

S. L. FRISBIE, IV

BIOGRAPHY

S. L. Frisbie was born in Bartow, Florida and graduated from Florida State University in 1962. He joined the U.S. Army in 1962 as a second lieutenant and spent the next two years working in the Intelligence Corps in Washington, D.C. Upon discharge from the Army in 1964, he joined Frisbie Publishing Company, Inc. to work on the *Polk County Democrat*, a twice-weekly community newspaper begun by his great-grandfather and grandfather. The *Polk County Democrat* has been operated by four generations of the Frisbie family. The company has purchased several other papers, and currently publishes four newspapers. Frisbie is a past president of the Florida Press Association.

SUMMARY

S. L. Frisbie begins by giving a brief history of the paper begun by his great-grandfather and father and describes the growth of the newspaper and the purchase of papers in surrounding areas. He discusses his grandmother's and mother's involvement with the family business. He talks about the changing technology in newspaper printing and the formation and publication of the *Polk County Times* paper, which covers local government. Frisbie talks about the role filled by local, weekly newspapers in the community and the impact of the paper's editorial endorsements on local politics. He discusses the changes in the paper's audience and circulation while reflecting on the challenges of running a weekly newspaper, including staff relations and hiring practices. Frisbie talks about the importance of independent newspapers, several offers by larger

newspaper chains to purchase his papers, and the future of his newspaper. He concludes with comments on the future of newspaper publishing in general.

S. L. Frisbie, IV was interviewed by Julian M. Pleasants, October 23, 2001 in Bartow, Florida.

P: Talk a little bit about the history of this newspaper. I know it goes all the way back to Mr. Sayer L. Frisbie who got interested in the newspaper business in Iowa. Talk about the history of the paper from the time the family came to Florida.

F: This newspaper was established on August 28, 1931, as a weekly newspaper, once-a-week newspaper, by my great-grandfather, Sayer Loyal Frisbie and his son, Sayer Lloyd Frisbie. They had been in the newspaper business off and on together for quite a number of years beginning, as you say, with Great-Granddad's employment at, I believe, the age of eighteen in Iowa.... Great-Granddad moved to Bartow to start a printing company, and my granddad, Sayer Lloyd Frisbie, was working in Tampa, originally at the *Tampa Tribune*, then [he] went with a boomtown daily that started up. When that paper closed, he went back to the *Tribune*. In 1931, he got the itch to start another newspaper, to own his own newspaper again with my great-granddad, so he moved to Bartow, published originally, I believe, on Fridays, printing in the printing plant of Bartow Printing Company. They started up against an established five-day daily in the depth of the Great Depression, which I have said many times is probably one of the more dubious business decisions in Florida newspaper publishing history. They continued as a weekly; then, in 1946, bought the competition, which was *The Polk*

County Record.

P: Let me go back to 1931, why did they make that dubious business decision?

F: ... I have never asked Granddad why he got the itch to start his own newspaper over here. He had, obviously, the production facilities through Bartow Printing Company. Why in the world he left the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, as it was then called, to come and become a struggling weekly newspaper publisher is a question I do not know the answer to.

P: There were two problems, one, there was already an established newspaper. It would not seem that there would be enough room for two papers. And then it was during the Depression. How did they manage to survive?

F: I have been told... they would do what was called kiting checks. They would write a check from one company to another company, [and] put it in the mail to Tampa. What today would be called float- the checks would clear because the money they were sending back and forth and the delay that it would take for the checks to clear the bank. I do know that on the bank holiday, when of course all the banks [were] closed [by President Roosevelt], ... some customer had paid his advertising bill, I believe the story is, with three dollars worth of dimes.... Granddad assembled the staff and divided out the dimes equally among the number of people who were there, maybe half a dozen people....

P: It started out as a free circulation, tabloid-type newspaper?

F: That is correct, it was free circulation and Dad has told me a number of times that the format tended to change..., based on the size of newsprint they were able to get their hands on. Particularly during the war years, but also in the early years when it was

being done at a job-shop, the format tended to change according to the availability of stock....

P: An interesting point in the development of the paper was 1942. For the first time, you got the right to print the Polk County delinquent-tax list. Why was that so important?

F: The delinquent-tax list, at that time and for many, many years after that, was a bonanza in Polk County. The price was fixed by agreement between all the publishers in the county and the county tax collector. It was rotated among the newspapers... but it was a bonanza. It was worth its weight in gold to get the delinquent-tax list.

