get into, every one of these businesses. So, I sat there for a few moments and I said, you know, let's see if I can pick out some trees in this forest. I realized that here's advertising and office supplies in every business that I wanted to get into, and with my warped mind, I said, you know, if I got into the office supply business and the newspaper business, I could buy my office supplies for the newspaper wholesale and I could take the newspaper and advertise my office supply store, and, this, to me, is about as close to perpetual motion as I'm going to get. So, I went in and woke my wife up at three-thirty in the morning, and I shan't forget her reaction. I said, sugar, get up and let's get dressed; we need to head south as far as we can go [before] daylight, and when the stores start opening, I want to start asking some questions, but I don't want anybody to know who we are or where we're from. There was a 100-year-old newspaper in [our] town, a father-son operation. The son, to me at that time, was an old man. I was [only] twenty-five years old, and he was probably fifty, and his daddy was probably seventy-five. He had a degree from the law school at Harvard. They were wise old men, and I was so full of ignorance and energy, I didn't have sense enough to know that I couldn't make it. [Failure never crossed my mind as an option.]

P: What was the name of that paper?

G: The *Madison Enterprise Reporter*, founded in 1865. Anyway, first thing [my wife] told me, she [said] Tommy Greene, you can't spell, you don't read, how do you expect to run a newspaper? I said, well, if you'll do the spelling and the writing, I'll do the drawing and

the figuring. I said, I can figure out a way to make this thing work if you'll do the spelling and the writing for me. At that time, she was teaching [English] here in Madison. So [she] got up and Bartow was the first place we stopped. It was not S. L. Frisbee's *Polk County Democrat*. It was another place there, and we didn't stay there but just a minute. Apparently, he was transported from way up somewhere else, because he didn't have any southern hospitality at all towards my idea, and I didn't find that much of anywhere else. They were real friendly and nice to me [at all the other places], but they'd just tell me right quick that new newspapers don't last. Then, when I'd tell them, well, there's another paper there that's been there for probably 100 years, then they'd assure me that it couldn't go. I said, well, my idea was that we'd start mailing it out free for the first several years. Of course, it just got deeper. So, everything I suggested I thought was a good idea, nothing seemed to [do anything except get worse]. The only person, we came on back [home], Carr Settle in Monticello that had the *Monticello News*. I went in and introduced myself to him, and he said, I can tell you right now, it's going to be the toughest thing you ever tried, but you're not going to be happy till you can look back and says, at least I tried it, so why don't you go on and try it, get it out your system. Then if you make it, fine, if you don't, you will have tried it. I left there thinking, and I said, you know, I guess he gave me the best advice because all this other stuff didn't do anything except drove that nail deeper. The more they told me I couldn't do it, there was just something, I don't know, it was like crosswiring a battery, I guess. From there, I went over to Live Oak to Mr. Wadworth over there that had the *Suwannee Democrat*, that was personal friends with both of the Mr. Merchants here in Madison. [Mr. Wadworth told me I was absolutely crazy to think could make it. He was right. I was crazy.] I knew the instant I told him, before I got back to Madison, the word would have gotten back. At this point, no one on this planet knew except my wife and I. Our mothers and daddies didn't know. Nobody knew. So, when we got back two or three days later, a day or so later—we didn't stay gone long because I didn't have that much money—I came straight back, and, by then, I already was working on a little old office space uptown that my daddy had. I told him I wanted to fix it up, and he said, fine. I guess he thought I was fixing it up to rent. Then we went to Jim Thompson up in Callahan, Florida, and told Mr. Thompson up there that we wanted to put out a newspaper and we understand he had a printing press, but we didn't want anybody to know about it. He [said], well, have you decided if you're going offset or letterpress? I said, well, Mr. Thompson, really, we hadn't made our mind up. He looked at me and he [said], you don't know the difference, do you? And I [said], no, sir. He [said], you two kids are just out for a good time. He says, yeah, we can print you, and the [printing] world [prefers] offset, so let me tell you what you're going to need. So, he took us to a restaurant, and he made out a list there on the napkin of things I needed to get, to get into the newspaper [business]. I understand he's in bad health now, but that man was the one [who] helped me get the list put together on what we needed, because I really thought about the only thing I was going to need was one of these old-timey Linotypes and I didn't know where to go about getting it, which, that was the farthest from the truth because that was the last thing I needed, you know, not if we [were] going offset. Anyway, he got us set up [with a list of companies and items], got on

the phone...

P: Let me interrupt you. Where did you get the capital to get this business started?

G: All my life, from day one and I haven't stopped, [I pinched pennies and saved my money]. When I would go to the theater, my mother and daddy would give me—my daddy had a John Deere and also an International Tractor and truck dealership uptown and a big parts house and a stable, had a big operation up there, and then they had an office upstairs—they would give me a quarter, and my brother, and we would walk across to the theater, and my mother could sit and watch us walk all the way across. This is back when I was little. We'd have to hold hands going from the office all the way to the theater. Well, a quarter, it took us \$0.14 to get in the show. We called it the picture show. Then, you could get a cold drink, a Coca-Cola, and a bag of popcorn for a nickel each and bubblegum [for a penny]. Of course, when the war broke out, you couldn't get sugar for bubblegum, and that was always a problem. Everybody was wanting bubblegum, and that was kind of a black-market item. So, that took up the \$0.25. Well, I'd spend the \$0.14 cents to get in the movie, but I'd put that \$0.11 in my pocket. I never bought a single piece of gum or a single Coca-Cola or a single bag of popcorn. I'd bring that \$0.11 home every Saturday. Plus, my daddy gave us ways that we could make money, to the farmhands and the sawmill crews and the woods crews. I was selling slabs coming off the sawmill for firewood. Back then, everybody was cooking on [wood-burning stoves, including us]. My daddy could afford better [but why buy a gas stove when we had wood to burn?] We had the first carbide lights that was ever brought into Madison County. That was before electricity got out there, and we only live a mile and a half out of town. I remember people coming out to our house to see the carbide lights. Then I had a little old small--about six- or eight-inch--circular saw all set up that I could [saw up] slats for tobacco sticks for sun tobacco. So I had ways [to save money]. The one that my mother never approved of (but my daddy told me that I could do it as long as I was there on the farm, but for me to never do it any other place, and I stuck to that), I always kept cornbuck, and daddy had a big sugarcane mill and a big evaporator. So he was selling sugarcane syrup. He was selling it all over the country. They'd come in there with semi-trucks to pick up the syrup. So I'd sweeten my corn, sweeten the beds with the syrup, so I sold cornbuck. I never distilled any of it during that time [but I knew families who made moonshine in order to survive].

P: Explain to people who would not know what cornbuck is.

G: Cornbuck, basically, is beer [made with corn], where you shell out your corn and, if you are making good [moon]shine, if you had fifty pounds of corn, you'd put in fifty pounds of sugar. Then, you can get three runs off of a bed. Then, the bed is when that corn and that sugar starts souring, and it doesn't sour because you got the sugar in it. If you didn't have the sugar in it, especially in fruits for brandy, it could vinegar on you. But the bed is then when you drain that buck off, you can drink it as beer, and that is cornbuck. I also

sold caneback during cane season. That was a good winter drink.

P: So you had saved enough money over the years to start your business.

G: Every time I'd get a jar of money, I'd bury it, and I had money buried. I was going back, digging up jars of money I had buried. I knew I didn't have much because a lot of those silver coins and stuff, I've still got. I wasn't going to spend those.

P: You started very quickly after you got this idea.

G: Yes sir.

P: Because your first edition is August 5, 1964. What was your first paper like? What did it look like, and what was in it?

G: It was an eight-page tabloid. We laid the first paper out on the wrong side of the layout page and didn't know it till we got over there and Mr. Thompson like to have [gone] into a back-flipping fit. It was all black grid, and we were supposed to put it together on a layout table, a light table with the black grids on the bottom side, and we had them up on the top side. We put an index in it because the other paper didn't have an index, but we forgot to put any page numbers in it. We had a complete page just left vacant, so I took a black magic marker and announced our grand opening, come by for some free drinks and hot dogs. I'd [gone] out and bought some hot dogs and worked a deal with Coca-Cola to furnish them. [I] looked down in, [and] there was no address or nothing after it got back, so nobody knew where we [were] open. Nobody knew anything. It was a...well, we look back now, and that first paper was quite a joke.

P: You were the only two people, right?

G: Yes.

P: You didn't have anybody else working for you?

G: My wife was teaching school, so, yes, sir, I had gotten one of my friends I hired. She came in to do the typesetting for us. So I started off with one employee, and I was selling advertising through the daytime. When my wife would come in after school, she'd come straight back and she'd proof the ads that I'd brought in [and built. If I wrote it, something was misspelled.] Then the stories I'd bring in, she'd do [the same].

