

UFLC 72

Interviewee: W. George Allen

Interviewer: Joel Buchanan

Date: July 22, 1996

B: This is Joel Buchanan and it is July 22, 1996. I am in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, about to interview W. George Allen for the University of Florida Oral History Project. We are at the offices of W. George Allen. Attorney Allen is the first black graduate of the University of Florida. Good afternoon, Attorney Allen.

A: Good afternoon. How are you?

B: Fine, thank you. How are you?

A: I am great.

B: Tell me please what the "W" stands for in your name?

A: Willie.

B: Was that your father's name?

A: No. My grandmother named me Willie George.

B: Attorney Allen, tell me something about your early years: where you were born; if you do not mind, the year when you were born; and the names of your parents, sir.

A: I was born in Sanford, Florida, on March 3, 1936. My mother's name was Lessie Williams and my father's name was Fletcher Allen.

B: Where were they from, sir?

A: My mother was a native Floridian and my father was born in Pineview, Georgia. My mother was born in Sanford, Florida.

B: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No.

B: So you were the only child?

A: Yes.

B: Tell us something about your childhood, something you can remember very

distinctly.

A: I grew up as an only child with my mother and my stepfather Bruce Brown in Sanford. My mother and my father never married and my stepfather married my mother when I was four. So he is the only father that I have ever known and grew up with. I had a very happy childhood growing up in a segregated Sanford, Florida, where we had separate and unequal schools. I was somewhat of a maverick even in the early years, attending Midway Junior High School. I got in trouble there when I challenged the white power structure and the system. We had boycotts when I was in eighth grade and we had fights in the fields in seventh grade.

B: What do you mean by fights in the fields?

A: It was a strictly segregated community in Sanford, where I lived. Every able-bodied black male worked in the fields. I started working in the celery fields in Sanford when I was in fifth grade. Percy Lee, a friend of mine who lived across the ditch bank, sassed a white man. Percy was in the eighth grade and I was in seventh and we almost had a riot in the field because the white man wanted to kill Percy and we would not let him. The old cracker's name was Red Tile. He started crying because we would not let him get to Percy and we told him he would have to whip everybody to get to Percy. We all circled around Percy and put him in the center. My mother and father were there too. All of us stood together and did not let Red Tile get near Percy. Of course, everyone said Percy would never live to be an old man, but Percy became the executive director of the Urban League in Palm Beach County and died four or five years ago of a heart attack, while fighting for the rights of blacks in Palm Beach County.

B: Really?

A: Yes. Percy also graduated from Florida A&M University a year before me. He and I were black brothers.

B: Were you a good student?

A: Yes, I studied hard. I have always read a lot. I had some great black teachers. I had some sorry ones too, but a few of them inspired me. Mrs. Refoe, in sixth grade, had a reading contest. I won the contest because I read more books than anybody else. So I developed a love of reading and I still do a lot of it. I had a few excellent teachers to help me and inspire me.

B: Excellent. What year did you finish high school, sir?

A: 1954.

B: At that point did you receive scholarships to go on to college?

A: Not a one. All the black teachers at Crooms Academy discouraged me from going to college.

B: Why?

A: At that time, we were talking about separate but equal education; it was separate but never equal. The power structure at the school decided that I came from the wrong side of the tracks. Nobody in my family had ever gone to school. They decided that Audrey Mosley, whose father was the undertaker, should get the Lewis State Scholarship that year. She had graduated some three or four years before me from high school and did not qualify then, but she got the Lewis State Scholarship in 1954. There was another young lady, named Annette Jones; they decided Annette was to be the valedictorian. Both Annette and Audrey got the two scholarships. So nobody encouraged me to go to college from high school. I just ended up, kind of in a back-handed way, going to Florida A&M at the last minute.

B: Let me ask you a question. You said this young lady had finished three years earlier, but she got that scholarship the year you graduated?

A: Yes. They called me in and said, you do not want to be a teacher, do you? I said, no. They said, so fine. Do not apply for the Lewis State Scholarship. They manipulated me and the whole system. The black powers also knew how to segregate and discriminate with great ability and still do.

B: Was this a black public school?

A: Yes.

B: What was the name of it, please?

A: Crooms Academy High School.

B: So you ended up enrolling into the Florida A&M University. How did you decide to do that? How did you get there?

A: One of my good friends, a fellow named Charles Merritt and I left Sanford and went to New York. Charles and I went there and worked to save money and to decide what we would do. He had a football scholarship to Morris Brown [a black college in Atlanta, Georgia] and he told me, you ought to go to college. You are a better student than I am. I said, well, I have no money and I would not know how to get into college. So he got a piece of lined paper and wrote out

an application to Florida A&M. We made a copy of my transcript and he sent my grades and this little piece of lined paper to FAMU. His parents had gone to college and he said he was an expert. He knew how to get into college and he knew that Florida A&M University, a college for negroes, could not deny me. And he said, you just go there. I will send this letter and it will be all right.

So like a fool, I went to Florida A&M University and I got in line to register and the registrar, Mr. Thorpe, came out and said, are you Willie George Allen? And I said, yes. And he said, I have been waiting to see if you would show up; I have your letter; come here. Mr. Thorpe took me out of the line, into the office, and he made the IBM cards I needed in order to register because they did not have them ready for me. That was how I got into Florida A&M University.

B: So the letter Charles Merritt wrote did get there?

A: The letter got there and they waited to see if the fool would follow the letter. And he did. When I got there, Mr Thorpe helped me and then my registration was completed. He asked, what was your major in? I said, pre-med. I want to be a doctor. I took some tests. Then they gave me a list of books and I asked, what is this? And Mr. Thorpe said, you have to buy books. I said, what? Charles did not tell me about books. I did not have any money for books. I tried to get money for books but could not, so I talked to some of the football players; they were given books. I agreed to help them with their lessons if they let me read their books. Most of them did not read books anyway; a couple of guys could not even read. They were on Jake Gaither's football team.

B: Was Charles Merritt at Florida at that time?

A: No. Charles was at Morris Brown [College] where he had a scholarship, but he wrote to Florida A&M on my behalf.

B: Did the registrar ever say that this person's family was important, was that the reason they made the decision to admit you?

A: No. He said he got this unusual letter and he would just hold it to see if this person would show up.

B: How was the first year for you?

A: Great. I enjoyed it, I loved it, I did well. I changed my major though.

B: To what did you change your major?

A: I changed my major to political science. I figured I really did not want to be a

doctor, I wanted to be a lawyer.

B: Let's digress back for a moment. Was there anything outstanding that stays in your mind about your high school or your school years in Sanford?

A: Yes. In junior high school I was president of the Student Government Association, the first one at the Midway Elementary and Junior High School. I had shown some leadership ability. I got elected and did well. Then at Crooms Academy I was president of the Student Government Association, the first one, and I enjoyed that tenure. I was the salutatorian of the class, but there was almost a riot because I was not selected to be the valedictorian. Kids, especially Charles Merritt, my old buddy, was mad and wanted to boycott graduation unless they changed their decision about who was to be valedictorian. I said, no, it does not matter. I did not have any money to go to college anyway. So I was the salutatorian and Annette Jones was the valedictorian.

B: Should it have been just the opposite?

A: My grades were better.

B: Better than Annette's?

A: Yes.

B: Was Annette Jones from the right family?

A: Yes. We had to take the high school test at that time. I did better than anybody and for the first time in the history of Crooms, they did not announce who was number one on the high school test.

B: They did not announce the number one person?

A: Did not. They had a supervisor of education for blacks in the county. Her husband and I worked together at the local dry cleaners. He told me that, he said, your scores were the highest, but, for political reasons, they did not want to publish them this year. But, he said, do not say that I told you, but you had the best score of all the high school graduates.

B: What did that do to you?

A: I did not mind. I did not care because no one had encouraged me to go to college and I was glad to get out of high school. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school and that was a milestone. I just had no immediate plans about what to do with my life. I was secure in the knowledge that I had

done well. I was a little mad about it, but there was nothing I could do. Apparently, the school teachers, the principal, and the people who ran the school were convinced that I was a hoodlum and that I was not worthy of going to college and that I will not amount to anything in life. I did not challenge their assumptions.

B: You said hoodlum. Were you a behavior problem?

A: I got into fights and stuff like that, but not a behavior problem.

B: So you were just a "bad boy?"

A: Yes. A young boy with a lot of energy [who] liked the girls.

B: With all the activities you managed in school and with your grades, the political influence within the school was so significant that they just could not allow you to have that honor that you deserved?

A: Some of them got together, and these were all black folk, all black folk, and said, no.

B: I understand it, because I am from the wrong side of the tracks too. I was not supposed to be at the University of Florida. And when I got there it was like, what are *you* doing *here*? I understand that. It is just amazing to hear you talk about it so openly. You were at Florida A&M now, you got there through Charles, was it difficult for you?

A: No, not really. After I got there, everything was fine. I learned the system. I went in and talked to the dean of students, told him I had to have a job. I was poor, did not have any money. He ran me out a couple of times and I went in and had a sit-in. I just sat in his office and said, I am going to stay here until you give me a job. And I did; I just sat there. At the end of the day he said, time for me to go home. And I said, goodbye. He said, you are crazy. And I answered, I know that, but I need a job. I have to stay here, now that I am in college. I do not have any money. So he gave me a job.

B: What was that job?

A: Cleaning up the girls' dormitories. I was the man on the hall. He thought it was degrading.

B: And you thought it was delightful?

A: It was delightful! And I made money; I got paid.

B: Did you?

A: Yes.

B: Were you paid by check or did they take care of your expenses at college?

A: I got a check. I got a check every month and it was enough to take care of me. I saved and after the first semester, I moved off campus. I did not have enough money to stay on campus, so I moved off campus and survived. I hustled; I just kept making enough to get back in.

B: Were your mother or father ever able to send much to you while you were in school?

A: Not much. They did what they could. They supplemented me.

B: While you were at Florida A&M, were you in any activities?

A: I was in everything.

B: Everything?

A: Yes. I was an Alpha [black fraternity member]. I was president of Alpha in my senior year; I was also involved in student government, NAACP, the YMCA, the Baptist Student Union, and ROTC.

B: So you were an all-rounded student?

A: Oh, yes.

B: And in what year did you graduate, sir?

A: 1958.

B: 1958. Is there anything that stands out in your mind about your years as an undergrad at Florida A&M?

A: I remember I also went into advanced ROTC, because they paid ninety cents a day and I needed the money.