P: In the 1940s there were eleven newspapers in Polk County?

F: That is my recollection, [I am] talking about paid-circulation newspapers now. I can count them up for you. The dailies were the *Lakeland Ledger*, *Winter Haven News Chief*, and *Lake Wales Daily Highlander*, the weeklies were Lake Wales, Frostproof, Fort Meade, Bartow, Auburndale, Mulberry, *Winter Haven Herald*, Haines City, I believe was the other one....

Polk County has the dubious distinction, dubious to those of us in the business, of being one of the most competitive newspaper markets in the country. Not all of those papers are still published, incidentally, but two of the three dailies are still around. One of the dailies, the *Daily Highlander* in Lake Wales, has folded, and several of the weeklies have folded. I do not believe there are any more new paid-circulation papers in the county....

P: Some time ago Loyal Frisbie began writing a personal column and I guess he is still writing that column, which is called, "Off My Chest."

F: That is correct.... His very first one, fresh out of college, was entitled something like "Picture of a Young Man Talking to Himself." He writes generally about whatever interests him at the moment. Growing up as the son of an editor, I sometimes found our family squabbles made it into the paper.... He wrote extensively about his travels, as did Mother. Sometimes it is [about] local issues. I think the title "Off My Chest," says it well. [He writes about] politics, international situations, local situations, talks about his dog Queenie, who has been called the most famous dog in Bartow....

P: So this is more commentary than editorial.

F: Yes, it is very much a personal column. At one time, his column probably represented the editorial policy of the paper, back before we had regular editorials. We now have conventional editorials which express the editorial position of the newspaper. He and I each write personal columns which tend to be purely personal observations. During World War II, he was drafted in World War II and served as an infantryman. His column was called "Private Opinion." ... His columns during World War II were written in the form of letters home, otherwise they would have had to go through extensive censorship.... Obviously he was circumspect in what he wrote about in terms of anything that would have been helpful to the enemy. Again, [they were] personal observations. I remember particularly, he had his feet frozen at the Battle of the Bulge and spent a lot of time in hospitals. The exposure for the first time to integrated facilities in the Army, the hospitals of course were integrated by a matter of practicality and exigencies of the service, as they say, even before the total armed forces were integrated....

P: This newspaper has an unusual history. I understand that this is the only paper in

the state that has been run by four generations of one family. So in the early years, Lloyd was the publisher, Loyal was the editor, and Richard was involved as business manager. Is that correct?

F: At the time that my Dad and his brother Richard and Granddad and Great-Granddad were here, I believe that Great-Granddad carried the title of president of the company, Granddad was publisher, Dad was editor or managing editor, I am not sure which term he used. On a small paper, it does not make a whole heck of a lot of difference. Richard, his brother, was business manager, also sports editor, but principally business manager.

P: I also understand that their wives worked at the newspaper as well.

F: Absolutely. Great-Granddad's wife did not work at the newspaper, she was an educator. Granddad's wife, Cricket... came in. It was the classic story, weekly publishers have been using this scam for years. Well, somebody is on vacation for a couple of weeks, honey, would you come in and fill in? That two weeks stretched into a career as a society editor. My mother, Louise Frisbie, came into the business on a regular basis when Dad was drafted, to help out during World War II. She not only was in effect managing editor of the paper, basically she was the news staff of the paper, but I believe she was also stringing probably for the *Tampa Tribune* and possibly for the *Lakeland Ledger* at that time. I do not know if that was represented to her as a temporary arrangement, but I do not doubt that it was, because that was the way we usually pull these scams. My wife came into the business back when I was in the National Guard and was drilling Wednesday nights.... She came in to just proofread on Wednesday nights to help us out a little bit. She is now our head bookkeeper,

corporate treasurer, and number-two person in the business for what is now four newspapers that we own.

P: Talk a little bit about your mother, Louise Frisbie, because she is not only well-known as a correspondent; she wrote several books, the most well-known, I think, is *Peace River Pioneers*.

F: Probably that would be the best-known. Yes, Mother started a second career... as an avocation in the sense that she never got rich at it. It remains a very active role for her. In 1969, *The Polk County Democrat* started a Fort Meade edition.... So Mother began writing a series of historical articles on the town of Fort Meade and discovered that she had a real love of history, even greater than she realized. So from that she wrote a book called *Peace River Pioneers*, which is about the history of the four counties which abut the Peace River: Polk, Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto....

