

FNP 50

Interviewee: Jesse Earle Bowden

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

Date: May 20, 2000

P: This is May 20, 2000. I am in Pensacola, Florida, and I am talking with Mr. Earle Bowden. When and where were you born, Mr. Bowden?

B: I was born in Altha, Florida, on September 12, 1928.

P: Talk a little bit about the early interest you had in journalism and newspapers. When did you first realize you wanted to be in the newspaper business?

B: When I was a youngster, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old, I began to try to write stories in my notebooks. My family did not really have any background toward writing journalism, although my mother was encouraging. She read a lot of gothic novels, and she always wanted to write, she said. I was imbued with a lot of imagination, taken from movies and stories I read, and I began to try to write. I also wanted to be an artist at the same time, drawing, reading the *Saturday Evening Post* and looking at editorial cartoons of the time, Milton Caniff and "Terry and the Pirates" and all that. So, I had all these interests of wanting to write and illustrate all through my childhood. Then, when I reached early high school, we developed a school newspaper, the first one in the history of Altha High School. It was a little mimeographed sheet that I created. I wrote it on my old upright Underwood typewriter that my dad had. I began to work for the county weekly in Blountstown, I would see my stories in print. I just slowly went into that, wanting to write, enjoyed writing. Really, my ambition was to write books, even at that early age, but I found the smell of the ink on the newsprint at an early age and was able to be the editor of a small weekly newspaper called *Altha Times* in the late 1940s. The town had prospered somewhat, and an old gentlemen by the name of Olen Kelly, who was an old-time weekly newspaperman, brought his flatbed press to town and started a weekly paper, and I was his editor. I was seventeen years old.

P: You were still in high school at this point?

B: Yes. So, I went from there. I began to be a correspondent for the *Florida Times Union* in Jacksonville. My father took that paper, and Arnold Finnefrock was sports editor. He paid me \$50 a month to phone in or mail in the sports events in the panhandle. I did the same thing for the *Panama City News Herald* at that time. So, I had a little business going by the time I started to go off to college that really whetted my interest in writing. Mostly at that time, it was sports because I was sort of an athlete in high school, baseball and played a little football. Sports was my world. Then, I decided to go to journalism school. First, I was going to the University of Georgia because, at that time, Georgia had a [journalism]

department that had a pretty good reputation. I had read a lot about it. Also, I wanted to be an artist, and I wanted to go to art school. I actually enrolled at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, but I was rather frustrated with all that, not sure, and some of my mentors said you really need an education, so I decided to go to school up in Georgia. They sent me to Savannah, to Hunter Air Base, because it opened as a branch campus of the University of Georgia. I was a country boy, a small-town youngster who was a little out of my element in Georgia. I stayed up there three or four weeks, and it did not have any kind of campus atmosphere. Savannah was strange to me, and I was awfully young and had not been out of Florida much. So, I called my father, and the registrar let me withdraw. I went back home and enrolled in Tallahassee at the campus of the University of Florida at Florida State College for Women, at that time. After the war, they sent 500 male students to Tallahassee because of the overflow in Gainesville. In that, I decided to study art and journalism.

P: This is 1947?

S: Yes, and I became a little disappointed in the study of fine arts. I wanted to be a magazine illustrator, and they were into abstraction and impressionistic art. I was just not real pleased. I wanted to write, so I drifted over into journalism, made that my major, became sports editor of the *Florida Flambeau*, the student newspaper. I found out that I could draw my own cartoons and write, too, so I began to draw a sports cartoon and write a column on the *Flambeau*. I have been doing that sort of thing throughout my career.

P: Let me ask about the journalism program. What did they emphasize? What kind of training did you get at FSU?

B: It was a small department, and one of my favorite professors was a gentleman named Earl Vance. He had headed the little department at Florida State College for Women. He had written extensively for academic journals, he was a wonderful teacher; he encouraged us to get a liberal arts education, which is a noble argument, the technical versus the liberal arts. He said, get yourself a good education; study history and economics and language, and let the technical aspect of journalism fall into its place. So, I took that as a guide in those early years, and I did that. I minor[ed] in political science at Florida State. He encouraged me to learn to read. This sounds elementary, but, in those days, I had come out of a rural school and thought I could read, but he had the most marvelous course called Journalism 101, which is contemporary reading. All we had to do was read about seventy-five articles out of *Atlantic* and *Harper's* magazines. Then, at the end of the semester, we had an essay test to give the thesis of each of those articles. His classroom technique was Socratic: start a discussion and have everybody thinking by the end of the hour. He really brought me out in that regard. I have always treasured that time I spent in those classes.