B: Ninety cents a day?

A: Yes. \$27.90 a month. I also became campus representative for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and gave out the little four-packs of cigarettes. They paid

me \$25 a month. I got a raise, I think, up to \$30 a month. Also, I was promoted from the girls' dormitory to the post office. It was a grueling job because I had to open the post office at 7:30 every morning, rain or shine.

B: And you were there to do that?

A: Yes. So I had three sources of income in my junior and senior years; I had the post office, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, and I had ROTC.

B: So those represented earnings coming in for you?

A: Yes.

B: Do you remember anything other than work about your college years, anything that was delightful for you?

A: My college years *were* great. We had a fraternity. [We were] very active in student government [and that] was during the heavy days of boycotts, when we boycotted the public transportation in Tallahassee in order to integrate the public transportation system.

B: So you were involved in all those activities?

A: Yes. I was involved with the NAACP. I also met Virgil Hawkins, a black student who from 1949 to 1958 led in the fight that challenged the Florida state law that prohibited blacks from attending white state institutions, and Horace Hill, when they came up [to Tallahassee] to get ready for the forays into the Supreme Court of Florida, to challenge the white power structure that was trying to keep Virgil out. I got a chance to see some of that in action.

B: So you met the Virgil Hawkins, who was denied admission to the University of Florida?

A: Yes. At that time in the 1950s, from 1954 to about 1958, he was in and out of both the federal court and the state court, trying to get admitted to the University of Florida or to the university system. He filed lawsuits against the old state Board of Control, which was in charge of public education in Florida.

B: You graduated from Florida A&M in 1958. What did you do then, sir?

A: I had a degree in political science with a minor in economics. I also got a commission as a second lieutenant in army intelligence. So since I had two years to do in the army, I went into army intelligence at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Maryland. I stayed in the army for two years. After basic training,

we went through some advanced courses. At Fort Holabird, while I was at army intelligence school, for the first time I really competed with white kids. Most of the kids were from Harvard and Yale and Columbia and the eastern schools. When we first started out, [there was] one young man from the University of Mississippi and one from Mercer [University, at Macon, Georgia]. The white kids from the South were crunched out.

They then selected the top 10 percent to keep going, to become special agents for army intelligence. I was the only black in that course and I was also selected of the top 10 percent to go on in intelligence. So I finally realized for the first time in my life that white people were dumb and competition with them was nothing to be feared. I was just as smart as any white person I ever met in my life. It was kind of a wake up call.

I think from a social standpoint it taught me some of the social skills, how people get along and how they live. I lived with whites for the first time. I went to the officer's club where they drank mixed drinks. I had never had that experience before. Also, they were eating in courses. In my hometown we had very few restaurants and in those everything was piled on the plate. But when I went to the officer's club and I ordered dinner, they brought me out the soup. I said, where is the rest of my food? They said, sir, here we eat in courses. So it kind of forced me to learn how to live. I thought that was really great. I enjoyed the army. Also, we had to hand out business cards. We had to call on the general and present our calling cards and stand around and make small talk with the general, and the rest of the staff, and learn social graces and how to go and stand in receiving lines. It was quite an awakening for me to compete with these so-called "blue bloods" and to find out that they were like everybody else. There were some smart ones and some dumb ones. There were some that did not care for me and some, quite frankly, I did not care for.

B: Would you explain to me what army intelligence is, sir?

A: After we went through our course, we did undercover work. We investigated people who engaged in sabotage and subversive activities. We had to buy all these uniforms and then we graduated. They told me to report to California with civilian clothes. So I got a little snub-nosed pistol and I do not know if it was intentional or not, but they gave me a purple Chevrolet to drive. Then I wore civilian clothes; I investigated espionage, subversive activity, [and] sabotage, for the United States government. I worked with other agencies, like the FBI and the CIA.

B: During this period of your training, did you find any hesitation to accept you, since you were a black, or were you totally accepted?

A: No, I was not totally accepted. I had problems. Fort Holabird is on the outskirts of Baltimore. I did not realize Baltimore was segregated. We would get tickets to the Baltimore Orioles baseball team at the time and the Baltimore Colts played there. We would go to the games and afterwards all the officers would go out for drinks and the people would not want to serve me and so some of these guys I went with would threaten to tear the place up and so they would end up serving me, but then I realized how Jim Crow Baltimore was. I also found out that just going above the Mason-Dixon line is never a guarantee that people are going to be civilized with regard to blacks. I found that some of those people, who were so-called "northerners," were worse than the so-called "southerners."

B: Was this your first time out of the South?

A: No. As I explained to you earlier, in Sanford everybody worked in the fields. [Since] celery was a winter crop, for the first three or four years of school, school was out in the winter for all the blacks, so they could work in the fields. School would sometimes take place in the summer and sometimes not. Many blacks would go north to work in the fields in upstate New York. So after, I guess, the sixth grade, my parents would go to New York to work in the summer and I would go with them. But they would always make me come home when school started, because they always said that they had plans for me and they wanted me to get my high school education. So I always came home and left my parents to work. But I would work in the fields in New York in the summer.

B: What kind of fields, sir? What were the crops?

A: Celery, potatoes, we picked cherries, we picked beans.

B: You mentioned that schools were closed in the winter. Was a school year in Sanford three months to six months?

A: I cannot remember what it was when I was in first grade and I do not know how many months. I know that most folks would work in the fields, and many of the kids in the first grade, kids I started out with in the first grade, just quit school and worked in the fields. Now, I can remember working when I was in sixth grade and making \$22.50 per week. I guess that translates [to] around \$4.50 a day. We worked in the fields from early in the morning. We started around 7:30 [and] we broke for thirty minutes for lunch. Then we stopped work about 6:00, and we came home, bathed, ate, and got ready to go to bed, because we had to be up the next morning. We would catch a truck that drove from Sanford to Zellwood, Florida, some thirty or forty miles, to go to work in the fields. As a youngster, I did that for days on end. I cut up my fingers. I still have cuts on my fingers from the knives.

B: I can imagine. Now, [when] you traveled to New York to the fields, how did you travel on those occasions?

A: That traveling was done on the back of a truck and we would put celery crates on the truck to sit on. We would have our clothing and sometimes we would pad the seats with pillows and stuff like that. We would also sleep on the truck. It would take two or three days to get there and we would stop in the woods overnight. Everyone would go to the woods, because there were no bathroom facilities to go to that would allow blacks. When we got north of the Mason-Dixon line, there were certain truck stops that would allow blacks, but not everywhere. Then we would go into the nicer little places to get food and things, but much of New York was still segregated.

B: So when you were in the military, you got a chance to see a different perspective and a different way of life that you never have been afforded before. And that left a crystal impression on your mind?

A: Yes. I could afford to live better too because I was making \$300 plus per month, which was more money than I have ever made before. Also, I lived in the bachelor officers' quarters and I was given a membership to the officers' club where I could eat and sign my name. I had never known a black to have a charge account or a charge card. When I was in Sanford, growing up, if I wanted to buy some clothing, I could not try on clothing downtown, so I had to go in and buy it. If I bought it, it was mine. I can remember in ninth grade, we put things on lay-a-way. There was no such thing as a charge account or going in and buying something, not paying, and walking out with it. You would put it on lay-a-way. I saw a pair of argyles; they were yellow. I can remember this vividly. I was in ninth grade and I saw these yellow argyle socks and I said, God, I have to have those. I went in and they were \$1.50. So I asked the guy if he would hold them for me? I wanted to put them on lay-a-way. I gave him a dime and he held them and every week I would go back and I would add a quarter of my own money. I kept doing this and finally I paid 50 cents and got them out. I wore them to church. I mean, those were some beautiful socks.

B: I bet they were. A dime held them for you?

A: A dime held them, but that was the South.

B: Did you happen to come back to Sanford during the time you were in the army?

A: Yes, I did. Between basic training and my going to California, I came back to Sanford to let my mother and father know that I was going to get married. I got married during the interim leave period, in December of 1958. I left Sanford, I went to Tallahassee, and I married my wife, Enid. I came back to Sanford with

my uniform and I stayed a couple of days; then I went up to Tallahassee and got married and then we headed to Alabama, to meet her folks, before reporting to Oakland, California.

B: Was the community very proud or surprised?

A: Proud, yes.

B: But not surprised?

A: I do not think they were surprised. These people, in the community where I lived, always expected big things of me. I can remember vividly, when I was less than four years old, playing in my cousin's yard, and my grandmother Mary talked to Ms. Emma and all the little old ladies. They would sit down after they had finished their chores and dipped snuff and gossiped. I would sit there playing marbles in the yard or whatever and my grandmother would say, boy, do not leave this yard. I sat there and I listened to them and I can remember my grandmother saying to Ms. Emma and all of them, I wonder if that boy will ever amount to anything. All of them [would] say, he is going to be all right. When she died, all of these little old ladies always encouraged me and told me, look, you stay in school. Your grandmother Mary would be proud of you. They always encouraged me. They knew, and they said, that she always had such high expectations. It kind of stayed with me, even until now. I still remember her saying, I wonder if that boy will ever amount to anything.

B: Do you think when she was asking that question she was literally saying, he will be somebody?

A: I think so, because she just doted on me and just did everything for me and just loved me to death. I just knew that I was going to do something to make her proud, because that was what she expected.

B: You did. You have made her very proud. What was your wife's full name?

A: Enid Carole Meadows.

B: Where did you meet her?

A: At Florida A&M.

B: Was she a student there?

A: Yes. I met her while I was cleaning up Diamond Hall. I was walking down the hall saying, man on the hall, so the girls would close their doors and would not

come out in the hallway unless they were dressed. She was studying; she was a nursing student. She said, come here man; she was kidding. So I walked in and stood at her door and said, yes, and shocked her to death. And she said, oh, I am sorry, I was kidding.

B: That was it?

A: That was how we met.

B: Really? And you married and went on to California and she went with you?

A: No. She was a year behind me, so she had less than a year to finish at FAMU.

B: Did she follow you?

A: Yes, she came on to California in June of 1959.

B: How long were you there?