P: So you were the reporter and the ad salesman, and you did everything. How did it go initially? Did you get ads right away?

G: The first edition, we got a good many because [it was our first and they were] going to

help, and then, I worked at it. Sleep is something, to this day, I've never been fond of. Sleep is an absolute, I guess, necessity. I resent lying down to go to sleep. It's a total waste of life, in my opinion. The only difference between sleep and death is a heartbeat, and that's always been too close for me. But we just did everything, and then, of course, we started hiring some folks. We just did not [accept failure], like those four tombstones out there, [I buried Impossible, Can't, If, and But]. The first thing, in 1957, when I was going to go off [to] school, my mother and daddy gave me school supplies, and I opened up that, well, it's a little old dictionary, and I still got it, carried all through service. It's a little old pocket dictionary, and the first thing I did was mark out those four words: Impossible, Can't, If, and But. My mother [said], what are you doing marking up a brand new dictionary? And I [said], I don't want those four words in my book.

P: How long did it take you to become established as a newspaper? I know in the beginning, you gave away the papers. Did that help?

G: Yes, sir. I mailed them out to every box holder in the county for a year and a half. I refused to accept any advertising other than Madison County advertising for that first year and a half. I've always been a heavy promoter of Madison County, but it just wasn't enough business here to survive, and I finally started taking in some outside advertising.

P: But that was successful from the beginning--in other words, consistently, you would get enough advertising to carry the paper?

G: I still got my first deposit books and records, and they're up there in this museum that I told you we've founded. You can see half of those checks [are] stamped insufficient funds. So the bank president would call me up and tell me how much I was overdrawn, and I'd just laugh about it. I said, well, you must know that I'm not going to leave because if I'm overdrawn, then apparently I don't have enough money to leave town. The banks worked with me real well because, of course, I grew up here, and they knew my folks. Then my wife's folks were all here, and, of course, my wife's folks and my folks were friends before we were born. So I guess it was a pre-planned marriage and life.

P: How about the office supply store business--was that successful?

G: I bought \$240 worth of discounted office supplies out of the back of a man's truck, that I bought from him and he delivered to me. So we started from there, and the office-supply store went real well in the beginning. We kept it for thirty years. So it was just another source [of income]. Back then, I was working weddings. I was not a photographer, but I learned right quick I'd better learn to be one. I started off with, Mr. Larry Pinson had a Polaroid camera that he sold to me for thirty-five dollars, and that was right after Polaroids had gotten started. This was one of those fancy ones. So I started off with a borrowed Polaroid camera from a fellow by the name of Buddy Lundy, he loaned me his for the first week or so. Then I bought this one for thirty-five dollars, and I thought that was the most outrageous price I'd ever heard of in my life. I guess that's when I worked

around the clock, and I was going to a lot of these bad wrecks and murders and stuff like that. Then I went and bought a twin-lens Yashica, two and a quarter [x two and a quarter], and converted my bathroom into a darkroom/bathroom and started shooting on negatives and started with that. Then I went from there to the single-lens Nikon, which I've been with ever since.

P: Tell me a little bit about as you got established, let's say six months later. What would a typical issue contain? What kind of stories? How was it laid out--still an eight-page tabloid?

G: Yes, sir. We went from eight, and we got on up to twelve. You know, I sat down and looked at that other newspaper, and, again, there's never been two nicer, more pleasant gentlemen in this country than the two Mr. Merchants. There was T. C. Merchants, Sr. and Curry Merchants, Jr. Young Mr. Mercher now is in ill-health, but to this moment, neither one of those two gentlemen have ever said a bad word against me, and I opened up a newspaper in their town. That's the reason that as many newspapers have tried to come and go out of this town and has failed, I don't get out there and say anything bad about another newspaper opening up in this town. I know what they [have] got ahead of them. But it was rough.

P: What was the name of your paper when you first started?

G: The *Madison County Carrier*, and people told me, as bad as I spelled, I probably meant to say *Courier* and did not know how to spell it. I put a back slant on it, also, a left-handed slant. I'm left-handed, and I just wanted something different. I named it that because we [were] going to be carrying the news and the advertising and the information for the people of the county. I didn't realize that the word carrier also meant some other bad things. You know, I was a country boy come to town. I was just short of being webfooted when I got up here.

P: Is there a point where your circulation matched their's?

G: It started off greater because I was mailing free to everybody.

P: But once you were charging for the paper?

G: We still continued to print more papers, because I was working stuff as I studied his newspaper. He was a social-type newspaper. He had a more liberal slant than a lot of country crackers of Madison County liked, which wouldn't be considered liberal under today's standards but, back then, it was. Almost no pictures because they were hot metal. So I looked at him and I [said], you know--and he had column called "Passing Parades" that was as good as has ever been--his newspaper was a carnival-type makeup, and I'm not saying that anything other than complimentary. That was his style. He would have

war headlines on something that was just anything, big half-a-page headlines. Then he'd start a story that says, continued to elsewhere in the newspaper. [It could be] page such and such, and it may go over here to page ten and then continue again back to page three. But he made money.

P: Because he was the only paper.

G: Well, he was the only paper, but after I opened up and I was struggling, I bought nothing that I could make or build myself. When I bought equipment, I saved the packaging—most of it was wooden packaging back then—and I'd build tables, light tables, drying tables, whatever I needed to do. I didn't throw anything away. I even saved the nails that came out of those packages. I didn't throw away anything, nothing. We never threw away a piece of paper that was white on one side and had been typed on the other. Everything was used to the max. I guess one reason I stayed in business is that I kept my expenses to the absolute minimum. I worked as close to twenty-four hours a day as I could work. [Our office had] an old hard concrete floor out there, and I'd take a stack of newspapers and [lie] down on that floor and put those papers under my head for a pillow and set my clock for fifteen minutes or ninety minutes later. That seemed to have been the two times that I could wake up feeling good. If I got out of that swing, I guess your sleep goes in and out into deep and shallow sleep. But he continued to make money. He made money all the way through.

P: Did the competition make him any better?

G: I think so. He finally went [to] offset [type] and used a lot of processed-color with one picture. A lot of times it would be a monkey or a rose, anything he could pull. If he could cut a good-looking picture out of a magazine, he'd just run it on the front page, maybe not even have a cut-line under it. That was a fine old gentlemen that had his own nick, and it worked. It really did. So what I had to do was something different, so I wound up putting blood-and-gut pictures on the front page: car wrecks, murders, bodies, hard-hitting editorials about this government that was caving in on us. I wrote the editorials. I wrote all my own editorials. I'd write them usually late at night, and when I'd go home to wake my wife up to get her ready for school, she would proof them for me, and I'd take her up to the lady up here, Ms. [Frances] Collins. They were teaching school in Greenville, fourteen miles from here, in Madison County. She'd ride over with Ms. Collins and come back with Ms. Collins. We didn't get called to bust up a liquor still one time. I got a call at three o'clock that morning [and someone] told me, did you know there was a liquor still busted yesterday afternoon; tell me about it. And I said, we didn't know anything about it. Because I encouraged people to call]; my motto was, put Tommy Greene on the scene, twenty-four hours a day. My motto was, if it happens In Madison County], I want to be there. I didn't care what time it was.

P: Would the police usually call you?

G: Yes. I worked with them hand and glove, rode with them, backed them up when it came to fights. I reckon that I'm probably one of the extremely few people [who have had] more assault-and-batteries filed against him than speeding tickets. But, I always worked hand-in-hand with law enforcement and still do. So when I found out that the sheriff had gone out there and busted a liquor still—we [were] getting ready to go to press the next morning—I just wrote a front-page notice that I knew nothing about this liquor still. [And] did the sheriff own part of it? You'd have to ask him. I asked a whole bunch of really intimidating questions. Had the sheriff been involved with other liquor operations in the county? Don't know, have to ask him, and all the way through. All of these things that--I didn't say that he did any of it, but I asked those questions, and every time I'd put his night number and his office number and told them that both phones [were] twenty-four-hour-a-day phones. Of course, when the paper hit the street, he pitched a fit. I told him, next time, you call me. He managed to call all of his friends, and they'd gone out there and carried the drums and the tanks and the cookers all back and cut them up and made cattle troughs out of them, but he didn't think about calling me. That got his attention, and we [were] called from then on.

P: When did you publish?

G: I hit the street Wednesday night, Thursday morning [was the paper date].

P: Did you have paperboys selling on the street?

G: Not in the beginning when I was giving them out.

P: Later on after you got established?

G: Yes, sir.

P: And then the other ones would be mailed?

G: Yes, sir.