P: In 1962, you finished at FSU [Florida State University] and come onboard as managing editor. At that point, what other family members were still working with the newspaper?

F: [I] did my two years of active Army duty, came back in 1964 and joined the staff as managing editor. That was just a few months after my grandfather had died. Great-Granddad died when I was in high school, so Dad was editor, his brother Richard was a business manager. My grandmother had [retired] by then, so it would have been the two of them, just the two brothers, Loyal and Richard....

P: Did you ever think about any other career?

F: I never seriously considered it.... I grew up in the newspaper business. My parents did everything they could to dissuade me from going into it, because they did

not want me to feel like I had some sort of family obligation to carry on, then later told me when I made that decision they were delighted. They also had a clear conscience because at every turn, they said, you do not have to go into the newspaper business, consider other fields.

P: In 1969, you purchased the Fort Meade paper. Why did you decide to do that and how has that paper done?

F: ... It has been excellent as a part of the total operation. We would be hard put to publish a freestanding twice-a-week broadsheet newspaper in a town of 5,000 people with a very small merchant district. But as a part of the entire operation, extending the advertising reach of *The Polk County Democrat* and giving us the ability to cover for instance, county-seat news.... It allows us to give something to the community that the community would not be able to support with the volume of advertising that is down there.

P: In 1971, you get an offset-press. How did that affect how you put out the paper?

F: Dramatically. The letter-press, or commonly called hot-type, was basically a technology not terribly unlike [what produced] the old Gutenberg Bibles. The majority of type was no longer set by hand, although we still set a lot of headlines and a lot of grocery ads in handset-type. At that time, a typesetter or a Linotype operator, a person who operated a Linotype machine, that was an apprenticeable trade. The apprenticeship period was five years. [When we began setting type on] computers, the training period for typesetter dropped from five years to about two weeks.... The materials that we used when we were hot-type, everything was cast in lead slugs. In order to pick up that stuff, basically you had to have the upper-body strength of a man.

Printers, almost 100 percent at that time, were male. We went from a totally male production force to one which became largely female because no longer was [heavy-]lifting a responsibility. It was also considerably safer.... When I was working as a teenager down at our old plant, [I] became, among other things, a stereotypist. This is [a] person who cast printing-plates in lead. You did this by scooping melted lead out [of an iron pot] and pouring it into a machine.... I remember the guy who trained me said, you learn to spit real fast and real accurate. It was just an occupational hazard that little droplets of hot lead, melted lead, would land on your hands and arms.... We were lucky we never had anybody seriously injured, but there was that degree of danger involved....

P: In 1997, you began to publish the *Polk County Times*. Tell me what that is and why you started publishing it.

F: *Polk County Times* is my wild idea that only I thought would succeed. I was driving home..., and I said, Mary, I am going to start a new newspaper, it is going to be modeled after *Army Times* and *Air Force Times* and *Navy Times* and *Federal Times*. It is going to be called *Polk County Times*. She looked at me like I was crazy. I said, it is going to be a niche publication for county government.... Polk County is a county of almost 500,000 people. So even though we are the third largest, and a rather distant third-largest town in Polk County, we are the county seat. Somebody was saying at this economic-development committee meeting, I wish my business could reach those thousands of people who work here in the daytime and go home and night. The little lightbulb lit over my head said, well, Bozo, is that not the business you are supposed to be in? Putting merchants in touch with their customers and potential customers?

... I announced it to the staff, they thought I was crazy – only a few of them actually told me so, but it was clear from the expressions on the faces of the others. The beauty of *Polk County Times* is that we do a great deal of county-seat, county-government coverage: both county commission and school board, the sheriff's office, other county agencies. So basically the reporting was already done. The merchant community was very interested in reaching these county employees. Neither the county commission nor the school board had a viable house organ or employee newsletter....

It was a relatively easy sell, to sell them on the idea that we would like to publish this publication, we would like for you to distribute it through your mail-rooms, so our circulation costs are minimal, because there are no carriers to be paid and no postal bills to be paid.... The school board has been an advertiser in the paper since the first issue. The county commission, or county government, has been an advertiser in it since sometime in the first year. Just in the last two or three issues, [the] Polk County sheriff's office, which was also looking for a way to communicate with their 1,000-plus, maybe 2,000-plus [employees] saw the value in using this as their internal communications [vehicle]....