A: I stayed there until June of 1960. During that period of time, Enid took and passed the California Medical Nursing Board, so she worked as a nurse there. That was around the time when it was announced that George Starke [first black student admitted to the University of Florida Law School, fall semester 1958], had been admitted to the University of Florida Law School. Starke was also from Sanford, Florida. His father was the only black doctor in Sanford. I did not know him very well, since I did not associate with doctors' children in any way, but I knew that he and his mother lived in Orlando, Florida. He stayed [at law school] less than a year. Then Regina Langston was admitted to the University of Florida Medical School and she did not last very long. I read this in Jet magazine and I said, we ought to go home. My wife laughed about it and thought I was crazy. I knew I would be getting out of the Army in July. I had a two-year commitment, from July 1958 to July 1960. I had never taken any time off, so I had some leave time coming. I wanted to keep that so I would get paid for it and so get enough money to get to law school.

My wife had one kid when we got married and I had two. She was divorced with one kid, and I had two kids born, before I got married, to two different young ladies, Pearl Higdon and Sharon Edwards, both from Sanford. My oldest was Timothy and my youngest was Frederick. All three kids came to Gainesville and lived with us. We already had a family, so we would need some money to get a place to stay in Gainesville.

I applied for law school during that period of time. I took the Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) at Berkeley. I applied at the University of California at

Berkeley, I applied to Harvard, I applied to the University of Florida, and FAMU. I heard from the University of California first [and I was] admitted. My wife was gratified. She said, great, I want to stay in California. My wife is from Alabama. This was her first time ever in California and mine too. It was a great place. We lived in Berkeley. I worked in San Francisco and she worked in Oakland and we had a great life. I said, let's wait, let's wait. Then I heard from Harvard. She said, well, if we cannot go to Berkeley, Harvard is a good choice. She told her sister and she was very happy that I had been admitted to Harvard Law School. I said, well, we have to wait. Then we heard from the University of Florida and I said, that is where we are going. She was mad. She said, why are we going to go back South? I said, darling, that is where the action is. We are going to stay in the South and that is where I want to go to school.

B: What do you mean by "the action?"

A: That was where all the integration was going on, the agitation, the quest for equality. When I was at A&M, Martin Luther King would come to Tallahassee to speak. My father-in-law knew Martin. My father-in-law is from Birmingham, Alabama. He was an official with the NAACP. So all of us were just caught up in the struggle. My wife said, you know, we do not have to go down there and be that close to it. I said, no darling, we want to go. We want to get in the action. So we drove back from California to Gainesville.

B: When you applied to the University of Florida, you applied to be in the South and to participate, you said, in the quest for equality; you were determined to get there. Was this because of the spark that had been started in your life when you were on campus at Florida A&M and in the NAACP and partaking in demonstrations, was it because you wanted to be a part of this?

A: Yes. It never occurred to me that they would not admit me. After all, this was a state school. Charles Merritt had told me that they had to take me.

B: Why was this a foregone conclusion?

A: Charles Merritt, my buddy who wrote the letter to FAMU, said, if you are a citizen of Florida and you want to go to a land grant school, they have to admit you; I mean, that was Charles Merritt 101.

B: But were you aware that Virgil had been denied entry?

A: Well, yes.

B: Why did you think you were different?

A: I just felt that they were going to admit me because I am Charles Merritt's friend. I had sent my letter to the University of Florida. I left off "race" on the application and did not send a picture. I got in. Later, one and one-half years after I was admitted, I met a clerk who said, when your application came in, I looked at it, I saw Florida A&M, but you met all the qualifications, so I just stamped "approved" without telling anybody. But I knew, this guy must be black. There was a lot of other stuff leading up to it, but after I got there, the dean of the law school [Frank T. Maloney] sent for me and said, we did not know you were coming. And I said, so what? Why the hell are you sending for me to tell me that? He said, I just want you to know that you are welcome. I said, bullshit. They were having a welcoming ceremony back in the auditorium and you send for me to tell me you did not know that I was coming and they are probably giving them the scoop on how to survive in this University and you got me out here by myself giving me a personal welcome? That is discrimination. I got up and stormed out of his office and told him to go to hell.

B: You said this to the dean of the law school?

A: Yes, to dean Frank Maloney [dean of the University of Florida Law School 1958-1970].

B: That is amazing.

A: I went back in there and sat down and [I was] mad, incensed, that he would call me out, on the day they were welcoming the rest of the students, for a personal welcome.

B: You do not think it was meant to be a personal welcome?

A: No. I guess the word got passed around that this George Allen is a little crazy too and does not take any shit. And I did not. I got mad with the school. When I first got to Alachua County, I went down to the employment office and they had positions. I signed up to see if they had any jobs and I said, if not, then I would like unemployment compensation. They told me how much money I would be getting and they said, you are over-qualified for anything we have. You have a degree in political science and economics and you have two years of military [service] as a first lieutenant [by that time I had been promoted in army intelligence]. They said [you are] highly qualified for everything except everything we have. They had two jobs, one as a janitor somewhere and one as an orderly at Alachua General Hospital. I said, how much would I make as an orderly? They said, \$35 a week. And as a janitor? [They said], something like \$35. I asked, what would I get if I received unemployment compensation? I would get about \$60 a week. So I said that is a no-brainer.

I went home and told my wife. I was laughing about it. But she said, no! Now, this was the first time in my life I have ever been eligible for unemployment compensation. I have worked all my life, starting in fifth grade, and here I am now twenty-four, never have been unemployed all my life. My wife got mad and said, unemployment is for poor people. It is almost like welfare. George, do not do it. I said, what do you mean? She said, do not take that. I would not be proud of you if you took unemployment.

B: What did George do?

A: I went to work at Alachua General Hospital.

B: As an orderly?

A: As an orderly. While [I was] there, dean [Lester Leonard] Hale [dean of men and vice-president of Student Affairs, 1935-1973] had an operation. His wife was sitting there.

B: Lester Hale's [wife]?

A: Yes. She was reading The Brothers Karamazov by Dostoyevsky [Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Russian novelist, 1821-1881]. I was mopping the floor and I said, excuse me, ma'am, would you move to the other side of the room? I will help you move your chair, but I have to mop around here. She said, no problem and she laid her book down and I said, oh, do you enjoy Dostoyevsky? She said, come again? I repeated, do you enjoy Dostoyevsky? She said, yes, you pronounce that very well, do you know this author? I said, of course, he wrote very sparingly, but I enjoyed reading The Idiot and I also liked Crime and Punishment. She said, you have read him? I said, I have read all of his works. She said, what are you doing working as an orderly? I said, well, I am really just waiting for law school to open. I have been admitted to the University of Florida Law School. She said, really, what is your name? I told her, W. George Allen. She said, can you come back tomorrow, I want you to meet my husband? I said, who is your husband? She said, dean Hale, he is the dean of men in the school. I said, oh, fine. I came back the next day and she had told him and he was waiting. He said, where did you go to undergraduate school? I told him. So he too asked, why are you working here? I told him it was a long story. My wife did not want me to get unemployment and I said I was very upset. I had to live. I went up and applied for student housing and they said they had nothing for black students, nor for colored students.

B: "Colored" students?

A: Because of that I ended up getting an apartment out in the city. I was staying, I

think, out on Waldo Road. While over there, I was looking around and I found this place where A. Quinn Jones lived. They were selling houses out there for \$250 down. I looked at this place and told my wife, look, we are going to be here three years. Why don't we buy a house? My wife said, why do we not wait and see if you will make it. I said, what do you mean, if? I do not play that way. Dean Hale said, when I get out [of the hospital] come and see me, let us find out if I can help you. He was out of the hospital and within a week, I was in his office. I explained, dean, they will not let me stay in student housing, which is cheap. I have to go into the city and find a place in the colored section. I want to borrow some money. I have enough money to stay here for a year, but I want to borrow some money. Do you have any funds for student loans? He said, as a matter of fact, I do. How much do you need? I explained, I needed \$250 for a downpayment, to buy a house. He said, you are going to buy a house? I said, of course! So during my first year in Gainesville, I borrowed \$250 from the student loan fund and bought a house.

B: And all because you made contact with Lester and Evelyn Hale. That is amazing.

A: Yes, a casual contact in the hospital.

B: Did dean Hale then take care of you, from that point on?

A: Yes. I would see him when I needed help. I bought the house. They built it, we moved in afterwards. Later, I sold that house to the guy who was the assistant city manager there, what was his name? He still lives there. Do you know where the Perrys live, Rufus Perry and Mrs. Perry?

B: No, not there. Although I know some Perrys on 5th Avenue. George, did you live on 7th Avenue across from Lincoln High School?

A: No. I lived out in the North-easterly section, where Oliver Jones lived.

B: I think the person you sold the house to might have been Jennings?

A: Edward Jennings, Jr., yes, I sold my house to Jennings. He still owes me money. [He] never paid me my money on that.

B: He is the mayor now. He ran for city commission and was just elected.

A: Maybe he will pay me now.

B: I am going to tell him.

A: Tell him to pay me my money or I am going to sue his butt.

B: So you lived out in what they call the Duval Elementary area.

A: Yes! Duval Elementary area. Is Jennings still in that house?

B: He sure is. He is still there.

A: I paid \$8,000 for that house, \$250 down, \$59 a month.

B: So you drove back and forth to law school? Did you have any problems? Let me ask you this question. When you spoke to Mrs. Hale in the hospital, had you not stepped out of your "place" as a colored boy, by making reference to what this white lady was reading?

A: No, I did not. My place? I had no such "place."

B: You had gone beyond that place.

A: Even in high school I was talking to all people. I would go down to the library in Sanford, when I was in high school, and get books.

B: You could do that?

A: I did. And when I was in college, I would go down and study and do research at the public library in Sanford. Charles Merritt, my buddy, would say, man, you are crazy, do not do that. And I said, what are they going to do? That is all kept by tax-payers' money. What are they going to do to me? I guess that was one reason why they said, this boy is kind of crazy, because I was always a maverick and always kind of doing the unusual. I did not consider what my "place" was.

B: What was your year like, the first year at the University of Florida?

A: [I was] scared to death. I expressed all of this bravado, I was going to make it and everything, [but] I was scared. I tried to get in touch with George Starke, but he would not talk. George's father was from Sanford. George's father was my medical doctor, so I knew him and I knew [that] he and George's mother were divorced. I think mother and son lived in Orlando. I never knew George well, but I knew his father very well. So I told his father, I want to talk to George, to find out what his experience was. Maybe he could help me with professors from whom I should not take courses, but George would not talk to me. Even after law school, I tried to get in touch with him and he would not. I thought he was a very strange dude. His dad and he did not have a great relationship, so his dad

could not give me any clue. The first day of class, I came with my tie on and I walk in and all these kids are wearing Bermuda shorts and tennis shoes with no socks. For one thing, I was overdressed. I thought all the law school [students] wore ties, but they did not.