P: How far did you mail your papers?

G: We [were] primarily a Madison County deal, and my theory was that if the moon fell, we didn't care unless it messed up fishing in Madison County, Florida, or somebody from Madison was on that moon. Our target was Madison County, Florida, and its people.

P: And was that enough?

G: That's what we lived off of. That survived it because, to this day, if the United States bombed Canada, we'd probably have something to say about it, but that's not of interest

to us. It's an interest to me as an individual, but as far as that newspaper, if somebody wants to know about Madison County, Florida, then we've got the only thing in town [or] on the planet.

P: So, that has not really ever changed?

G: No, sir, that has not changed.

P: And what happened to the other newspaper?

G: The other newspaper thrived and continued on, and nobody could understand why because no town is big enough for two newspapers. But, again, he was so unique and unusual, and, I guess, as I look back, I was also. Mine was in the extreme opposite direction. The bigger somebody was, the quicker I wanted to take them on, and the people out there [loved it]. By nature, they may tell you they don't want to see blood, guts, and fights, but you let one break out in a grandstand and see if they continue to watch the football game or if they look at that fight. You know? I mean, it's just human nature. And I guess it was the competitiveness in me, between my football and my boxing and my track and, of course, my daddy's raising, that we didn't come out of those swamps till we got what we went in there after.

P: But they finally closed down?

H: He sold out to a [con]glomerate, and then that [con]glomerate sold out in 1983. Now this is where it really gets ticklish. In 1981, I had a company come to me wanting to buy my newspaper [chain]. By then, I had five newspapers, I think. I [started building] this building up here on this hill on July 1 [1974]. Everything seems to have fallen in my lifetime, on big stuff that I've done, for some unknown reason, [on] July 1. I drove my first slob down here in 1974, ten years after [I decide to start a newspaper], and built this big building up here by itself on this hill. This is the same field that I have plowed in the past with a mule, and then later with a tractor. And then bought a big press, a web-fed press, and they sent the check back to me. I think they called. I had sent it on my farm account. Those first ten or fifteen years, everything came out [of the] Tommy Greene Farms [account]. I wouldn't even spend the money to open up a newspaper checking account. So, they said, [we] got a check here paid in full for the entire price of a press. It was a big three-unit press, V15A, a Harrison Intertype. And I said, yes, on that farm account because if I don't print on paper, I can print on cowhides, or something like that; made a joke out of it because I was [also] running cows at that time. So we started printing our own newspaper up here on May of 1975. That came about from a [print job] that I couldn't get them to print it right. I was printing up in Georgia. So, I just threw my fist [on my desk] and picked up the phone and ordered me a press.

P: Who was trying to buy you out?

G: A Mr. Bob Fackleman. He is deceased now, but he was absolutely a distinguished gentlemen. In my newspaper career, I have come along with some real boogers, but I have come along with some of the finest gentlemen that I've ever met, and Bob Fackleman was among them. Bob Fackleman owned a big group of newspapers, weeklies and dailies, and one of his hired—I accuse him of being a hired gunman—people that he had bought out (the other paper in Live Oak) in hopes of jacking the price on it and then turning around and forcing Tom Ricketson to buy it. Tom Ricketson, of course, refused to fall for that kind of stuff, and Tom Rikardson is another gentleman. I [have] some good things to say about a number of people [who have] worked with me over the years and helped me, and I could never, ever have done this without, first, I guess, my momma and daddy's raising and then the friends that I've had over the years. I mean, they don't make a self-made man. They just don't do it, I don't guess. But, when Tom Ricketson refused to fall for this, then they came to me to buy my papers out. [A] fella [who] worked for Bob Fackleman [came]. I told them I wasn't for sale, but I'd lease it to them. Well, they'd never heard of leasing a newspaper, and I hadn't either, but I'd leased this woodyard down here to Gilman Paper Company, and I'd leased out other things that I'd bought and acquired over the years and turned around and stop selling it; just leased it back to them. You know, industrial property and stuff. So we sat down and worked out a lease, and I leased them all my newspapers, which then gave them the upper hand over Tom Ricketson, because my newspapers kind of surrounded [his]. The first thing they did was move the main office from Madison to Live Oak. I knew then, in my own mind, this isn't going anywhere fast. You know, we were running fifty-eight employees out of this one office. I was, with my other newspapers and operations and all. We [had] the big press here in Madison, a warehouse full of paper, and I was printing thirty-six newspapers at the time, all being printed out of this one building. I had a printing operation that was just really doing me good. That was before everybody else decided to get into [printing]. Then, right shortly thereafter, Tom Ricketson and this fella worked out a deal that they swap the *Live Oak Post* in Live Oak, so that became under Tom Rikardson's umbrella, and the *Taco Times* and the *Perry News Herald* [were] owned by the two different groups down there, so they put those two together. It worked out real good for both of them [then;] the Fackleman group had both papers in Perry, and Tom Ricketson's [two] in [Live Oak]. Then, the fellow that was in charge of Fackleman's doings quit paying. We fought this thing back and forth for five years, and I finally wound up suing and getting the newspapers back in five years rather than ten years.

P: Let me go back. When did you start buying other newspapers, and tell me which ones you bought? Obviously, you had at that point made a success of the local paper in Madison, right?

G: Yes.

P: So you could expand?

G: Yes.

P: Tell me when and where you bought the other papers.

G: The first one that I bought was one that we were printing here, the *Mayo Free Press*, which was also an extremely old paper. It wasn't as old as the *Enterprise Recorder*, but it was an old paper, [founded] back [in the] 1800s. The first paper that I put out on that one, ironically, was August 5 also, which my first *Madison County Carrier* was August 5, 1964.

P: And what year was this, the *Mayo Free-Press*?

G: [We bought] the *Mayo [Free-Press]* August 5, 1976, twelve years later.

P: When you were buying the *Mayo Free Press*, what was the circulation of your Madison paper at that point?

G: I'm going to guess around, I don't know, 3,500, probably.

P: What would it be now?

G: I have no idea, because all of that is turned over to my daughter. She is doing such a fantastic job, and I'm really out of it. When I walked away from it August 5, 1999, I tried desperately to walk away from it.

P: So *Mayo Free Press* is your first paper bought. Your second paper?

G: My second paper was the following January 10. I bought the *Branford News*. I went to Lake City and bought it from Tom Haygood. I gave him a \$100 bill, and he wrote me a receipt as a down payment. I went over to talk to him about buying it, and it went fairly rapid with it, the deal. We put the deal together pretty fast. He said, yeah, I'll sell it, and I said, okay. I said, here, let me give you some money down on it, and he said, no, I don't need it. And I put a \$100 bill down, and I said, let me give you \$100 right now; just write me a receipt out as a down payment and the balance due, and I'll get you this money back, how about in the morning. He said, well, fine. At that point, I knew I was going from there to Jasper to try to buy the Jasper paper.

P: Was that the only paper in Branford?

G: Yes, sir. That was the southern end of Suwannee County. There [were] two [other] papers in Suwannee County at that time. It was the *Suwannee Democrat* and the *Live Oak Post*. Fred Hughes had opened up the *Live Oak Post* over there. So, then I left Branford. I went on through Live Oak because I knew they weren't for sale. I knew that from the

beginning. I went to Jasper, and the man up there, Mr. Ellis, didn't want to sell it to me because I was an outsider. He wanted to sell it to somebody local that would have an interest in keeping a local newspaper. Now, I understand that, and I assured him that when I bought these papers, I'd keep them local. Well, he didn't want to [sell], so I left there. I don't know what was in me that day, but on the way back to Madison, I came through Madison and I saw a city block there that was vacant. So I went to that man's house [Mr. Bruce Bryan] and bought that city block, sitting on his front porch that night. I came home and told my wife that we [had] bought the Branford paper and the city block uptown, and that was another one of those fine times when I thought she was going to leave me. [I went back to Lake City the next day and paid the balance to Mr. Hagood. When Mr. Ellis] sold to a Mr. White, I think out of Alabama or Arkansas or somewhere, the Jasper paper, I drove over to White Springs and got me a post office box and telephone number and then packed my family up in my motor home. We went over there and parked my motor home in a trailer park over there, a campground, and spent a week over there, and I opened up the *White Springs Leader*. White Springs is a bedroom community for Lake City.

P: Was there a paper there at all?

G: No, sir. Then, we expanded our Mayo paper down into the Hatchbend [area] and started off with a Steinhatchee edition, which was a separate paper. Then, about that time is when they came along, wanting to lease my newspapers [and printing plant].

P: So you ended up keeping these papers for how long?

G: Well, I turned those over. I leased the whole newspaper chain out.

P: But you got it back.

G: Yes, sir.