P: So this goes out monthly and there is no charge?

F: Once a month. That is correct, it is free circulation.

P: So how do you make money?

F: We make money by charging about fifty percent more for advertising in this than we do in our paid-circulation papers. That was one of the [reasons] that the ad department looked at me like I was crazy. I said, I know that you are wondering, are we going to be selling in competition to ourselves? The answer is, yes, of course we are,

because there are [only] so many advertising dollars out there, but we are not going to do it on the basis of price. We charged a premium rate of approximately \$10 a column-inch. We have contracts and stuff, but it washes out about \$10 a column-inch for *Polk County Times*. At that time, that was a good fifty percent higher than the rates for our paid circulation newspaper....

P: So you were not crazy?

F: Yes, I was crazy, but we were successful nonetheless.

P: In 1998, you purchased the Lake Wales paper. Why did you publish that paper and how has that worked out?

F: The *Lake Wales News* is five years older than the *Polk County Democrat*. *Lake Wales News* was founded in 1926 and had been under the management of father and son of the same family, just two generations for that many years, from 1926 until 1998. The Brice family at *Lake Wales News* and the Frisbie family have been friends for two generations on their side and three or four generations on our side. We had printed the *Lake Wales News* for the better part of twenty years.... Owen Brice had a stroke and his three adult daughters came to me and said, would you help us keep the newspaper alive until we can decide what to do with it? I said, yes, I will be glad to do that. They said, we will have to pay you. I said, oh no, this is a labor-of-love for Owen, he would have done the same thing for us. Incidentally, when you decide what you are going to do with it, I hope you will give us first option.

There were basically two possibilities, sell it or close it. They came to me because they did not want to close it, this was on a Friday. They said, would you come over Monday morning and let the staff know that you are going to be helping us run [the

paper]? I said, no, the staff needs to know this now. It has been three weeks and I know that they are wondering from day to day what is going on. So I walked in and said, hi, I am S.L. Frisbie, I have not met you folks yet, I have no authority, I cannot sign checks, I cannot hire and fire, but I am going to help you keep the *Lake Wales News* going. Anything is open to negotiation, except we will not cease publication. Within a very few weeks, the daughters had convinced Owen's wife, Laverne, who was his partner in the business, that the smart thing to do was to sell.... Finally, we did negotiate a purchase as of close of business, March 31, or as I sometimes said, [on] April Fool's Day of 1998, I became owner of the *Lake Wales News*.... I said, I am not interested in buying a shell, I want to buy an operating newspaper, so all the members of the staff did stay on....

P: How is the Lake Wales paper different in content from the *Polk County Democrat*?

F: [Our] Lake Wales [paper], even more so than [our] Bartow [paper], is oriented one hundred percent to community news. [In] Bartow, not only do we have the community of Bartow, but being a county-seat newspaper, county government is the biggest business in town. We have a great deal of coverage of county government. In Lake Wales, we run a few county-government stories, generally though, only those which have specific applicability to Lake Wales. Also in Bartow, having [a] substantially [greater] number of pages per week, we run a lot of features....

P: If you look at all four of the papers, what is your main source of advertising? Do you get a lot of local restaurants and car dealers? You said you do not get grocery advertising anymore.

F: Right, in Bartow the only grocery advertising that we have is Publix inserts [and]

we get retailers, auto dealers, [and] some amount of chain-store advertising. The nature of our business is that weeklies rely to a great degree on locally-owned independent businesses, where the local manager is, in all likelihood, the local owner and makes his own decisions. The chain stores to a large degree, believe in daily newspapers, no matter where the daily newspaper is. They just simply do not believe in weekly newspapers, in many, many cases....

P: I would assume most people in the county read the *Tampa Tribune* or the *St. Pete Times* or the *Lakeland Ledger* as a daily newspaper. They also get news on television. Why is a weekly newspaper important?