I sat down and some of the folks moved and some of the kids moved closer to me and introduced themselves. And most of them were Jewish. Mort Perlin was not in my class, but he was very helpful and he grabbed me under his wing. He owns Perlin Hand Trucks and Ball-bearing Casters down in Miami now. Ross Beckerman, whose father was a lawyer in Hollywood, a very prominent lawyer, came up and shook my hand and said, welcome. A fellow named Barry Stone, who is now a Court of Appeals Judge up in the Fourth District Court of Appeals, was another fellow who came and shook my hand and welcomed me. And a guy named Charles "Chuck" Reiters. Mostly Jewish people came up and said, look, let me help you. Mort Perlin said, I want to see you before you finalize your courses. He looked and advised, do not take this professor, take this one. And [he] helped me with things I did not know. So I said, here is a guy who is seemingly genuine and I took his lead. I did what he said. So these guys grabbed me and said, you are taking Criminal Law with [Vernon Wilmont] Danny Clark [professor of law, 1946-1974, 1976-1977] and here are my notes from last year, when I took him. One could buy notes from some of the better students who would take notes and print them up and sell them. So they introduced me to buying notes. Some of them were very helpful. Some of them would say, I ain't going to school with no nigger. I would say, well, goodbye.

B: They did not worry you?

A: No!

B: Did you happen to have any professors who stood out in your mind, those who were very agreeable that you were there and those who made it difficult for you?

A: None of them made it difficult. All of them were very helpful.

B: Now, Stephan Mickle [Judge, First District Court of Appeals for Florida] put it as being the quiet period in his life. There were times when people did not even recognize he was there. He went to class, they taught, he left. If you had to put your years at the University of Florida, how would you describe those years at the law school?

A: The first year I was scared to death. I studied twenty-four hours and slept eight. Every other day I would go to bed and [the next day] I would study all the time. I was in the library all the time. This was 1960. After I got my first grades, I had

about a 2.5 or 2.7, something like that, and I was in the top 10 or 15 percent of the class. Then I relaxed a little. The first semester I did not know what to expect. I did not know how my professors were reacting. During that period of time, one wrote everything in blue books and long hand, everything was essay and one did not get the paper back. The professor announced what the grade was. You got a "C" and you said, professor, what did I do wrong? Can I critique it with you? And they said no.

In my junior year, I took a course called "legal accounting" with professor [Richard] Stephens [professor of law, 1949-1977] who was from New York. He taught legal accounting, which was a bullshit course, but everyone made an "A," except I made a "D". [There were] four questions. I thought I had aced it. I had turned in all of my assignments. I had participated in class. I went to this guy from New York University, one of the few non-southerners at the University of Florida, and I said, professor Stephens, I know it says in the handbook that you cannot see your paper. I was certain I made an "A" in your course. Can I just ask you what I did wrong? And he said, I checked your grades. You did not need any help, he said, you made a sixty-seven on three questions and the fourth one you just missed and got zero. I said, which one? He said, oh, I checked your grades and you do not need help. If you would have needed help, I would have given you three points to make you have a "C." This is the only "D" I made in law school.

B: Really?

A: Yes. And [it was from] professor Stephens, the northerner. [With Ernest] Ernie Jones, [professor of law, 1955-1995] from Mississippi, [I had] no problems. [I received] mostly "B's." [With] Danny Clark, a real Florida cracker, [I had] no problem, [I received] mostly "B's." [With] Hayford Enwall [professor of law, 1956-1976, 1980-1982], a real southern gentleman from Florida, [I received] mostly "A's." Here, with this guy from New York, go figure. He said stuff like, I am from the North and I am not like them. Those were the ones I had trouble with at the University of Florida. [The] northerners. You look at real friends, you find that most of them are southerners.

B: That is very true. Do you feel Stephens thought you were too intelligent and he was trying to deflate you?

A: I really did not know, but I did not give a damn. I did not take another course from him and never respected him after that. The fact that he went and looked at my grades indicated that his heart was not right.

B: And told you that?

A: Yes. [He said], I looked at your grades and you do not need any help. I did not want any damn help to start with. I wanted a straight shot. I wanted him to treat me like he treated every other damn student, not to see if I needed help.

B: While you were there, was there any public recognition that George Allen was at the University of Florida?

A: All the time. I would walk across the campus and everybody knew me. All the pretty girls [would say], hello, George. I was the only black there. All the guys said, who is that fox? And I said, I do not know. They said, well, but she knows you. And I said, hey, I am the only one here. For two years, Joel, there were over 20,000 students and I was the only black student there on the campus.

B: And they knew you?

A: Everybody knew me because I was everywhere. I went to the football games and sat on the fifty yard-line with the lawyers. I did not like football. I went there because I heard a cracker say, I ain't going to no game with no nigger. I said, what is your name? He said, my name is Danny Mayo. I said, where are you from? He said, I am from Mayo, Florida. I said, I want you to know, you are not going to go to a goddamn game as long as I am here because I am going. I do not normally go to football games. I will only go to keep your white ass from going to the game.

B: So you went?

A: I went to keep him from going.

B: Did he go?

A: No. Well, at first he did not. Then he found out and he said, this is crazy. I heard another lawyer, named Buddy MacLean, make a statement that he would not sit with no nigger. I sat in the stadium with him and turned to him and I said, Buddy, I thought you said you would never sit with a nigger. He said, you heard me say that? I said, yeah, I heard you.

B: You were kind of defiant, were you not? You were determined to do what you had to do and you did it?

A: He was drinking bourbon whiskey and after he had a couple drinks, he said, you want a drink of my liquor? I said, yes. I got it and drank out of the bottle. I said, now, let me see if you really are real. You drink.

B: Did he drink?

A: He wiped off the top of the bottle and turned it up. Before the game was over, he turned around and he said, anybody [who will] mess with George Allen got my ass to beat. From then on, he and I were friends. But I was never a quiet person. Stephan [Mickle] was quiet. I had to beg his daddy to let him leave Bethune-Cookman [college in Daytona Beach, Florida] to come to the University of Florida.

B: Wait now. Let's skip here. During this period, the decision had already been made about Virgil Hawkins. You were aware of that. You were there as a student going to school. Did you ever have the privilege to meet the president?

A: No.

B: You had met just the dean of the law school, Frank Maloney?

A: Yes.

B: How did the people in the community respond to you?

A: The black folk called me, "our student of the University." They were proud, very nice, very cordial and very helpful and protective. If anyone had come in my neighborhood looking funny, they would have been shot because those folks protected me.

B: They took care of you?

A: Oh, yes. They took care of me and my kids. When white folk would start talking about what they were going to do to me, they would make it very known that if you messed with our student you would get hurt.

B: "Our student?"

A: Yes. I became "our student." Now the white folk in the community were not as accepting and after the first year of law school, I got more active in the NAACP. I organized and started working with the youth group. Charles Chestnut [former County Commissioner and prominent Gainesville businessman] was the president of the youth group. I got them together and I went with them and we started sitting in down at Primrose Grille [Primrose Inn on University Avenue]. The place was owned by Byron Winn, [who was] the mayor [of Gainesville]. I organized all of that and took them down and I also started recruiting blacks to go to school. I recruited Stephan to go, begged his daddy to let him leave Bethune and come as an undergraduate. When he got there, [I] got Stephan involved at the law school as a witness in my moot court trial to try to get him interested in

going to law school. [He was] scared to death.

B: So that was how Stephan got to the University of Florida?

A: I recruited him. I went to his daddy and begged him [to] let Stephan transfer from Bethune. His daddy allowed him to do that. I also got eight other students to come, most of them from Bradenton, Florida. I went and told their mothers and fathers that the University of Florida sent me and I was recruiting for them.

B: Were you?

A: No, I lied. I got nine students to come and Stephan was one of them. I lied to Stephan's daddy [when I told him] that they really wanted blacks. I was a senior and getting ready to graduate in December. The summer before my senior year was when I recruited Stephan and all of them and begged them to come in. In September 1962, nine students came in [as] undergraduate[s], living in the dormitory. Dean Hale did that.

B: This was 1962?

A: Yes. Nine freshmen; well, not all were freshmen. Stephan was an upperclassman, but I think the rest of them were freshmen.

B: They lived in the dormitories?

A: Yes. Except I believe Stephan may have stayed at home. Many of them lived in the dormitories. During my senior year, I needed only nine or ten hours to graduate, because for two years I had gone to summer school and I taken full loads. After my first year I said, this is not hard. I then took full loads trying to hurry up and get out of there. I took my last nine or ten hours and I graduated in December 1962. When I left the University, I left nine students there. That was how Stephan got there.

B: Did you recruit anyone to go to law school?

A: No. Stephan went to law school later, but this was much later, long after I graduated.

B: Did you ever have the privilege to converse with Virgil Hawkins [about his] not being admitted after all the efforts he made, yet you were admitted?

A: Yes. Virgil and I talked about that many times, first while he was going through the process, and also afterwards when I was there. I would go to meetings. In 1962, the NAACP had a big conference down in Tampa. It was that year, 1962,

when James Meredith, Charlene Hunter [now [now Hunter-Galt, works for PBS], and Hamilton Holmes entered the Universities of Georgia and Mississippi. [It was in] 1961 or 1962. I had completed at least a year at the University of Florida before they entered Mississippi and Georgia. And they gave us awards in Tampa. I am pretty sure Virgil was there when they gave me the NAACP award for contributing to higher education in the state of Florida and to the integration of schools. But I had always talked to Virgil and said how he had made it all possible, because without Virgil none of us would have been admitted to the University of Florida.

B: Do you believe that?

A: Believe that? It is true! We were only admitted because Virgil had opened the door. If Virgil had not filed the lawsuit, we would never have been admitted to the University of Florida. That is why I insisted that we name that demonstration project, the Practice Court, after Virgil. There was a Practice Court program; students were to get practical experience in courts. It was named after Virgil; there are a plaque and offices at the UF Law School. Some of the alumni wanted to take Virgil's name off and put mine on. Some of them called me and said, George, you are more distinguished, but the legislature and Carrie Meeks want to name this project after Virgil, when Virgil did not measure up. I said, bull. Virgil was a man; he was "the man." He was the one who took you all on when no one else would and held your feet to the fire. When he was on the Supreme Court of Florida, Stephen O'Connell [later president of the University of Florida, 1968-1974] and other Florida Supreme Court judges told Virgil, you can go up to the University of Florida, but we are going to rope off an area in the classroom for you to sit in, otherwise you will disrupt education at the University of Florida.