P: Okay, and then how long did you keep them after that?

G: Well now, in the meanwhile, they [weren't] going to do anything with White Springs' paper, so I put it up for sale and eventually just closed it, pulled out of there. I lost my main person over there that was selling advertising and my main writer over there. That's during that time when Judge Smith in Lake City, the circuit judge, was accused of the big dope dealings and served some time for it and all this big drug trafficking was going on. We didn't know it, but the old hotel that was there was the main headquarters. My newspaper staff and I [were] not aware of this, until they all of a sudden just quit. Everyone just quit on me. I found out later, the little girl that was [working there] and went from there to the University of Florida and went into journalism, she had been given threatening...our phones [were] tapped at White Springs, and she was doing an

investigation on this Judge Smith and all these other people and was writing all these heavy hard-hitting stories. I told them, I said you know, if it doesn't rattle some cages, it's not worth writing; I want some cages rattled. So we just got threatened out of business, and I didn't realize it till after the fact, or I think I would've moved over there and probably wound up getting waylaid one night. It got real serious because that was during the time that a Mr. Gate went missing, the road guard, and they had carried him out down there, right there in White Springs, [to] one of these Ag[riculture] inspection stations. He went missing during that time, and they found him tied to a tree and executed, a bullet in the back of his head. She was doing a story on that, and we had run the pictures down in those woods. There [were] three or four different people who'd gotten killed during that time, so, yes, it was serious business. My advertising lady, who lives here in Madison now, she was Nancy Surlles, then; she was the heartbeat of the profits. She could sell snow to an Eskimo.

P: You had a group of mainly what would be called local papers.

G: Yes.

P: Did you have any dealings with John Perry and the Perry chain?

G: I knew all of those folks, and we got started in the Florida Press Association in 1964 because I knew that without the association and their knowledge, we didn't know anything. So, I got involved in the Florida Press Association immediately, and I got to meet all these people, and I'd pick their minds.

P: What finally happened to the *Madison Enterprise Recorder*? Did it finally go out of business?

G: No, sir.

P: Still in business?

G: And we own it.

P: Oh, now, you bought that?

G: Yes.

P: So, you still have two papers in Madison?

G: Yes, sir, and I chose to do that. It sold, and then the Ricketson group ended up owning it, Tom Ricketson. Before then, though, the [con]glomerate had moved a girl in here that was...she must have been raised on blood because she went after mine. She came in

saying she owned this other newspaper, which, she never owned the *Enterprise Recorder*. She never owned the window or the bucket. So, that's why I brought my people in and I said, we're to go twice a week, and we're going to start today. This was a Monday morning. I said, Friday, we will have a second paper on the street. That's what I've always done. We've always moved. Let's do it now. Don't plan to do it, because if you plan to do it, then the word gets out and this, that, and the other. So, we just do it. One of the people up there [said], what's going to happen if this thing don't work out twice a week? I said, then we'll go three times a week, four times a week, five times a week, we'll put out twice daily. That other paper is not going to whip us. They had the finances to do it with, or do it under normal conditions. So we were sitting here, and I was losing money. We fought for two years. The last year, we'd lost \$35,000. They'd lost \$140,000, according to their own spokesman after the fact. So, Mr. Ricketson called me, [and I] went over. Again, I cannot say enough about what a fine gentleman that fella is. We went over and had three different meetings at the Bob Evans Restaurant at the Lake City I-75/U.S. [Route] 90 exchange there. In those meetings, I sold him the *Mayo Free Press*. He had already bought the *Branford News*. And I bought the *Enterprise Recorder*. We kept this thing just between us. Nobody knew about this deal except he and his wife, and me and my wife, until we got all the details worked out on it. Then he came over and told this girl that had such a vendetta against me because she had put in to run me out of business. It was a turn-key job. I was supposed to wind up with everything as is when I took it over. Unbeknownst to Mr. and Mrs. Ricketson, all the archives had, the old, old *Enterprise Recorder*, since this woman had given to the Florida [State] Archives in Tallahassee under her name as the owner of the *Enterprise Recorder*, and after a conversation or two, I convinced them that there was going to be some hereafters if I didn't get those newspapers back, and they were mine, and, as far as I was concerned, they were holding stolen goods and was part of the party. So they've still got the papers and I told them to photograph them, keep them, secure them. I don't want anything to happen to them, but when we get this museum built, I'm going to want those newspapers back, and they're coming back home to Madison County, Florida, period. That's where we stand right now. All the Madison County archives that are in Tallahassee right now are mine.

P: Why didn't you merge the two papers?

G: My thought was two things. Number one, I didn't want to give up my baby because it was so well-established, the *Madison County Carrier*. I did not want to close down a legend; the *Madison Enterprise Recorder* had been here since 1865.

P: But they were losing money?

G: They were, under separate ownership. That's when I called my daughter in. My daughter is good with figures. She's a godsend to me. All four banks in Madison have told me repeatedly that she's the best businesswoman or best businessperson in this county. She

knows where every penny is going. She won't spend a copper penny on anything that's not an absolute necessity. So, she's really kind of fallen in there.

P: So she took over that paper?

G: She became our bookkeeper and our general manager. We moved these two papers in, and then I stopped publishing the *Carrier* on Fridays and came back to once a week with the *Madison County Carrier* and moved in the *Madison Enterprise Recorder* (from also a Wednesday publication because we [were] butting heads, Wednesday-Wednesday) to a Friday publication. So, rather than putting out two *Madison County Carriers*, one on Wednesday and one on Friday, we're now putting one *Madison County Carrier* out every Wednesday and a *Madison Enterprise Recorder* out every Friday. The *Madison Enterprise Recorder* carries certain columns every week, that these people that like those columns can look forward to, and weekend-type news. We also carry hard front-page news, the same as the *Madison County Carrier* does. And we got certain columns [that] run in the *Madison County Carrier* every week that do not run in the *Enterprise Recorder*. So, there are two separate banners in one respect, but they are still owned by us.

P: When you started out, what were your ultimate goals for that paper?

G: I guess I kept telling myself that I wanted to show my daddy and my mother that I could do it on my own and that I wanted to prove this to the other people. I guess the real bottom line was that I proved to myself that I could make it. I guess I felt, you know, I had grown up in a family that was driven and had been successful. All of my daddy's eight brothers and sisters in Pavo, Georgia, grew up on a little old tiny farm up there, poor as dirt, and all of them managed to be successful.

P: What goals other than personal goals? What did you want this paper to be, to represent?

G: I wanted to let the folks of Madison County know that if it happened in Madison County, Florida, they could read about it in the *Madison County Carrier*, period. I didn't want anything missed, and we worked desperately to cover the county.

P: Both when you began and today, what do you consider the most important functions of a newspaper?

G: Truth. There's no truth on this planet that I'm afraid of, period, and when I find, especially a government official, elected, hired, appointed, any way, shape, fashion or form, that is not totally leveling with me, I instantly smell a skeleton in his closet, and we don't quit digging till we destroy that closet, or find that skeleton. I think the editorial pages, the letters to the editor, [are] first and foremost. We need pages there that the public can sound off in. We need to be an alarm clock, not to alarm people but to awaken

people. Basically, we need to be, kind of, a half-breed dog, between a bloodhound that can sniff out wrongdoings in government, and then a bulldog, with an attitude that would be just about like a brain-dead bulldog with lockjaw: hang in there until we get that story and we expose what's out there.

P: Who determined the letters to the editor? How did you choose which ones were in there, and were there some you would not print?

G: Yes, sir. All the letters to the editor back then came through my hands, to me, unless it was something that was just so simplistic it was childlike. It was, I'd like to thank the ladies of the church for the fine job they did during my daddy's death, or something. But, if it had any type controversy about it at all, I wanted to read it.

P: Did you try to balance your editorials with the letters, so if you took one position, you would print letters representing the other position?

G: Yes, sir. I never answered but one letter to the editor in the same edition, and that came from a feller in Madison [who] was going to the University of Florida down there and wrote me a letter to the editor and says, I guess you must be an FSU [Florida State University] fan, being that you live so close to FSU. I wrote under and I says, Gene, I'm going to take exception to my policy and I'm going to answer this letter [in the same edition], and that is, that when FSU and Florida play one another, I hope they both get beat because neither school let me in. That's the only letter I've ever answered, in the same edition. I'd answer in the following [edition], and that does two things. That gives the writer, the author of that letter, the one that's ticked off or whatever the case may be, that sees a different view than I do, gives him an opportunity to express himself without a rebuttal. It gives me an opportunity to come back, and when you get in this type [of] tennis match, then you build readership. You know, what are they going to say next?

P: When you published a letter, did it have to be signed, and did you check on the content to some degree? There might be letters libeling public officials.