F: To me, the role of the weekly newspaper, and I have said this many times to readers and anybody else who cares, that we do not try to be a little *Tampa Tribune*. We can not begin to compete with the *Tampa Tribune* or the *Lakeland Ledger* on the scale that they can in covering statewide, national, and international news, or for that matter, news of the total county. What we can do, and what the nearest large daily newspaper cannot do, is to cover, if not everything that happens in our communities, a whole lot more than anybody else can cover. We can and do cover civic-club meetings, and Chamber of Commerce luncheons, and print substantially more detail in weddings and engagements and social activities, large volumes of school news in all three of our community publications.... We have a great deal of church news, local features, much more in-depth coverage of city commission in each of our three communities than the dailies can devote space to. What I tell people is that everybody ought to read a daily newspaper. I read two. But you also, to really have a thorough understanding of what is going on in your community and to read about what your friends and neighbors are

doing, [read] the community newspaper. The... weekly newspaper is the only place you are going to get that degree of local coverage.

P: How do you go about deciding which candidate to endorse for political office and what impact do you think that endorsement has on the voter?

F: We decide. That is a classic editorial “we,” the editorial board is me and if we have any other member of the staff who wants to sit [in] on the interview, they are welcome to do so. I almost never get any takers on that. Occasionally the school-board reporter will sit in with the school-board candidates. Occasionally, Dad will sit in, but not often. We make the decision, at the risk of sounding over-simplistic, based on who we think will do the best job. The name of the paper is *The Polk County Democrat*,... [But] we have endorsed every Republican candidate [for President] since... [1964], both when Dad was making the decisions and when I made the decisions – some years with more enthusiasm and some years with less enthusiasm. Dad and I are both conservative in our political positions, [and believe] that government is best which governs least. A little bit of an over-simplistic comment, but we believe generally that it is better for people to make their own decisions than for government to make decisions for them.

In local races, the [party affiliation] is barely even a consideration because, especially when you get closer home than the state offices and senatorial candidacies, the party labels are really a matter of convenience. Right now, Polk County is voting about 55-45 [percent] Republican for everything, so the politicians [who] can hear thunder and see lightning are registering Republican.

We try to interview every candidate. We send out an invitation to every candidate to come in for an interview. Those who do not come in, we consider them even so. I

generally spend one to two hours with each candidate. I have said many times that we endorse not because we are any smarter than anybody else, but because in a county of a half a million people, there are not many people who have the opportunity to sit down one-on-one with the candidate for an hour or two hours at a time. We do. That is the value we see in our endorsement to the readers....

P: In local races, the endorsement is probably important, because I doubt very much that the average voter knows anything about judges at all. They probably know the candidates for governor and president, but they would not know much about some of those offices, would they?

F: That is correct.... As far as the importance, I asked a veteran campaign-manager that one time exactly what you asked me, just how important are our endorsements? His or her response was, considerably less important than the candidates think they are, but they want them anyway.... I have had people tell me, the people that absolutely know nothing about the candidates will tend to just accept our endorsements for the reason they do not know anything else. I have often said, the bumper-sticker on your next door neighbor's car or the yard sign across the street from your house is also an endorsement. If you know and trust the judgment of the person driving the car or the person who lives in that house, that is a bona-fide endorsement. Billboards to me are meaningless in terms of anything other than just name-recognition. I think [our endorsements probably have] some impact. I think it is probably less than most of us in the business would like to think. In the presidential and probably even gubernatorial races, I doubt that we sway one vote in a hundred. People know who they want for president, they know who they want for governor, but we have still got to go out and

give it our best shot.

P: What would you consider to be the most important functions of this newspaper?

F: From an editorial-leadership position, I think that it is important for us to speak out, to take editorial positions on important issues, even if and perhaps, even especially, if it is not a particularly popular position to take. Which is not to say we do so every week....

P: I noticed that in today's paper, there is an issue that is probably rather controversial. I understand the county government wants to post the Ten Commandments.

F: The County Commission was planning to post the Ten Commandments as an historical document, thereby attempting to get away from First Amendment issues. I said... that the moral precepts expressed in the Ten Commandments..., about half of which are part of the legal codes of every civilized country, thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal, thou shall not commit adultery, bearing false witness, perjury. I think it is a shame that in order to post these fundamental moral values that we have to pretend that it is not a religious document, that it is an historical document. I will tell you that although I feel that is the case, that is not a big issue with me. That is not something I would go to the mat with somebody over. [The] *Lakeland Ledger* incidentally said just the opposite, [said the county is] heading for a legal hassle for no particular purpose....