B: That was exactly what he said to me; they were concerned that if Virgil was admitted, his presence would disrupt the University and it would not be productive.

A: That was white bullshit. If they had some crazy white folk who disrupted the school, then they could deal with the disruption. But it was crap to keep Virgil out and they kept putting up other hurdles. There was no Florida Bar Examination until Virgil started filing these damn lawsuits.

B: None at all?

A: Every white person who graduated from law school got diploma privileges. One did not have to take a bar exam. That was just this white rhetoric and bull. No, they did not want any blacks to come and they kept trying to give Virgil these little perks. They tried to trick him to come in.

Virgil kind of realized that even if he got there, they were going to make sure that he did not stay. Do not believe that every white person who came to the University of Florida was smart. When I went there, they had this whole crap that you should look to your left, then look to your right, because next year one of you will not be here. They admitted everybody. The admission policy at the University of Florida Law School was very low. They admitted everybody and then they called out whomever they considered the best students, after admission.

B: What was it about you that made you able to stay there? Was it your ability?

A: I studied and I was able. I studied like a dog.

B: And then you did not let their behavior, the way they treated you, interfere with your goals?

A: They did not intimidate me.

B: Did George Starke get his law degree from there, did he finish?

A: No, he never graduated. He left.

B: What was graduation like for you?

A: I did not come back for graduation.

B: What do you mean you never came back?

A: We had a ceremony over at the law school, for the law school, and they gave us a parchment that somebody at the law school had made up. They said we had to come back to attend graduation. When I graduated, the NAACP and some of those folks in the black community who did not really care whether I went to the University of Florida or not, said, oh, our graduate is done and we want to have this big thing for his graduation. I said, look, I have a family. I have a job offer in Miami. I am going down there [and] I am not coming back up here, just so you all can have a spectacle. So I never went back to graduation.

B: Where did your wife work while you were in school?

A: She was employed at the J. Hillis Miller [Health Center] as a nurse.

B: Did she have a problem there?

A: No.

B: And did your children have any problems in school?

A: They went to Duval Elementary.

B: Did they?

A: Yes.

B: You talk about that first year [and you said it was] scary. What were the second and third year like for you?

A: That first year, I would get calls, nigger, they said, we are going to kill you. I would say, kiss my ass, and hang up. I had a .22 [caliber handgun] and I would take my boys out and teach them how to shoot. I would strike matches with my .22 and I would tell them, boy, I can shoot. From the army-days I was a marksman and I keep a lot of shells. My kids knew how to shoot. If anybody had come into my neighborhood to make trouble, I could put their eye out [from] two blocks away. I was as threatening as they were. Some of them said I was a little crazy. Of course, they still say that. So that first year I was as threatening as they were. I just studied and did not let them distract me. Once a month, we would load up the car, pop our popcorn and make some Kool-Aid and go to White Springs. We would go to the drive-in theater, once a month; they had three rows in the back for colored folk. We just lived an austere life; we were poor. When advertisements would come on and tout hot dogs and all that, I would say, boy, that is for white folk. You all sit back down. We would make some bologna sandwiches for the kids, get some Kool-Aid and shut up.

B: That was it?

A: Yes. So we had fun. My mother and father would bring me vegetables and stuff and some of the neighbors would give me stuff. Somebody had a still out in the woods there, just north of where we lived. I would go out there every now and then and steal me a gallon of moonshine and put some apples and raisins in it to give it a little color and flavor. I would invite some of my classmates over and we would drink moonshine. We had a ball.

B: Really? So you were something else! Did your fraternity ever do anything for you while you were in Gainesville?

A: Yes. The Alphas were very supportive and very nice and very kind. They gave me a couple of little scholarships and awards. A few brothers who were

educators had me speaking for commencement and paid me \$50, which was a lot of money at that time. W. L. "Shorty" Johnson had the ring business, Shorty would take me out and I would speak at his ring ceremonies and he would introduce me to some of the principals and so he was very helpful. Dr. Hampton, the dentist who still lives in Ocala now, yes, Dr. Hampton was very kind to me and he was a frat brother. John Dukes and Rawls were also helpful.

B: You were there, so you got involved in the community?

A: I was involved in the community. I was a member of a Baptist church there, I cannot remember the name of it now, and I even joined the Masons.

B: Did you?

A: Yes. So I was active with the fraternity and in the church.

B: During your tenure at the University of Florida, did anyone ever approach you personally and confront you about being there as a Negro or as a colored student?

A: The first month I was there, I was in the bathroom. The janitor came in and exclaimed, nigger!

B: Black man?

A: White man. And he walked out. He obviously needed to use the restroom facilities urgently, but would not use them when a nigger was in there. So I opened up my book bag and started to study in the bathroom. He came back about three times and opened the door and I was still sitting in there studying, and I said, piss in your pants, you goddamn cracker.

B: I hear you! How about that? Delightful!

A: He did not bother me anymore, but he did not use that bathroom that day. After about an hour, I left. Somebody asked me, what were you doing in there? I said, just making a cracker piss in his pants. And then there was Ralph [Paul] Douglas and the incident at our registration. He was a judge in Palm Beach, the last time I saw him. In any event, one had to be aggressive to get the professor one wanted, at registration time. Still, one had to get in line. I was trying to get a course, Labor Law, with professor [Walter Otto] Weyrauch [professor of law, 1957-present]. All the professors were seated at tables and one had to get in the line. Ralph Douglas, I think that was his name, came up and said, get out

the way boy, and he pushed me. I decked him.

B: Did you?

A: Yes, I knocked him on his ass. He was on the floor and I stepped over him. Professor Weyrauch was aghast.

B: I can imagine.

A: Everybody looked. I stepped over him and said, professor Weyrauch, I would like these courses. He said, by all means.

B: He was not going to say no?

A: I stepped back over Ralph and went out. From then on, I did not have any problems.

B: Of course not, because they knew then that you would have caused a problem.

A: Yes. One of them asked me right after that, he said, I wanted to ask you, I know there are some good "nigroes." I said, one moment. Can you say "ne" [nee]? And he said, yes. I said, say it. [He said] "nee;" I asked, can you say, "gro?" He said, yes. I said, say it. [He said], "gro." I said that is the word, "Negro," not "nigro," which is perilously close to "nigger" and if you say that to me or in my presence, it better be a joke and it better make me laugh or I will kick your ass. I never took any shit. Some of them asked me about that. They said, I read about Martin Luther King and he is non-violent. I said, I want you and everybody in this class to know that I am not non-violent. If you bother me, it will be life or death. I am still that way. I am not non-violent. If you bother me, you have a fight. Everybody understood that. The dean and the teachers and the students knew that. I did not take any shit and I still do not.

B: No wonder someone said to me, I think it was dean [Frank] Read [dean of UF Law School, 1981-1988]; the dean asked if I had talked with you. I told him I had and he said, Joel, that should have been an interesting experience! I said, what do you mean? He said, George Allen is an interesting person. I guess he meant that because of the way you say things; I appreciate that you are so up-front and direct. Did you happen to go back to dean Maloney's office at some point and communicate with him after you had your first visit with him?

A: Yes, I did. I did and we became good friends.

B: Did you?

- A: Yes. After I graduated, he asked me to come back sometimes to teach his class and I did. We became very good friends. [He is a] good man. His son practiced law down here, but dean Maloney left and went up to Malone, Florida [Jackson County], one of those small towns up north.
- B: His wife Lucille, who was very, very active in Gainesville, just passed away this year [1996].
- A: Yes. I spoke up there once and I talked about dean Maloney calling me into his office and how I confronted him. Lucille was a little upset. She said, but he liked you. I said, Lucille, I never said he did not like me, but your husband had a way of being a little condescending and I wanted him to understand that he was dealing with a different person, who took no [nonsense]. We became very good friends. I never said Frank was prejudiced. It just came across that way to me. Once we established how he felt and how I felt, we got along very well. I never said he was a racist. But she thought I felt that way because I said I had to grab him. If you gave Frank Maloney an inch, he would take it and I never let him do that. I was always setting the parameters of how we dealt with each other.
- B: It was said to me that president [J. Wayne] Reitz [UF president, 1955-1967] was pretty much instrumental in getting you to the University.
- A: None of them knew I was coming. I am pretty sure that none of them knew. The decision to go to the University of Florida was my wife's and mine alone.
- B: It was your decision?
- A: Yes. Many folks took credit afterwards, but for no reason.
- B: Why did you have that desire, to study law at UF?
- A: It was not really a desire. I tell you, I was reading Jet magazine and I saw this in the paper and I said, baby, we ought to go back and straighten this out. That was what I did. I wrote an article to this literary magazine at the University of Florida; in 1960 I wrote an article about why I came. I think I still have a copy of it right here somewhere. But I denied all this stuff, that I was hand-picked, that they had this smart Negro and they hand-picked him; all that was crap.
- B: How did Sanford respond to the student to whom they denied the award, who was not encouraged to go to college, [but] who was the first into the UF law school?

- A: Some of them were very supportive and some of them [were] still scared of me, especially while I was at the University of Florida, because they said, here is this crazy Negro up there who does not back down from anybody. And [they] did not want to have too much to do with me because they were still afraid. Those folks who did not want to encourage me to go to undergraduate school were still not very supportive. One of them was supposed to write a recommendation. You still needed recommendations to go to the University. Well, professor Refoe, who was a nice guy, very nice to me in elementary and junior high, never did write that letter of recommendation, so I had to call somebody else to do it. I think John Dukes finally did it. Here was a guy who swore that he was almost like my father, but would not write a letter of recommendation, because he was afraid. He was a principal at an elementary school in Sanford and he was afraid that this might militate adversely against him, so he never wrote that letter.
- B: When you graduated from the University of Florida Law School, you said you got a job in Miami. What was that job, sir?
- A: I worked with the law firm of Orr and Kaplan.
- B: Was that a white or black law firm?
- A: White. [It was a] white law firm.
- B: Was this the first in the state of Florida?
- A: [It was the] first integrated law firm south of Washington D.C.
- B: How were you received, sir?
- A: Very well, very well, except they did not pay me anything. I left because they were not paying me a decent wage. It had nothing to do with race, they were just cheap.
- B: Did the clients respond to you favorably?
- A: Yes. Their biggest client was Roosevelt Savings and Loan Association, which itself was an integrated savings and loan association. They were the biggest client Orr and Kaplan had and I did their work. The law firm was very pleased with the work I did, except they also got all the money.
- B: How long were you there?