G: We stretched the reliability to the extent when it came to public officials. You know, I wasn't that concerned about it. Just gossip, we didn't do. We tried if we felt like it was the truth and it was this man's or woman's personal opinion, if in their heart, they believed what they were saying was true. But, as far as just coming out here and saying that, oh, I'm sick and tired of Joe Blow running around with Mary Smith, that didn't get in this paper.

P: But they did have to sign it?

G: In the beginning, they had to sign it. Now, occasionally, we run letters. Emerald has got it set up so that if they send in stuff that's not signed, then they give her their name so that

we at least know it's a legitimate letter.

P: When you put out your paper, did you ever try to get any national columnists, like Dear Abby or anything like that?

G: We're running one now, Ann Landers. A friend sent us something, and we sent it back and said, we'd love to run her column but we're not able to afford this. Ironically enough, I got a buzz here a week or so later and someone said, there's a Mrs. Ann Landers on the phone for you. So I picked up the phone and it's Ann Landers. We talked and we had a good time on the telephone, and she cut us a deal. We've been running her column ever since.

P: But that's pretty limited for a weekly paper.

G: Most of our columns, if you'll go through our papers are all home-spun columns,

P: So you have now a much larger staff in terms of reporters and columnists.

G: We run the *Madison County Carrier* and then we have the *Madison Enterprise Reporter* and then we have a third newspaper, *Madison County News*. The *Madison County News* has been established now for about five years. We have a total circulation of nine. The *Madison County News* that we started about five or six years ago is really a scavenger paper. It's a one sheet, eight and a half by eleven. We run off ten or twelve copies of it. We pick up just stuff that we've run in either the Madison paper or the other paper that's already set up. It takes us about ten or fifteen minutes a week to do it. We've met all the criteria of the post office. It's as legal a newspaper as the *Madison County Carrier* or the *Enterprise Recorder*, so we [have] three legal newspapers, as far as that carry legal ads and meet all the postal regulations. A number of years ago, a paper started in here, just one that was coming off of a copy machine, and that came out on a eleven-seventeen folded and was running off 300 copies. So, when they hit the street one week, the following day, we came out with the *Madison County News*. I said, Madison won't have three newspapers unless all three of them's mine. It can have four. So, right now, we've got the three legal newspapers. The *Madison County News*, we run off ten or twelve copies of it. It sells for \$0.09 cents a piece in one location, which is our uptown newspaper office. Nobody buys it. The subscriptions are \$100 a year. We have no subscribers. But, it's sitting there, and if we ever need to bring it to life for any reason, it's sitting there idling on the runway.

P: It is mainly in case somebody tries to compete.

G: If we get a serious threat of any kind, the county commissioners will have a choice of taking two real newspapers, like they're doing right now with our *Madison County Carrier* and the *Madison Enterprise Recorder*, or they can take this other paper and the *Madison News* if they want to deal with that kind. So, right now, I don't have any

intentions of doing anything with the *Madison News*, except keeping it legal.

P: Let me talk about your association with the Florida Press Association [FPA]. You mentioned when you started business you were a member, but you eventually became the youngest president of the Florida Press Association. How did that transpire?

G: Well, our first Press Association [meeting] that we ever went to was in [1965], and, if my memory serves me correctly, it was in St. Augustine. My wife and I were both twenty-five years old, and it looked like everybody in that bunch down there was 100. I realize now that they [weren't]. I just, from the beginning, knew that if we stayed in the newspaper business, we needed to find out something about the newspaper business and that nobody should know better than the people associated with the Florida Press Association. I didn't even know that there was a Florida Press Association when we opened up the newspaper business. Again, I stayed in the newspaper business out of sheer energy and ignorance, and that is the absolute truth. I didn't know what we couldn't do, so we did it, and I had the energy to do it--the good Lord gave me that. One of the first people that I met down there, and we became lifelong friends, still are real good friends, was Hoop Teabault from St. Augustine. He had the *St. Augustine Record* at the time and later bought out the strong weekly and opened up the *Clay Today* and sold it also. Then, I became just heavily involved with the Association and wound up on the board right quick-like. It was several things that I was interested in. We [were] having some real problems in Tallahassee, and I've always been politically oriented, I guess. I made my best grades in history and political science in school. So I got involved with that. I was very concerned about the fact that everybody that knew anything about the Florida Press Association at that time was very concerned about the direction it was headed in. In the very beginning, John Paul Jones was heading it up, and we had an extremely good operation. It originally was in Gainesville and then, you know, the hub of politics is Tallahassee. So, about 1965, I think, is when they had that real move[ment to] move the capital to Orlando, and Mallory Horne was given credit for stopping that. But the more I got involved with the Florida Press Association, I got involved with the National Newspaper Association, and I was the state representative for the National Newspaper Association for twelve years and would go to Washington and work with them. But one of the things that I wanted to do was to get our Florida Press Association on good financial ground, which, during my years on the board in the beginning, it was not, and we were all very concerned about it. Another thing I was concerned about was that fifteen seconds and thirty seconds and sixty seconds all over the world was fifteen, thirty and sixty, wherever you went, but a column inch was not. So I wanted to try to get some sort of uniformity to what is a column inch. You know, it's so much by so much. During that time, we [were] able to get it down to twelve picas by one inch. Then, the Florida Press Association membership was extremely low, and, again, I have more energy than control. That's always been a major problem of mine, I think. But I told them, if I become president, I will visit every single newspaper in this state. So I wound up as vice president, and then I became president.

P: What year was this?

G: 1974-1975. I bought a thirty-six foot Pace Arrow motor home. My wife only taught the balance of the year that first year [1964], and then she came with me full-time in the newspaper business. She's been with me all this time. So we took our three children, Harvey, William and Emerald, and we toured the state of Florida in that motor home. We went to every single solitary newspaper in this state. We didn't miss a one.

P: How many were there?

G: I don't know. It seemed like we [were] looking at somewhere around 300 weeklies and sixty dailies, and that may or may not be true. I don't know why those two figures stick in my mind.

P: What would the number be today?

G: I have no idea. I would think it would be a lot less. I do know I put a Florida map on my wall and took some thumbtacks and painted these thumbtacks different colors. Then, I took some of these straight pins—I had a little old pin cushion—and I put paper, instead of buying these things, I just cut me out some different colored paper and made some flags after because the pins were too broad. They didn't work right. So I made me some flag pins, and I had them coded for the members and non-members. When I'd visit one, I'd put in a green flag, and I kept on till we had the entire...I think the blues ones [were] members and the white ones were non-members, and we had more white ones up there than we had blue ones. So we put on a campaign, and we went to every single newspaper in this state that year. We got it up, and we found out what people [were] wanting [to join]. A lot of them didn't even know about the Florida Press Association. You know, they're out there. Then the first order of business, and perhaps one of the hardest jobs I've ever done, was that I handed the gavel to Hoop Teabault, [who] was vice president, and I made a recommendation that we fire our manager. He was sitting in that room, and it caught him as cold--it caught the whole room cold. I didn't really want him fired. I was hoping that what we could do is bring him back around, and that's, as it turned out, that's what happened. So, we agreed, and I looked over at him and I said, Jim, I hate to do this, but you're going into those meetings with liquor on your breath, our reputation is a disaster over there [in Tallahassee], we're going to need a lobbyist [who is] a strong lobbyist. That's what the head of a press association has got to be. He's got to be as good a lobbyist as money can buy. I [said], we don't need somebody showing up late in the morning and going into a meeting with a brand-new beer on his breath so he can operate. So we agreed to give him, I think it was a thirty-day grace period to see if he could straighten up, or sixty days, and he straightened up and flew as good as we've ever had. As soon as that grace period was over, he went right back into that same slump, and it was just such a shame, because he had such a talent. So we put out a search for another

one, and Carroll Lamb is a Madison County boy [who] was head of the Florida Forest Service, and I asked Carroll if he knew of anybody out there that we could use. He said he had the best assistant for the job that he knew of, and that was Reg Ivory. We interviewed Reg Ivory and a whole bunch of other folks, and we hired Reg Ivory. When we fired the manager, Jim, I had made a motion to get rid of the two girls, too. Let's just clean house. I was talked out of that, and I'm glad I was because those two ladies turned out to be as fine a workers as they could be. They just didn't have any leadership [to follow]. Consequently, they could've done a good job themselves if they hadn't had the poor leadership. So, we got that. Reg took over, and we worked really hard and heavy on trying to get the profitability of it turned around and get a positive image, and it worked.

P: How many did you get to join the FPA who had not been members?

G: I don't know.

P: But you obviously increased the . . .

G: We brought in members, yes, sir. Yes, we brought in a bunch of members.