P: What is the hardest thing about running a weekly newspaper?

F: Oh, let me count the ways. Probably the biggest challenge, particularly [as] an independent weekly newspaper, (we are not part of a group unless you consider that our four papers are a group), ... is recruiting and training people. We do not have a

farm-team system. If you are a *New York Times*, or a Gannett, or a Knight-Ridder, you have got the small papers out there where you not only are training the editors and publishers of your big papers, but you are training pressmen. [The] hardest job I have to fill is pressman.... [W]e are not hiring people away from the *New York Times* chain on the basis of the money we pay. To a lesser extent, [that is also a problem] with the reporters. Almost everyone who starts with us starts as entry-level and we train them. I enjoy training young people and new people in the business....

It would certainly be nice sometimes to be able to hire someone who has five years of experience as an advertising salesman or five years of experience running a press, or three years of experience as a reporter. But the financial realities are that the weekly field is an entry-level into newspaper journalism. The hard realities are that the income-levels of weekly newspapers, with relatively few exceptions, are not nearly those of the daily newspapers. What we can and do attempt to offer is a very family-friendly operation. If the kids are sick, we understand that there are more important things than coming to work some days. We try to offer a sense of participation for employees. The reporter, [who would] have to write obits for five years on a daily newspaper, will be writing front-page stories [for us] in his or her second week on the job here. We genuinely involve the staff in making decisions....

P: Since you have been involved with the newspaper, 1964 to the present, how has your audience changed?

F: ... [O]ur core readership historically has been the folks [who] grew up here, went to school here, raised their kids here, and would not miss reading an issue of the *Polk County Democrat*. They come in [after] they have been on vacation [to pick up back-

issues] or they have it sent up to the mountains in the summer because they just would not miss an issue. As we become a more transient society, and that certainly is the case with our markets, the change in our readership is that those core readers are dying off and the new readers are here one year and next year they are off somewhere else. My perception, at least, is that is our biggest challenge in maintaining readership is trying to appeal to the person who is really only interested in what is the latest thing going on in Afghanistan and really does not care [about].. the big issue in Bartow....

P: What is your circulation now?

F: Combined circulation of *The Polk County Democrat* and *The Fort Meade Leader* is in the neighborhood of 6,000..... [W]e are probably down about ten percent from our all-time high....

P: How has Bartow changed since 1964? I am not just talking about the transients, but the town itself.

F: Within the merchant community, the biggest change is that there are fewer and fewer locally-owned sole proprietorships, more and more chain and franchise operations. The growth of both city government and county government has been geometrical in relation to the growth of the community. One of the biggest changes, and it certainly is not limited to Bartow, but in my opinion the biggest change in Bartow in the years that I have been covering here is the coming of the integration of the school system. With the integration of the school system has come, in a large part, the integration of society. Integration not only in the numerical mixing of races, but in a genuine sense of camaraderie, friendship, and understanding which has come about because of the forced integration at the school system. We have become much more

empathetic and understanding of each other.

P: There are not many independent newspapers in the state of Florida. How have you managed to avoid being taken over by Knight-Ridder or *New York Times* or a larger conglomerate?

F: Just say no.... [T]en or twenty years ago, when there was a frenzy to buy up newspapers, we would get a serious inquiry every few months.... It was terribly tempting to take the money and run, but to some extent, I think the nature of community journalism, certainly the nature of the Frisbie family, is that we have always wanted to be independent. We were more interested in working for ourselves and making our [own] decisions than we were in getting rich.

P: Also, from what I understand from talking with other newspaper publishers, if you are part of let us say, Knight-Ridder, they are going to make certain demands on what profit level you achieve. They may not interfere with your editorial policy, but in order to achieve the bottom line, the chain papers do less investigative journalism, they have to fire some of the people who work there, and they, in the view of some critics, do not turn out as good a newspaper because it has now become a bottom-line business as opposed to a newspaper trying to serve the community. Do you think that is a fair assessment?

F: Absolutely. Several years ago, I was moderator of a panel at [the] Florida Press Association. I believe it was four publishers who had sold to the chains, and in each case they were community papers, I think all [were] weeklies. Three of the four of them said that they were very disappointed with how it had turned out. Although they had come out very well financially, as I recall three of the four of them had left the papers....