A: Six months.

B: And where did you go then?

A: I came to Fort Lauderdale, to work with P. M. Construction, a Jewish construction company. P. M. Construction had a large black clientele and they said they needed a black lawyer like me and they offered me more money and the opportunity to practice law on my own. So [to] Fort Lauderdale I came.

B: When I talked to Judge Mickle, he mentioned to me that he had never seen a black lawyer prior to going to school, then you became that first black lawyer. What stimulated you?

A: I played the part of a lawyer in high school in a play called "The Case of the Missing Heirs." It was a class play and I played the lawyer.

B: That [play] gave you the inspiration?

A: Yes. I liked the part of the lawyer. I figured I could not stand the sight of blood, so I thought being a lawyer would be great. The first lawyer I met was Horace Hill. I might add [that] I did work for Horace for one whole week after I graduated law school before I went down to Miami.

B: Was he the attorney who had an office in Daytona?

A: Yes. He represented Virgil Hawkins through most of those cases.

B: Really?

A: Yes. I cannot find that article but I do have some of the old Virgil Hawkins cases. Here is the State of Florida Ex Rel Virgil D. Hawkins; also Hawkins v. The Board of Control. This was 1955; [Florida Supreme Court] Justices [Elwyn] Thomas [1938-1969] and [Harold L.] Tom Sebring [1943-1955] dissented. [Florida Supreme Court] Justice B. K. Roberts [1949-1976] wrote the decision.

B: B. K. Roberts.

A: Yes. This case was heard in 1955. The lawyers for Virgil Hawkins were Horace Hill of Daytona Beach and Robert L. Carter of New York City. Robert Carter was Thurgood Marshall's [U.S. Supreme Court Justice, 1967-1991] right hand [when Justice Marshall was with the NAACP].

B: Carter practiced in New York?

A: Yes. Richard W. Ervin, [attorney general of Florida 1949-1964, and Florida Supreme Court Justice 1964-1975] was the attorney general; Frank Hanks was the assistant attorney general. But all through these cases here, I believe, your president over there, [Stephen C.] O'Connell [Florida Supreme Court Justice 1955-1967, then president of the University of Florida 1968-1974] was involved.

Now [in the] 1951 case, Horace Hill was the attorney, Richard Ervin was the attorney general, Tom Sebring was the chief justice, and other Florida Supreme Court Justices on the bench concurred, namely [Glenn] Terrell [1923-1964], [Roy] Chapman [1937-1952], [Alto] Adams [1940-1951, 1967-1968], [T. Frank] Hobson [1948-1962], and [B. K.] Roberts. [Elwyn] Thomas did not participate. Here are some of the later cases.

B: So his case made pretty much national attention?

A: Yes. [It was] a great case. You read these decisions about how white folk talked badly about this poor [black] man.

B: I definitely plan to read those.

A: [Tom] Sebring was the judge in this case.

B: President O'Connell said he was not sitting as a judge when those decisions were rendered.

A: Not any of them?

B: No.

A: So at this time there were Adams, Terrell, Chapman, Thomas, Hobson, and Roberts. They named the law school at FSU [Florida State University] after B. K. Roberts. What a tragedy! They named that law school after a no-good cracker.

B: Let me ask you this question. How do you respond when you hear them say that they did what was right for the period of time they were in?

A: No. They were evil people. There is no time to do that. They talked about black folk. On this one, Sebring was the chief justice [and] Horace Hill was the

lawyer. The others were Terrell, Thomas, Hobson, Roberts, [John E.] Mathews [1951-1955], and [N. Vernon] Hawthorne. Let's see, this one was heard in 1957.

B: If I leave my card, could you just mail me a copy of those? I will come back and get them; I would like to have copies.

A: Yes. B. K. Roberts was the judge and they named the law school after [this man] who wrote these crazy decisions. Here we have [Campbell] Thornal [1955-1970] and [Stephen] O'Connell concur; Terrell and Hobson concur especially; Thomas and [E. Harris] Drew [1952-1971] dissented in this one. So I guess your president was in one of those cases dealing with Virgil.

B: How did attorney Hill get involved in this? Was he a private attorney or was he an attorney for Mrs. [Mary McLeod] Bethune [educator and reformer, founder and president of National Council of Negro Women; retired to Daytona Beach, Florida, where she died in May 1955]?

A: [He was a] private attorney.

B: Do you know what law school he came from?

A: Howard University [in Washington, D. C.].

B: Howard. I see. Now, you graduated and you came back to Fort Lauderdale, to work for P. M. Construction. Have you been in Fort Lauderdale since then?

A: Yes. I never left.

B: Have you ever been called back to the University of Florida to be an instructor?

A: No.

B: Would you want to do that?

A: No.

B: You would not?

A: No. After Stephan [Mickle] graduated, he came to work for me.

B: He mentioned that.

- A: When he graduated, I kept waiting for him to apply or say something. I encouraged him to go to law school and I said, once you get out, you can call me. He got out and went to Washington. I called his daddy and said, where is Stephan? He said, he is in Washington. I said, give me his address and number. And I called him and I said, what are you doing in Washington? You were supposed to come and work with me when you got out. He said, yes, you are right; I should have called you. I asked, what are they paying you? Do you like your job? He said, not really. I said, come on down here. So he and Evelyn came down. I convinced him to come down. He was doing very well; we were doing very well. Then the dean [of the UF Law School] said, I need him to come up and teach a summer course. I said, do not go. If it is money, I will give you extra. Do not go. Stephan said, this is for prestige, not money. I said, you do not need that. People down here could not care less that you were up there teaching some summer course. I need you here to take care of our business. We have clients. We have a thriving business and we are doing very well. If you need more money, fine, just tell me. He said, I just want to try it one summer. I said, Stephan, if you go up there, you are never coming back.
- B: Did you tell him that?
- A: Yes.
- B: He went to UF and he never came back?
- A: Right. He said, I am just going for the summer. He never came back.
- B: Did you ever have the desire to be a judge?
- A: At one time. I had a heart attack and after that I applied, but in a half-hearted way. When I was in my thirties, I got mad at the Democratic party because they would not support black candidates. I tried to talk to them and they were not interested in helping blacks. So I said, the hell with you; I became a Republican. But the Republicans were really not interested in increasing the number of their black voters, nor increasing the black leadership presence in the Republican party. But I stayed with the Republicans for about a year or two. While [I was] with them, [Richard M.] Nixon became president. I got a call [that] they needed some young, bright, black lawyers to be appointed judges, so they encouraged me to apply for a judgeship. But I was around thirty-six years old; so I said, I am too young to be a judge and also I am too much of an advocate. I fight the system; I do not want to be a part of it. Then [there was] the money. Judges were making about \$36,000 a year.

B: That was all?

A: Well, this was twenty-five years ago.

B: So was that considered a lot then?

A: Yes, now this was twenty-five years ago. At that time, I was driving a yellow Rolls-Royce. Man, I was somebody [laughter].

B: A yellow Rolls-Royce?

A: Yes. [When I was] thirty-five years old, I bought a yellow Rolls-Royce. I was making it. On my tag I had "Allen 35," because I was thirty-five years old when I bought the Rolls-Royce. I was doing well. So I said, no Mr. President, I do not want to be a judge. When [William] Clinton became president, I also got a call from the attorney general saying, if you apply [for a judgeship], you got it. I did not want to do it then either. My wife said, no. So I said, o.k., baby, and I did not apply.

B: Are you still married to the same lady you married when you went to California?

A: Yes.

B: How many children do you two have now?

A: We never had any kids. She brought one kid and I brought two children into the marriage, but the two of us never had any children. But we adopted a daughter.

B: Did anyone in your family follow in your footsteps?

A: My son Fred went to the University of Florida, but never graduated.

B: Does he have the fire that his father had?

A: He says he has more, but it depends to whom he is talking.

B: That was the same thing that Alcee Hastings [United States Congressman, 1993-present] said about his son. His son said that he has the fire his father had, but he does not. He has been there too.

A: I know.

B: What have you been active in, besides being the prestigious attorney that you are? Are you very active in your fraternity or in the NAACP or the Urban League?

A: I am active in all of them.

B: All of them?

A: Yes.

B: Always in a leadership role?

A: I have been the chairman of the board of the Urban League for years. I am still a member. I am a life member of the NAACP and I have been a member since college. I am currently the chairman of the board of directors of the United Way of Broward County. I have held positions with the American Bar Association; I have been on their House of Delegates and on many of their prestigious committees for years. I also served as the president of the National Bar Association, an organization of all the black lawyers in the United States.

B: Is the National Bar Association for black lawyers still active?

A: I was its national president 1975-1976.

B: Do you think there is still a need to be organized? Is there still a need for the National Bar Association?

A: Oh, yes. It is still in existence and still needed. Still needed very strongly. [They will] have their meeting next month in Chicago. At least 2,000 or 3,000 people will be there for the national convention. It is needed more now than ever, with the forays and fights with respect to affirmative action. I have also been president of the local Broward Bar Association.

B: Is that bar association integrated?

A: Yes. [That was in] 1988-1989. I have been active with them since I first came to town, when I was practicing by myself. Business was great. I was the third black lawyer in Broward County. Tom Reddick and Raleigh Rawls were here before me. But when I got here, I was a lot more aggressive than they. I was involved in everything and I was suing everybody. In the first two weeks I was here, I was suing the county, the city, and everybody and just kicking butt. Business boomed. So Alcee Hastings graduated from law school the next year.

Alcee and I had been in high school together. I called him. I saw his cousin and I said, what is Al doing? He said, nothing. I said, where is he? He said, in Orlando. I said, give me his number. I called him and he was not there, so his mother said he is in Orlando at his favorite haunt. So I called the bar and left word, tell Alcee to call me. He called me and I said, come on down, man, and look at Fort Lauderdale. You would love it here. So he came down and looked. He said, what are you proposing? I said, let us become partners. So he and I formed a partnership and we did very well.

B: You are talking about Alcee Hastings, current congressman? So you all had partnership together?

A: Yes. The one and only time I ran for public office was with Alcee. He and I were partners; both of us ran. Somewhere I saw a picture of the two of us. You talk about looking young? Both of us were young skippers then. It was great. Both of us did very well then and we have done well since.

B: Do you still find it productive to be here in Fort Lauderdale? Has this become home for you?