P: When you talk about lobbying, give me an example of what the FPA would do for the members of the Association.

G: At any given session, and the fate of no man is safe as long as the legislature's in session, and especially the fate of the newspaper because somewhere in this great state of Florida, some newspaperman has ticked off some legislator. So they go to Tallahassee with a spur under their blanket, and they're going to get that newspaper. Well, this last time, that man [who] was caught running around with somebody else's wife and then wife abuse of his own and a divorce and all that, it made all the newspapers, and, consequently, he put in just this last legislature—which I spent the time over there because we published a book over there called *The Third House of Florida*—he was determined to eliminate the three times that you run the delinquent tax rolls and bring it down to one time. So, had it not been for Dick Shelton and the publishers . . . of course, the first thing I did was contacted my three representatives. We had one state representative and two senators representing this county. It's a split county. The first thing I did was call them and got them on my side, so they were opposed to it. Dick Shelton kept us aware of what was going on, all the newspapers across the state. Consequently, that bill never got out of committee. Now, had we had somebody over there that was not as sharp enough on it as Dick Shelton or a Reg Ivory, if we'd had someone else that was coming in drunk and not showing up at these meetings, that thing could've eased on through.

P: And how would that have affected you?

G: In that one particular instance, it would've cut our revenue by two-thirds. It would be real

disaster revenue-wise, plus it doesn't inform the people. You know, I hate to think that somebody doesn't read every edition of every paper we publish, but occasionally somebody will fail to pick up a newspaper. And it gets right back; the county then won't have the bidders in there on that particular item, and on the legal advertising, we're always having somebody wanting to hit at the legal advertising.

P: What about something like the services tax, when [Bob] Martinez was governor. Would that have negatively affected the newspaper?

G: Yes, sir.

P: How did you respond to that?

G: In fact, they had a sales tax on advertising, and because of our strong leadership over there...I guess this [interview] is for historical publication. I'm not going to sit and tell you that we didn't have a lot to do with us cutting our own throats right there for a little while because we wanted to show government the impact that this sales tax was going to cause Florida. So we didn't get upset when these big companies absolutely just cut off doing any advertising in the state of Florida. We were able then to go back and say, y'all, look at the revenue we're losing. [Coca-Cola was one,] Sears was another one. These big boys. Of course, they favored it, but I know right where the master plan came from. I was sitting there amongst it. You know, we just couldn't afford to have something like this happen to us. One other state, and I think it was Idaho, or some other state, had tried it--there may have been several that tried it--but that didn't last.

P: Those are two good examples of what the Florida Press Association does.

G: I can show you good examples every year.

P: Let me talk a little more about some broader issues. How is your audience different today, the people who read your paper, than it was in 1964?

G: Well, we [have] a lot of newcomers [who have] come into this county, but we have still stuck, I guess, to our original deal, that if they want to read about something else somewhere else in the world, then they need to get a daily paper or *USA TODAY* or something else. Madison County is our domain, and we cover it.

P: How has the county changed in thirty-five years?

G: In some areas, it's made major changes. We [have] people moving in here; we call them South Florida Yankees. They come from the North and they go South, and then they get fed up with that down there and they come move up here. We're the ham between the two pieces of bread. Every time somebody tells us, well, this isn't how we do it up north,

we tell them to take I-95 or I-75 north and do it now. What's happening to us is that the worst thing that happened to the state of Florida is when Bob Graham promoted this \$25,000 a year homestead exemption. It threw the burden of property taxes now all on the businesses, and the one that's hit the hardest is agriculture. They're also the one business that depends on the weather, that buys all their stuff retail and sells all their stuff wholesale, at the mercy of whoever's buying it. That's a primary reason that agriculture is catching it so very hard now. This is your timber industry, and this is annual row crops. We're still basically an agricultural property here. Our problem now is we're getting so many people moving into North Florida [who] want an acre of land and a \$2,000 mobile home, and, consequently, they're not paying any taxes. They come up here either retired and not producing any goods or services, or they come up here with a trailer full of young'uns that we've got to school. We've got to protect them with an ambulance and law enforcement and fire protection and all this other stuff, and they're not paying any taxes. That's really bringing a hard crunch in on the locals [who has] been here over the years [and] bought land and has to live off the land.

P: This is still pretty conservative country, is it not?

G: George Wallace was somewhat liberal, in our opinion.

P: Do most people here vote Republican or Democrat?

G: Most of them here are registered Democrats. They vote conservative.

P: No matter the party.

G: Right. Now, since we can cross lines, if we don't have a Republican or a Democratic opponent, the Republican party has really flourished out. We've gone from thirty or forty to 1,700 just in one mammoth jump, almost. We got 10,000 voters in Madison County, Florida, and we're looking now at right about 2,000 of them are Republicans and they are coming on hard and heavy.

P: Well, with the legislature and the governor Republicans for the first time in the history of the state, that shows the whole state has changed.

G: This pendulum, and the swingin' pendulum is what keeps the clock ticking, has swung so far to the left until it's bringing on so much resentment towards government. I owned a meat-processing plant for four years, and I had such a hard time with government until when that man in Texas, [who] owned that little meat-processing plant, killed those three government inspectors last week. I stood up and applauded him, because he did something that I wanted to do.

P: Is this also OSHA, or mainly meat inspectors?

G: It's government . . . the three that gave me the most trouble were federal inspectors [who were] retired military veterinarians, and we hadn't had a mule in the Army since World War I. They would retire, [and] in order to keep their pension going, then they'd get on with the state. They'd come in and literally and physically not know how to close—and I didn't know it when I bought the plant--you don't slam a cooler door. You push it [with] one finger, and it latches. The harder you slam it, the farther it bounces back on you. Those three men didn't even know how to close a cooler door, and they came in with the ability to close me down, and tried to. So I've got a lot of resentment towards our government, not towards this country because, like I say, I'm still standing [when] the flag comes by. I'm a member of the American Legion. I'm a disabled veteran but I've never drawn a penny from the government of any kind. All my farming operations. I want that clearly understood, that when I write a hard-hitting editorial about our welfare system, I've never accepted a penny on all these government handouts to the farmers to plant or not to plant. I've never accepted a penny to build a bluebird nest or build a fishpond, and they're doing it right here in this county. You can get money today to build bluebird nests. I have never, ever accepted a single solid penny from the government, no way, shape, fashion or form. I sent six checks back to the United States Army as a disabled veteran until I finally got my congressman to get them to stop sending me those checks.

P: When you first started the newspaper business, was there much competition from radio? And how did you deal with that?

G: There was a radio station here, WMAF. We never knocked the other newspapers. We never knocked our competitors, no way, shape, fashion or form. When somebody would say, well, I'm spending this much money with the radio station, I'd say, well, good, but I can show you this: when it's published, it's permanent. I think we had a big advantage over the radio station in several respects; [we had] something they could hold (a newspaper) in their hand, and they knew that it was something you could clip coupons out of. Coupons [were] heavy back then. Green stamps [were] heavy back then. This was something that was material, that they could hold in their hand, where the radio station wasn't.

P: Do you think that's going to change, that, pretty soon, everything is going to be off the Internet?

G: We're looking into that. In fact, we're already on the Internet. That's a world out there so unknown to me until I know it's going to change. I don't know how, but we've hired somebody to help us learn. I told my children all these years, you know, if you're not living on the edge, you're dying in too much space.

P: Do you think there is going to be a time where people can't physically hold a newspaper, that they're not going to print those papers anymore?

- G: The way printing prices are going up so, I'm almost looking forward to it. That's the reason I kept a big herd of cattle. Back there when the newsprint industry, back, I guess it was, around the 1970s, when the oil prices went up so high the first time, and then, bam, the newsprint industry saw exactly what was happening and they considered themselves a shortage. I had this great big huge warehouse full of newsprint, and we [were] bringing in two or three truckloads a week coming in here. We [were] ordering newsprint out of Canada, and I was talking to truck drivers that [were] seeing warehouse loads of it stored back in Texas. It was just one of these deals that they were just creating their own shortage, jacking the prices up. I don't buy anything today that associated with CompuGraphic because of the way CompuGraphic did us. I just resent that type [of] tactics.
- P: Have you ever had any pressure from an advertiser because of something you either had written in an editorial or printed in an article?
- G: The best way for somebody to get something on front page is to tell me what they're going to do if I print it. God be my witness, it goes on front page. It may have been an inside story to start with, but it'll go on front page with an editor's note that we don't take threats and they can take their money and walk with it because the newspaper business never kept me in the newspaper business anyway. It was my other doings that did.
- P: But people would occasionally threaten to pull their advertising.
- G: I've had that to happen before. Then, of course, the first thing I do, I go ahead and run it. I try not to hold these grudges. Eventually you can get those fences mended and get it back, you know, if it's not something that's morally wrong. I don't care about the legality so much as if it's morally right or wrong. The government comes up with a new law every moment that we live, so we've broken so many laws by the time we get out of bed every morning. So that's not a problem to me. If it's right, do it.
- P: Can you give me an example of something that might happen like that, where you had printed something that might be controversial, might hurt the automobile industry or something? And they would say, well, we're going pull our advertising. Then you would just go ahead and pursue the same issue again? Is that correct?
- G: Most of our endeavors [were] not so much against the businesses. Of course, I've always been business-oriented, and they've had such a rough time. I'm never worried about my competitor because they've got the same Big Brother to fight that I've got.
- P: Plus, with advertising, you're the only paper in town, so they really don't have much choice, do they?