Contrary to the public perception that the *New York Times* buys newspapers so that it can dictate editorial policy and determine who is going to be the next president of the United States, the *New York Times* buys newspapers to make money on them. Yes, there are [financial] pressures. I tell folks that come to work here that you will never make as much money working at *The Polk County Democrat* as you could make working for government or working for the phosphate mines, or even working for the daily newspapers. But since 1931, when we were established, we have never ever laid off an employee, and it is my hope to retire with that boast intact. We have fired some people, but it has always been on the basis of job performance or whatever. We have never had to say, Joe, you have done a great job for the last five years, but business is down, so this will be your last paycheck.

P: When you retire from the paper, is there going to be another Frisbie to come along and run the business?

F: My children are all aware of that opportunity, [but] thus far, none of them [has] availed themselves of that opportunity. One daughter and son-in-law have said, keep asking us before you make any irrevocable decisions. I have told our supervisors this, [that] my first choice would be that my family would take over the paper. My second choice would be that somehow the employees could get together through an ESOP [employee stock ownership/option plan] or whatever, form a corporation, buy the paper. Our third choice would be that someone in the community with a continuing interest in the community and in the newspaper would buy the paper. My fourth and final choice would be to sell out to a chain. You can sell out to a chain any time. That is the easy way out and probably the more profitable way out.

P: What is your view of *USA Today* and do you see that kind of newspaper, that format, as the future of publishing in America?

F: I think there has been a lot of imitation of *USA Today*, most notably the weather maps. But I recall hearing, either John Quinn [senior vice president and chief news executive, Gannett Co.] or Al Neuharth [founder, *USA Today*; vice president, Gannett Co.] [speak] to the Florida Press Association one time. He said, they call us McNewspaper, I wish they would quit stealing our McNuggets. A great deal of the format, particularly in the daily newspapers and to a much lesser extent in the weekly newspapers, is taken straight from *USA Today*. The use of graphics, pie charts, big color weather maps, the shadow-box format that they use to set [highlight] their stories, the idea of a dominant front page story as opposed to the major story of the day, it is the issue du jour, if you please. I see that more and more in a lot of the dailies....

USA Today believes in a high story count of short stories. One of my approaches, and part of my theory on what we can do differently in our community is, we can devote thirty or forty column-inches to a story of local importance in almost every issue.... In that sense, we are different from the *USA Today* approach, which is lots of short stories to the point. I am not sure we are right. Certainly I am not one to lecture Al Neuharth on how to be a success in newspaper publishing.

P: What is the future of the newspaper as we know it today? Are we going to eventually go to electronic newspapers?

F: I do not believe so and partly because I hope we will not, and partly because I remember my dad saying that when AM radio came along that was going to be the death of newspapers, and when FM radio came along that was going to be the death of

AM radios and newspapers, when TV came along, that was going to be the death of AM and FM radio and newspapers, when the news crawlers across the bottom of your cable channel came along, that was going to be the death of newspapers. I think that the printed word is going to be around for a long, long time to come. I know that we are going to be scrambling harder and harder to hold our share of the market, or even to hold a sufficient share to remain profitable....

P: What have you done in hiring minorities for the paper?

F: Not much, quite honestly. We have interviewed, I really want to say that we made a conscious effort to hire minorities when we have the opportunity to do so. We do not get that many minority applicants and the hard truth of the matter is, particularly at the professional level, the journalist level, that is to say someone with a four-year degree, the dailies are going to grab up talented minorities just as fast as they can and they are going to pay them fifty percent more than we would... I have made, as I say, a conscious effort to try to get more, to be more reflective of the community, and have not had a whole lot of success.

P: What do you want to accomplish in the remaining part of your journalistic career?

F: To a certain extent, continuing to do those things which I feel like we do reasonably well. I talked about the importance of strong editorial leadership where it is needed and thorough coverage of the news, as opposed to a once-over-lightly, which the nearest metro-daily can do in any small town. From my personal standpoint, doing everything I can to ensure a smooth transition to new management, whether it be one or more of my children, or some new owner....

To some extent, to maintain the quality and the standards that we have

maintained. With my father not in the greatest of health and being eighty-six years old and wanting to slow down a little bit, we currently have only one generation of the family actively involved in the newspaper management, which I guess is probably the first time that is happened since the paper was established....

End of interview