A: Yes. It is home.

B: You never had plans to move back to Sanford?

A: No, no such plans, my wife would not let me do that. She does not like Sanford well enough to stay there. At one time we had thought about retiring and going to Groveland; it is a little town outside of Orlando, where they had the last lynching up in that area. We had a log cabin there and we were preparing and getting ready. Then, there was a big fire. They burned my cabin.

B: Really? Do you think it was planned?

A: There is no doubt it was arson. I had one fire in my kitchen in Fort Lauderdale, so I still "have the fire."

B: Really?

A: Yes.

B: But you like the fire, do you not?

A: Yes. I am not quitting.

- B: Now, you got into law school without any affirmative action law ever being in existence. Do you feel there is a need for it?
- A: Yes.
- B: Why?
- A: It rights a wrong that is still there, when the playing field is not level. In order to right all of the past wrongs, there are still a lot of people who need that push and need that help. Some people can do it without any help and some people need that push. We are not in a society where everyone is created equal or given equal opportunity, so we need affirmative action.
- B: Oh, you found it! [Interviewee produced a picture of George Allen and Alcee Hastings]. This was in 1965?
- A: Yes.
- B: "Alcee [Hastings] and George Allen." Did either of you win that election?
- A: No.
- B: Why do think you did not win it?
- A: I did not campaign. Alcee campaigned like hell. I paid the filing fee [of] sixty dollars and I got a few campaign contributions.
- B: You mentioned prior to the time when colored or Negroes were admitted to law school, there was no bar exam one had to take after one finished law school. Do you think that was the reason why it was installed?
- A: Those were the days when law schools were not money machines like they are now. It was easy to set up a law school and hire some professors and buy some notes. Now, with the days of grants, the government will give a student \$30,000 a year to come to law school and the school takes a lot of that money. So it became a big business now.
- B: I see.
- A: Law schools themselves are big business. So you need something to try to hold down the numbers. I do not know that the bar exam is a good method. Say you sell someone on the idea to come to college, have that person pay \$12,000

to \$15,000 a year and obtain all of this great instruction and teaching on how to be a lawyer. Then after that person graduates, but cannot pass the bar, it may be that you are leaving yourself open to a law suit. You have sold these people on a product and now they cannot use it because you have indicated to them that they passed this or that course and they make a "C" and were going to be lawyers. Now they have to take this separate exam and they cannot pass it and they cannot be lawyers. So sooner or later there are going to be some lawsuits, I think. You may be open to litigation by people who bought a bill of goods and cannot use it.

B: I never thought about it that way, but that is true.

A: Should an exam, a one or two and a half day exam, determine whether one can be a lawyer? I think through the process of grades and graduation, we can determine that better: you have mastered all of the course work, you have done what you needed to do and you went out and you practiced teaching and you practiced a few cases and now here is your certificate. You do not need another test to get that certificate. Tests are so culturally biased. They are skewered toward the Anglos and Europeans, so it is really not a true measure to say a test determines whether or not one will be a good lawyer. I have seen good students who could not try a case if their life depended on it. Really what we teach in law school is how to be a good law school teacher, not how to be a trial lawyer. Law school does not give anyone that fire in the belly and that willingness to go to court and take chances and be innovative. I do not think bar exams test anything but how well one can master what is thrown at them.

B: When you graduated, you took the bar exam within one year?

A: I took the bar exam within months.

B: Did you pass it?

A: I passed it the first time.

B: Did you?

A: Yes. When I took it, it was two and half days long. I did not see my paper. One got a telegram. Congratulations, you passed, or we are sorry to inform you, you flunked.

B: You did not see your paper?

- A: I could not see my paper. [One] could not see one's paper at law school and [one] could not see one's paper at the bar exam. White folks controlled every goddamn thing.
- B: So you did not even know what you failed on and you had no way of finding out?
- A: No. No way. You could not see your paper. There were no blacks on the board of bar examiners. We pushed for that saying, good God, at least give us one or two blacks who are reading, because maybe some black guy wrote the exam you white folks cannot understand, and you are flunking him because you do not understand what he is talking about.
- B: Did you ever serve on that board?
- A: No, but we got Earl Johnson, who is black, on it. When Alcee and I came to town, no blacks were members of the Broward County Bar Association. We had to threaten to sue them to get in, because they had control over all grievances against lawyers. They could disbar a lawyer and yet they would not let black lawyers be members. The bar association had discipline powers over whether or not one remained a lawyer. Somebody could trump up some charges [against a black lawyer and] nobody black was sitting there. I said, you let me in or I am going to sue you. So they let us in. When I was sworn in as president, my speech was about inclusion. If you do not let me in, I will sue you. Now you let me in and now I am your president.
- B: How interesting! Was Virgil Hawkins not disbarred?
- A: Yes, he was.
- B: Do you think that something like that happened to him?
- A: Unfortunately, during the prime of his life, when Virgil really wanted to be a lawyer, these people would not allow him the opportunity, while during the same period of time they were letting some very dumb white folks go to law school, because they had fathers and cousins and uncles who were lawyers. One such example was a fellow named Ervin, a brother of the fellow who was the attorney general, Richard Ervin. In this case, the brother was dumb as a doorknob and tried to go to some university, I think it was Florida, but he ended up in the Army and never got to finish the university. Then when he came out, after the end of World War II, he finally went to a law school and graduated, but could not pass the bar. A former US Senator, Claude Pepper, [1937-1951, and US Congressman 1963-1989] signed an affidavit that young Ervin wanted to be a

lawyer and was enrolled in the law school but had to leave school, during World War II, to serve his country. Had he not gone to the war, he would have graduated from law school at the time when one had the privilege to practice law with the degree. He had a great desire to be a lawyer, the petition read, and therefore the bar association ought to let him be a lawyer under the diploma privilege. White folk in the Florida Bar allowed that and let the brother of Richard Ervin, the attorney general who had kept Virgil out of law school, become a lawyer.

When that happened, I said, this is interesting. I called [Richard C.] Dick MacFarlain, the lawyer for the Florida Bar. I said, Dick MacFarlain, old friend, this is your friend George Allen. He said, every time you call me I am about to be had, so what is going on? I said, Virgil Hawkins. He said, I knew you would do this to me. I said, I am going to mount a petition. Virgil Hawkins wanted to be a lawyer. Virgil graduated from the New England College of Law and Virgil cannot pass the bar. If there ever was a man who wanted to be a lawyer, during the time when there was diploma privilege, it was Virgil. Meanwhile Virgil had to file all these lawsuits. White folks just kept saying, do this and we will let you attend, and he said, no, no, I do not want to go sit in a corner, I want to walk in the door like any other man. They said, Virgil, go to Harvard and we will pay your way, and he said, no, I do not have to go there, I do not have to do that.

There were a lot of blacks who did that. During that period of time, the state of Florida would pay any black to go to college somewhere outside the South. They would have paid me. I know blacks who went away on state of Florida scholarships to go to graduate school. If you were black and you wanted to go to the University of Florida, they said, oh no, you cannot go, you cannot go to the University of Florida. But if you were a black Floridian and you wanted to go to Harvard, Florida would pay your way. Now,

I was admitted to Harvard. I could have gotten paid to go.

B: But you chose not to?

A: I did not want to go there. I wanted to stay home. In any event, back to Virgil, we petitioned the Florida Bar. Virgil had graduated from an inferior school: New England School of Law. Virgil could not pass the bar; Virgil was not smart. Virgil could just not get it together and could not pass the bar. So we petitioned and we got Virgil diploma privilege.

B: Again, what does diploma privilege mean?

A: That he did not have to pass the bar exam to practice law. He was sworn in as a lawyer. Some of us who did that, like DeLano "Del" Stewart [and] myself, some of us knew that it could be done. Virgil really did not know. Virgil lived in Leesburg, [Florida], so I called [that] old boy who had got drunk at the University of Florida game, and who later became my friend, Walter "Buddy" MacLean, [who] also lived in Leesburg. I said, Buddy, I want you to take care of Virgil. Do not let him get in trouble. I called Virgil and I said, Virgil, if you get a case and you do not know what to do, call me. I will come there and help you. Call Del Stewart, call Buddy MacLean, there is a good old boy who is my friend. Buddy and I were in law school together and after I messed with him, we became good friends. They will help you.

Judges helped me when I was a young lawyer. I said to people who gave me help, how did you know I needed help when I first got to Miami? And they said, Hayford Enwall and the boys from the University of Florida told us to look out for you. They called me just to pull my coattail and said, look here, do it this way. That is what we do; we help each other. I still do it for young ones. But Virgil would not listen. Virgil would take on a first degree murder case and did not know anything about it and Virgil got in trouble. And Virgil would take on causes that he knew nothing about and got in trouble. It was not all about his getting disbarred; Virgil was older too. Virgil started practicing law in his late sixties when most people are quitting.

B: Oh, I see. I did not understand that.

A: After he had fought the battle for so long and so hard, when they finally said, fine, if you want to run the 100-yard dash, do it. By that time he was old. He could not do it; he did not have the stamina. I am sixty now. The fight is not in me like it was. The fire is not in my belly like it was when I was twenty-seven.

B: I cannot imagine that, because it has been very spicy today.

A: But not like it was at twenty-seven, when I was ready to fight, mentally and physically.

B: Talking about Virgil Hawkins, there is proof here that the law clinic, as of today, should not bear his name.

A: And are those white folk who said so?

B: Yes.

- A: To hell with them. Virgil is the symbol, he is the guy who did it and made it possible for me to go there. Without Virgil, I never would have gone to UF.
- B: One judge said to me that it was disrespectful to the law school to have a clinic named after a person who could not get in or did not get in and who was disbarred. He feels that it was just shameful and if he tried to do it today, he thinks he would be run out of the state of Florida.
- A: Virgil's ethics are better than B. K. Roberts's, who did everything illegal under the sun. While on the Florida Supreme Court, he violated ethics rules. [He] was the fair-headed boy of Ed Ball [head of the DuPont Holding Corporation in Florida].
- B: Of the DuPont family?
- A: Yes, the DuPont family. You cannot divorce a crazy person in Florida. There was a special bill passed in the legislature to allow Ed Ball to divorce his crazy wife and B. K. Roberts was involved. B. K. was as crooked as they come, as unethical as they come, and should have been disbarred and disrobed. But they named the law school after him. How dare they talk about Virgil. They were responsible for all of the ills Virgil suffered from, or most of them. After they denied him until he was in his late sixties, they finally said, all right, you can be an attorney, now run with the wolves. It was sinful. Then [to] start talking about morals and ethics about blacks when they allowed them to name a whole damn law school after a guy who has the morals of a snake.
- B: Really, that is very interesting.
- A: And he wrote some of these crazy decisions about keeping niggers out.
- B: Did he use the term niggers?
- A: Maybe not, but it was something that was not unknown to his vocabulary.
- B: I understand.
- A: Although, he may not have used that term in these [cases].
- B: I was told that before the clinic was named for Virgil, they discussed that it should be named for you.
- A: They had talked to me about it, but I refused to take part in that. I refused, I told

them no. Virgil was the real person it should have been named after, as an inspiration.