G: No. We have promoted the local businesses so hard and heavy anyway. We really have.

P: Maybe you can tell me how you've changed over the years with new technology. How has that enabled you to operate more efficiently?

G: When something new was on that drawing board, we wanted to be the first to get it. We [were not] always the first to get it, but we've always tried our best to stay, I guess they use the word, cutting-edge. In 1982, I got to hearing about this LP TV, and I didn't even know what it stood for (low power television). They had to retrain me to operate one of these remote controls. So I'm not technically knowledgeable. But the first thing I did was applied for the TV license, for a television station. Somebody asked me why, I said, about like the mountain climber. You know, why'd you climb the mountain? Because the mountain was there. So, in 1983, we put our television, we owned a local television station, and we put it on the air. That works hand-in-hand with our newspaper because we were already in the news-gathering business. I realized back then they [were] talking about computers and Internets and stuff that I just wasn't familiar with. One day at the Florida Press convention, one of these farsighted individuals was talking about one day we'll be reading our news off the pages of a TV set-type deal, I guess maybe not knowing the terminology because it probably wasn't invented at the time. He was talking about Internet type stuff. And I read in the business pages about this low power television, community television. So we became the second in the nation and the first in the state of Florida to have a TV station here, and we still operate it.

P: What do you mainly have on the station, and how many hours do you operate it?

G: We operate twenty-four-seven, 168 hours a week, around the clock, twenty-four hours a day. We've got several things right not that's never been tried anywhere else in the country that we think will work, and we're getting ready to [implement] that. My son William resigned after thirteen years with the law enforcement. He's now come on board with me full-time. My oldest son Harvey, [who is] in charge of the emergency medicine for the hospital, works with us on our computers. All three of my children live on our farm, so it's all-in-the-family-type deal. Right now, we're running video classifieds. Any time of the day or night, you can turn on and we've got these ads up there where you can buy and sell and trade and swap.

P: So it's twenty-four hour ads?

G: Yes, sir.

P: You don't have any programming?

G: Yes, sir. We've got it set up so that on our Internet--our Internet comes in on those same deals right there--when they're working on the computer, we--not the Internet, it would

be the computers. I've got two of my oldest grandchildren working with me on a history book this summer. They're doing some research for me. So we go all through the daytime. We go on six- and twelve-hour tapes. We promote Boy Scouts. We promote the National Rifle Association. We support Americanism and all, at all levels. We promote the Church of Jesus Christ, the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) real heavy, and any other church that'll bring us in tapes. We run religious stuff.

P: So, mainly, this is promotional sort of stuff?

G: Promotional and educational. Then, we put it back and then we run these other tapes in between it.

P: You obviously feel a need to be involved in community activities. I notice that you're a member of probably every club that exists in Madison. Why do you think that's important for a newspaper publisher to do that?

G: We laugh about it now, I guess, that all of my life up until last year or so I tried to be known everywhere and now I'm trying to hide. But if you're not totally committed to a community—and I loved it so much, my second son was named William Madison Greene—totally dedicated to this type work and have, I guess, a certain degree of insanity about you, it's not the right job for you. I wanted my community to be the very best community on this planet, second to none. One of the sayings that we've got: the problem about being second is that you're the first one to see the winner and the first one to see the loser. For three consecutive years, I was president of the Madison Development Authority, and I helped organized, I initiated the phone calls, and got a Chamber organized. I've just always loved Madison. It's been my home. [See appendix.]

P: Were you ever specifically involved in politics?

G: I've always been involved in politics. I like the behind-the-closed-door-type stuff, one-on-one

P: But you've not held political office?

G: No, sir.

P: Have not run for political office?

G: In 1968, I had a group to talk me into running for state legislature when they had that two-week shift, when they came up here and the Supreme Court says you will re-district, and so Florida was able to say, okay, we'll run again in two weeks. After you announced, we had the elections, which was a farce, and I ran in four counties. So, actually, I probably put in about three weeks of running. Not a single person was defeated because I

felt just as strong about the Supreme Court telling us what we had to do down here as the rest of the bunch. I came in second out of a field of six, missed it by 176 votes. The government went back in, and it was the best time I ever spent in my life because I met folks I would've never known. Since 1968, I'm still friends with folks I met back then.

P: As a newspaper, do you endorse or recommend political candidates?

G: That's about the only time we get outside of local. We really don't do a lot of endorsing of local folks. Now, four years ago, I came down hard and heavy on three individuals. Two [were] running for re-election, and one was running for the first time, and we successfully whipped all three of them.

P: Was this an ideological difference or incompetence? What was the issue?

G: One of them was a county commissioner that I had helped get elected because we have our little closed-door meetings and see what we can do to put together. It's nothing they can help any of us financially with, but it's what we want is what's good for this county. We want somebody up there [who is] not going to put any more rules and regulations on us. It's a shame that you're not even able to do anything on your property. They totally eliminated property rights, you know. But we had a grant opportunity [of] getting an airport to come to Madison, about a \$16,000,000 grant coming this way, and this one county commissioner just wound up letting it go to the ballot, and then it just went from bad to worse. So, we really and truly try to base what we do on what we think is going to be the absolute best thing for this county and the people [who are] in it.

P: So, your opinion, one way or the other, is fairly influential in this county?

G: I don't know about that. I'm just a country boy that stuck it out.

P: You were an observer at the execution of John Spenklink. Tell me a little about him and what that experience was like.

G: I put on a lot of socials. My motto: if you don't wake up to a party, start one. Consequently, I try to stay in very good with all the local and area state politicians, and I wound up getting on as a state witness to that execution. I've always believed in capital punishment. Swift and severe justice, I think that's an absolute key. In fact, I've run in the paper several times in my editorials, if we want to stop crime, we need to execute all criminals and their lawyers. I went down as a state witness, and, of course, it was postponed a time or two. I sat there on the front row. In fact, I sat next to Bobby Brantley, [who] became the lieutenant governor. Bobby and I have remained friends over the years. You're not allowed to take cameras in, so I took my art pad in and I sat there and sketched out the execution. Of course, you have the twelve news media witnesses behind the twelve state witnesses. One of them was the well-known writer from the *Atlanta Constitution* [who] died here last year, Lewis Grizzard. Anyway, he wrote a

story, a column, when he got back, that there was a man sitting on the front row in a bright green suit sketching out the execution, unmoved about a man dying, but he didn't call me by name. I had a number of my friends [who] sent me the clippings and said they knew who he was talking about. Ironically enough, I was headed up the country to a meeting up there, a year later to the date. We never go through a town we don't pick up newspapers. We pick up [a lot of] newspapers. My wife will read around, probably, twelve to fifteen papers a day, every single day of her life. She goes, eats her breakfast in the corner of the same restaurant, same table, every morning, by herself, and reads these papers. Well, we stopped and picked up the *Atlanta Constitution*, and he was rehashing that same story. Anyway, I was asked then if I believed in the electric chair, and I said, no, I'd prefer electric bleachers. Then I wrote that editorial about [how] we ought to scrap the human body, instead of electrocuting these prisoners that we've got on death row. We [have] 700 capital crimes per 100,000 people. England [had] almost 600 and something, almost the same as we were. After I wrote that, about treating the inmate as a patient, putting them to sleep, coordinating this with their medical people, and sending their body parts out to people [who] need them, British Broadcasting Company came over and interviewed me on that same theory and went back and ran it, aired it, in England, and I got calls from England. Of course, that theory never got off the ground anywhere. [There are] too many do-gooders out there, but we [have] so many people [who are] needing organs.

P: What about the new system as opposed to the electric chair? Do you think that's better and more humane?