It taught me that, really, I needed a strong education. It is a philosophy I have used throughout my career. I teach writing at the University of West Florida, and I tell these [students] in communication arts now, get yourself a good strong liberal arts education; take the writing courses, learn to write, but all the other technical aspects of journalism can be learned on the job because on-the-job training is really what you need.

P: Do you therefore think a degree in journalism is necessary?

B: Not necessarily, no.

P: Is it better to learn on the job?

B: I think it probably is, because what I have found in journalism in my experience at Florida State. We had a course in the history of journalism, which was okay but it was a textbook course; we had courses in headline writing and copyediting, which is kind of a routine thing you learn on the job because each newspaper is different. I could have spent more time in other areas of political science, learning American government, economics, maybe some advanced English courses to strengthen myself in the language where I was learning little technical things. Now, I have to say, in today's world of electronics, so many courses in graphic design and use of a computer are very valuable. As a matter of fact, you probably could not get a job unless you had some knowledge in that, but it still goes back to the basics. You have to know how to use the language, how to write a good, sharp, clear story. That is the most important thing that you can learn. But, you really ought to have history, economics, language, because, as a newspaper person, you are going to have to deal with everything, from the high-and-mighty and the celebrity to the technical, the scientist, the police beat, the courthouse and city hall. If you do not know the framework of government, if you do not know how American business operates, if you do not know how education works, then you are going to be lost. So, it begins with that liberal arts base.

P: How about the *Flambeau*? What was it like during this period of time? I guess it was controlled pretty carefully by the administration?

B: It was up to a point. At Florida State, Doak Campbell was the president. It had been a women's institution. When I went on the *Flambeau*, I was the second male sports editor of the *Flambeau*. There were few male[s] on the staff. [The] paper was financially in good shape. They had money in the bank. They sold ads. They operated semi-independent of the administration, up to a point, because at that particular time, we did not have any really controversial issues that had caused the student rebellion [in the 1960s]. I will share with you an experience we had in regard to that. Earl Dobert, who was from Tampa, was the editor, and he was an aggressive young idealist. He ran into difficulty with

President Doak Campbell over an issue that would sound awfully simple today. One of our associate editors discovered that, in the late 1940s, some faculty [members were] teaching black children on Saturday mornings in the black area of Tallahassee, French Town; we thought it made a good story. These people were volunteering their time to help these black children. So, we ran a story on page one, kind of a feature story of people doing good service. The Florida legislature was in session, and Doak Campbell, being a university president who (like all university presidents) was sensitive to what the legislature was saying in those days, called Dobert in, and he told him, you are going to have to step down as editor of the *Flambeau* or I am going to have you kicked out of school. Dobert, being one who wanted to finish his degree, resigned, and I became the editor that last semester before I graduated. That was the only experience I had with the administration cracking down.

P: What was the issue? Why was he upset?

B: The issue was the black issue because they did not want the radical faculty out in the early days of the civil rights movement, in the late 1940s. It was beginning to take shape even at that earlier period. After World War II, all that began to change, and Tallahassee had a pretty large black community. The issue was that the Florida legislature at that time was controlled by what we call the Porkchop Gang, a term created by Jim Clendenin, the editor of the *Tampa Tribune*. He called them the Porkchop Gang, and that comes from the fact that they were mostly North Florida rural legislators, before the days of reapportionment, who really controlled the legislature. In those days, [the more urban] South Florida did not have much clout in the legislature. So, all across the tier of North Florida, the rural [lawmakers], who were avowed segregationists [and] in control. So, you can imagine the attitude of Campbell—and he probably was overreacting to that—but you can imagine, you got your faculty out teaching black children and, you know, [funding might be in jeopardy]. That was the only issue in my time that was that severe. At a later time, I was on the committee when Stan Marshall was president of Florida State University, in the 1960s, when we had student protests developing and the *Flambeau* became, apparently in his eyes, very radical. He, being the overall administrator of the university press, asked three of us editors, John McMullen of the *Miami Herald* and Don Shoemaker, the editorial [page editor] of the *Herald*, about four of us, to come to Tallahassee and tell him what to do with the *Flambeau*. We spent a couple of days over there talking to the students, found them to be very wonderful—you know, just typical students. But we recommended that they set up an independent corporation to run the student newspaper, and that ended it. It happened, and, today, I think many of the student newspapers are [independent enterprises].