B: Has the University done anything in your honor, as the first black to enter law school?

A: Well, I have been back to UF. They have probably given me a plaque or two; I do not know. [Robert] Mautz [chancellor of the State University System] has, anyway, perhaps in November 1988.

B: Do you have very many speaking engagements at this point?

A: Yes.

B: Do you provide inspiration to young people or do you just speak, period? Most times, in reading our [black] history, you find that many of our leaders or persons who have been "the first" end up as ministers. Are you a lay-minister?

A: No.

B: Not a "minister" at all?

A: No.

B: Just an attorney?

A: That is it.

B: Husband?

A: Yes.

B: Family man?

A: Yes.

B: And involved in everything in the city of Fort Lauderdale?

A: [I] try to [be involved] in most everything.

B: What would you like to do that you have not done?

A: [I would like to] retire.

B: Retire?

A: Yes. I am tired. I would like to retire and write.

B: What do you want to write about?

A: Just my experiences.

B: In addition to what you have just narrated and being the first at the law school, have you had some unusual experiences?

A: I have tried some very unusual cases.

B: Tell me about one case you tried that you think has been very unusual.

A: I guess the one that I am most famous for, in Broward County, has been the Broward County School Board case I filed in 1970, to integrate the schools. For twenty-five years, until last year when I quit, I was monitoring the school system for Broward County.

B: Were you?

A: Yes, for twenty-five years. [There were] two lawsuits. Also, I integrated the schools, by court order, out in Hendry County. I was involved in a lot of civil rights litigation. I just got an article that a newspaperman sent me from St. Petersburg, Florida, about this lady. The guy who wrote this article sent me a printed copy, where he claims that she got away with murder. I was her lawyer back in the 1980's. The day she was found not guilty, someone started a fire in my kitchen, with commercial briquettes, about a mile and a half from here. I am no stranger to fire.

B: How has your wife dealt with all of your involvement? Has she ever told you to be quiet or slow down, or does she just know that that is your personality and that is you?

A: She knows that is me. She was upset about them starting that goddamn fire in the kitchen. She put it out with a Persian rug.

B: Did she?

A: Yes. But she was pissed and I was too. I called the young man whom I had

taken to the fields in Sanford and taught how to cut celery. I call him my little brother. I called him and I said, I just got a not-guilty verdict two hours ago in this murder case. I told him to go in my house and get the shotgun in my bedroom. If anybody moves, just shoot, and I will represent you. And he spent the night at the house, until I got there.

B: Did you ever find out who did it?

A: The police came and asked, what is your husband's name? She said, W. George Allen. The policeman asked, is he that controversial black lawyer? She said, what does that have to do with it? Goddamn it, somebody tried to start a fire in my kitchen with commercial briquettes. They never told us if they found anybody. When I got home the next day, I had to call the police chief to get them to come back out and dust for fingerprints. They did not even dust. I talked to the neighbors; my neighbor was Bob Baumhower who played with the Miami Dolphins; I asked him, did you have any workers here? He says, yes, I had somebody here trimming my hedges. The guy who was trimming his hedges was a former secretary treasurer of the Ku Klux Klan. I said, you ought to start there.

B: Yes. Right there should have been a good place to start.

A: They never did a thing. Ten years ago, my log cabin was burned in Groveland. They said they knew who did it. They said it was arson. They said an arrest was imminent. They never told me who did it. I finally asked my good friend, attorney general Bob Butterworth [attorney general for Florida, 1987-present], who was, I thought, a political ally and a great friend, to investigate, since he was the attorney general. I said, it is a hate crime. Somebody burned a goddamn black person's log cabin down. He sent me a written report from the fire marshall, which stated that a fire occurred, we have investigated it, and we have no suspects except George Allen, the owner, and we have ruled him out as the person who started the fire. End of investigation.

B: That was it?

A: Yes. I said, goddamn it, this is no investigation! What happened to the young person who they knew had set the fire, whom they were going to arrest? He said, I do not have any such information in my report. I said, get out and ask, investigate! Nothing ever came of it.

B: Did you ever get back to Butterworth?

A: Get back to him?

B: Did you ever go and say anything else to him?

A: Yes. I cursed him out. His wife said, you should talk to me. I said, well, you do something. [But] nothing has been done.

B: I would encourage you to write your experiences, because it should be just unreal. How do people respond to you here, when you walk around, or when you appear? Do they deal with you or not, how do they behave with you?

A: How do you mean? What people?

B: For instance, you have represented a case like this and at one point it must have been a very controversial case. How did the community you live in respond to you?

A: Very well, I think.

B: Very well?

A: As I said, I am not carrying a gun [laughter].

B: There are some statements now [saying] that, with all the integration and with all the affirmative action laws, a lot of the things blacks have at the law school and at the University of Florida should be dissolved, such as the Black Student Union [and] BLSA [Black Law Students' Association], because we *are* now a part of the whole system. What do you think about that?

A: Say that again, now?

B: There are people who feel that programs like BLSA, where you separate black students from all others, should be dissolved. We should be a part of everything, because we are now part of the system and should no longer be either separated or segregated. If one is intelligent enough, whether one is black or white, one can get in. Your Black Law Students' Association [and other] special programs for minority students should no longer be in place, they think they should be dissolved rather than continue to separate people. They were also talking about the Black Student Union on campus [and] the Institute of Black Culture, started for black students only. How do you feel about this?

A: I do not know what these groups do, because when I was there they did not have any of them.

- B: All these programs and support groups were established for blacks to get together and support each other, [and] to reinforce educational or study habits. Now the perception is [that] we are integrated, [that] we can do whatever we want to do, [that] we do not need these special programs.
- A: I do not know if they have served a good purpose or not and so I do not know whether they have done good or bad. I just do not know. I never had to deal with them and I never dealt with them. My philosophy has always been that one ought to try to learn how to get along and work with other people and one ought to learn how to live in a multi-racial society. I never wanted to be a “black” lawyer. I wanted to be a good lawyer. I wanted to be the best lawyer in this town and my clientele has always reflected this. Giles, the lady whom I defended and got off in Bradenton was white. She had hired me, because she was told by a lawyer in Flint, Michigan, that if one had a case in Florida, one needed George Allen. She said, money is no object; I want to hire *you*. I am also involved in organizations like the Broward County Bar Association, [to which] I was unanimously elected. The black population in the Broward Bar Association is less than 2 percent. The United Way of Broward County is another organization that runs across everything and I am the chairman of the board of directors.
- B: So you are not a “black” attorney, you are an attorney.
- A: I am. That is the way I operate. When I go to court, you better be ready because I am going to try to knock your socks off. Do not come in there looking for a “black” lawyer [because] you are going to find a lawyer who is as well-versed as you are going to see.
- B: Did you ever have any problems with any of the judges when you first came here?
- A: I had problems with them and I grabbed them and told them. I had this client and her husband. She said, let my husband pay for the divorce, and I said, fine. When I first started practicing, the minimum fee for divorces was \$250. So after we finished the case, I said, judge I move that you order the husband to pay the attorney's fee in accordance with the minimum fee schedule. The judge said, well, I do not follow that. He said, I am ordering the husband to pay you \$150. So I said, all right, could you all wait outside. When the door shut, I said, judge, let me tell you [that] I worked overtime for this and I do not like what you just did. You awarded me less than the minimum fee. He said, well, the colored people cannot pay. I said, look, you are not in the business of

collecting. You are a judge and you ought to issue judgements. Whether I collect it or not is not your business nor your problem. When I come to court, do not give me the color treatment. I am a lawyer; I am not a colored boy.

B: What did he do?

A: I said, would you talk to your colleagues? Another thing I noticed was that you all do not appoint black lawyers to capital cases. I have watched that and I am available for appointment. He said, I will talk to them about that too [laughter].

B: So you just called an "A" an "A" and a "B" a "B"?

A: Yes. That is what you have to do. It is not about being black; it is about being a lawyer and that is what you have to do. I am involved in politics. They had an "A" list and a "B" list. When politicians came to me and said, I want you to help me, I said, fine. What kind of contributions do you get and I get my checkbook out. They do not want you to give them a fish sandwich. When something comes up, I go to them and I say, look, I need your help. There is a special bill or something else and I need your help. You have to be involved politically; you have to give. I am on the "A" list of people who contribute to campaigns because I am involved politically, I am involved socially and I work in this community for the total community. I work black and white. The United Way is not just a black organization. We raised \$8,600,000 last year, this year we are going to raise over \$9,000,000.

B: That is your goal?

A: Yes. I am going to do it.

B: What would you share with students, what could leave them with that would say: this is George Allen talking? Give us one statement about you as a person that could serve as an inspiration?

A: I have cared about this community. I cared about black kids and I cared about white kids. I spoke to schools all over--black and white. I sometimes have kids shadow me, black and white kids. Some of them still stay in touch. I saw a guy at the school board, who was the assistant superintendent, and he said, my daughter shadowed you and went to court with you and went to lunch with you and stayed in your office for a day when she was in ninth grade. Now she is starting her first year of college and she says because of you, she wants to be a lawyer. So you never know whom you are touching when you work and try to do your part. So you have to try to help everybody.

B: We have now a total black student population of about 2,500 at the University of Florida. You were the first. Afro-Americans are no longer in the minority. We are getting a lot of Haitians. We have blacks students who say they cannot do it. How did you do it? How were you successful?

A: Because I wanted it. I was hungry.

B: You wanted it?

A: Yes. I wanted it. I was hungry.

B: You were willing to give all you had, to get it?

A: I did, yes. Everything.

B: I have enjoyed this interview today.

A: Thank you.

B: May I come back again?

A: Yes. I have met you before.

B: Thank you. I really enjoyed it.

A: Tell them all "hello" up there.

B: I sure will.

[End of the interview]