G: People don't die in the electric chair. They are alive, and then they're dead. Victims die, when they're lying there bleeding to death. But I've seen two executions. One [was] this Johnson fella [who] killed a local man here, and I was a journalist-witness on that one. I've seen two executions in the electric chair, and what I see is not what these bleeding hearts describe. People do not die in the electric chair. They are alive, and then they are dead. Electricity travels at the speed of light, and that's how quick somebody ceases to exist when they are shot the juice to them. Now, which is more humane? It doesn't really matter to me because humanity shouldn't have anything to do with these cold-blooded murdering animals [who] have no mercy on someone else.

P: What do we do about the mistakes that have been made in putting to death, or at least convicting, innocent people? How do we make sure that doesn't happen?

G: That needs to be examined. I don't know how many of these [are] being turned loose as supposed to being freed are actually innocent, but we don't think about that when we send hundreds of thousands of our men and women overseas to fight for our freedom. These young men and women are innocent of any crime, and they're dying by the thousands on our foreign battlefields. Now, if we want a free country, we're going to have to eliminate crime, and if we kill the innocent, let God separate them.

P: You started a newspaper without any journalistic training and sort of learned on the job. Do you think in newspapers today that people in the business need a journalism degree?

G: Not to knock our J[ournalism] schools because they may [have] changed from some time back, but the first thing we tried to do was de-program them. The problem with the *Tallahassee Democrat* today, and I think they now realize it, is that they're getting these young journalism students out of FAMU over there that come in with all the answers. By their own admission, they've lost circulation. They've absolutely lost respect in the community. I think that each individual is a different case, and they need to look at it. Our problem, and we made some changes, and, thank the good Lord above, the University of Florida worked with us hand-in-glove, because that was something else the Florida Press Association worked at. The Florida Press Association and the University of Florida J-school worked together during those years, and we got this thing around because we [were] having students, J-school graduates, come to us that had not taken a photographic course. It was their understanding that when they went off, they did the writing. They may not have even had a speed-writing course. I was going to send a photographer with them. Now, last St. Patrick's Day—because of my all-green doings [referring to Mr. Greene's total use of the color green], I'm always interviewed around those days—they sent two people to cover one story. They sent a photographer and they sent a newswriter. That would've never happened, and does not happen, in our business because the same person [who is] going to write that story is going to take that picture. We're not going to have two people on the payroll doing the same job. I think what we need to get down to doing is they just need to handle more of it. You don't see one of our reporters...they leave here with a pad, a pencil and a camera, or they leave with a laptop and a camera.

P: Have you had difficulty hiring people to work for the newspaper?

G: Our problem right here at this place, same as other places, is just as soon as we can get somebody trained, then either the Department of Corrections, the courthouse, some government agency [who is] paying more money with all the benefits, because they can, with our taxes, continue to raise these salaries and raise these prices, we aren't able to keep good people unless they're totally dedicated to the newspaper industry and [have] a spouse [who is] basically supporting the family. We find our major competitors are not other independent businesses but our government agencies.

P: They don't go to bigger newspapers?

G: No, sir. Now, occasionally, we'll have someone that we've hired that's come in, but, no, we don't find them running to other newspapers. We find them leaving here going to more secured jobs that the state can provide for them because they don't have any limit to their budgets.

P: What's the future of independently-owned weekly newspapers?

G: We could sell out today to a [con]glomerate. I think it's getting slimmer and slimmer that you're going to find independently-owned newspapers, of any kind. Live Oak, for instance, just sold out to Thompson, and Thompson just sold out to Community. Thompson did their best to buy us. They tried to buy the *Monticello News*. Right now, the only two right here, Monticello and Madison, right now, is the only two independents that I know of [in north Florida].

P: Do you think you'll eventually sell to one of these conglomerates?

G: I won't ever sell, and my daughter loves it so, I'd be surprised that she would. I'm not saying it won't happen, but I'm going to outlive my enemies before I sell.

P: What is the major source of income for a weekly newspaper? Is it still advertising?

G: Yes. Advertising, advertising, advertising.

P: Do you think that the larger chains can buy up a bunch of these newspapers, and they can operate them, at least, cheaper than an individual can? Because they can buy, I guess, paper in bulk and they have all these services that they can offer and they have, I guess, columns that they can purchase at a cheaper rate, so that, technically, they can operate these weekly papers more efficiently than an individual owner?

G: What they do, they come in, like, for instance, if they bought up Greene Publishing out, they would come in and they would trim it down to the bone. Madison people would not be getting the same newspapers that they're getting today. They'd have this thing cut down to a survival-type publication. If another newspaper opens up in Madison to bring in a better product, then they start souping up their product again. So it's going to be extremely difficult for a new paper to come in against a [con]glomerate. Now, they tried to open a paper up there in Valdosta here a number of years back, and they came and asked me about it. What they did, they started to open up a daily against a daily, and I told them right up front, I'd never do that. I could make a weekly work up there and get you a good strong weekly, and then down the road if you wanted to convert it to a daily or a twice a week or tri-weekly, then you could. A lot of people, just like me, gets into the newspaper business not knowing what's in front of them, and most of them's smart enough to get out.

P: When you look at the time you've been in business with this paper, what would you think the paper's greatest contribution to the community would have been?

G: Whew. Well, we have promoted industry as hard and heavy as we can promote because

without that, we don't have a tax base. Industry includes agriculture, just a number of things. Again, that's where I took it as an individual as much as I did as the newspaper, but I always had the backing of the newspaper. We promoted law enforcement, and a lot of times, we'd sit on a story until they could get their case worked out so that we wouldn't break something before they got their case put together. Of course, again, this was me working with them on an hourly basis, virtually. You know, any hour of the day and night. I'd say our biggest contribution right now is trying to keep as much government control out of our lives as anything. Right now, I just found out yesterday that now you've got to go get a permit for a man to slip an air conditioner in your window, even if he plugs it into a one-ten outlet, and they [are] getting ready to go from a \$20 permit to a \$40 permit. This is local, but what they're doing is following suit in all these other counties. This past legislature, I understand Volusia has somewhat of a thing on this, they tried, there was rumors about these people that's planting pine trees, and that's a crop. That's nothing but a crop. It's a crop to be harvested. That they wanted it now so you would have to pay for somebody, a government official, to go out there and look at that stand of pine trees, and then if he says, yes, you can cut these trees, then you go get a permit to have them cut. Now, when are they going to go to corn and soybeans and tobacco, and then when are they going to go to your wife's flower garden? No, you can't cut those flowers until you go buy you a permit. There's no stopping to it.

P: That's mainly the editorial content of your paper, that you feel like you made your major contribution.

G: Absolutely.

P: When you look at your career in journalism, and I know you have other interests, are you satisfied with what you've accomplished, given where you started?

G: Well, I've never been content in my life, so I don't really know how to answer that. I'm happy that I've reached the thirty-five year mark and I've got a daughter that can take this paper and go with it. I was extremely blessed that my wife has got the sales ability and the love to sell. She stays in on that telephone all day. She'd sell toe tags in a hospital waiting room. She's got her own office in there where she's in charge of ad sales. My daughter's in charge of the business end of it. The two of them together sees that the composition is put together. My other daughter that my son brought home, and I refer to her that way rather than daughter-in-law, she is in charge of composition and layout. We are bringing our grandchildren up in this business just like we brought our children up in this business. Our children slept in cardboard boxes underneath the layout tables. In fact, they just grew up in [the newspaper business].

P: Is there a strange or amusing story about your career that you would tell us?

G: Well, I'm writing a book, and I keep my little handy tape recorder with me as I go down

the road. The name of my book is *The Belly Side of Me and My Trashy Friends*. So, it seems like, someday or another, and my wife [writes a column] call[ed] "Wandering With the Publisher," we've never considered anything bad. We've always considered it a better column or a better news story. I've kept a collection of these things that's happened. We can take a simple trip to the post office, and it turns into an adventure. There has always been that cloud over our head, and we've considered it to be a good cloud. As black as it may get sometimes up there, on the back side of it, it's got a silver lining. We're the luckiest people in the planet. My wife wins all the time. My daughter won a \$10,000 drawing nationwide. My son's driving a brand new Jeep he just won. They quit giving away the shotguns at Ducks Unlimited because we won them every year. We've won several televisions just out of picking it out of the box. We just win, and we get ticked off when we don't win. We get upset. You know, a good loser's a constant loser, and I have refused to let my children think otherwise. So we've lived one endless party, and we made a party out of this newspaper business. When it gets too rough, she and I will maybe take off one night and go somewhere, but we're back the next morning.

P: On that note, let's end the interview, and I want to thank you very much for your time.

G: It's been my pleasure, sir.

[End of the interview.]

[Appendix: Mr. Greene noted after the interview that he was also involved with the Jaycees, Kiwanis Club, the Elks, the Shrine Club, and the Wakulla Shrine Club, all in Madison County.]