P: It happened about the same time the *Florida Alligator* [at the University of Florida] became independent.

B: Right.

P: When you started out with the *Altha Times* and later with the *Calhoun County Times*, what kind of journalistic activity were you involved in? Were you doing stories, reporting?

B: I was writing all kinds of stories for the paper, whatever came in. Sometimes, there were even social items, death notices, a little police and sheriff's department, just anything that came. Mostly, when I worked on the weekly, I learned how to set type by hand. [Mr. Kelley] at the *Altha Times* set all his type by hand, which was an antique thing even in those days. An interesting part about the *Altha Times*, [was that Kelley] was an alcoholic and an old-time printer. He knew his business. He could go to that California case, as we called it, and pick up that type, and he could get a stick of type in just a few minutes, and his wife could do the same. The problem was that he got too much alcohol sometimes, and he could not set all that type. He had an old station wagon, so we would get out in the night and go to Chattahoochee, Quincy, Wewahitchka, Bristol, where weeklies were produced, and they would finish up his newspaper. They had Linotypes, and they would finish up this newspaper for him. That happened a lot. Now, the other paper I worked on was called the *County Record*, in Blountstown. It was run by a gentleman by the name of Wallace Finley, who had been principal of Altha High School. Wallace was an [University of] Alabama graduate, and his field was literature. He was really the one who turned me on to good literature. When I was in the eighth grade, we had to go into a class of four seniors who needed a credit to graduate, and he was going to teach us Spanish. He had been to Spain and Mexico City, had seen the bullfights. He thought he knew all about Spain. He never taught us three words of Spanish that entire year, but we sat in his room and listened to all the great books that Ernest Hemingway had written, and William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. He was fascinating. He always had a novel under his arm, and so that really [inspired] me. Well, later on after World War II—he was a field artillery officer in World War II—he came back to Blountstown and bought the county paper. So, when I was a student at Florida State, in the summers, I would work for him. I would do everything, clean the rollers on the press, try to learn to use the Linotype machine—he had a Linotype—and then I would write stories. I would even go down to the grocery store and pick up their ads and bring them back. There was a lot of fun and excitement in that, so that helped whet my interest in it. The world of the weekly newspaper, as you know, has changed. They do it all electronically today. They do it, sometimes, in a common shop somewhere, and it is printed somewhere else. The paper in Blountstown now is printed, I think, in Thomasville, Georgia. Some lawyer out of Tallahassee bought three or four weeklies, and he operates them out of a print shop in Georgia. That is a changed world, but in those days, you had to put it together mechanically by hand. You could see the whole paper come together. So, I got experience on how to write headlines, how to compose

type, and how to make things fit. When I was finally in journalism school taking these copyediting and headline writing stories, they were easy for me and it seemed to be redundant. I recall a course I took in headline writing, and this gentleman who had been an Associated Press [AP] reporter was the instructor. He had a copy desk and he would just throw us a piece of AP copy, and we would edit it and write a headline on it. After three weeks of that, you pretty well mastered that. That is what I meant, that I thought I was wasting my time with that where I should have been studying the more serious areas that would have helped me later on in my career. But along the way, I [became] fascinated with history and good literature and writing, and so I advanced on through that. But the weekly experience was very valuable. I would not take anything for it. I did not make any money, but I fell in love with the printed page from that period.

P: After you leave FSU, you go in the Air Force for two years, and you have some additional writing experience with *The Planesman* at the Mountain Home Air Force Base. What sort of activities were you involved in there?

B: I was editor of *The Planesman*. I had joined the Air Force. In those days, if you were a college graduate, you could join. You had to go to basic training, and then you could [enter] Officer Candidate School [OCS]. That was the agreement I signed. I went through basic, and I missed the OCS class. As typical in the military, they finally put me on orders to go to Mountain Home, Idaho, because they were developing the U.S. Air Force's psychological warfare program, which I did not know the first thing about, but I was a journalism graduate. They sent me up there, and I was in the wing that was developing this program of psych war. Because I had a journalism degree, they thought it worked. Just as I got to Mountain Home, which was an old World War II base they had reopened for the Korean War, the base commander wanted a base newspaper, and so I was chosen to go over and develop it. We named it *The Planesman*, and it was the plains. It was a sagebrush desert country. I edited that newspaper for about a year, and, again, I was able to draw my own cartoons. I did facial cartoons that were fashionable in the day, take the face and then put little comic characters around them. I did all the base leaders and all these wonderful guys in psych war. They were really John Wayne kind of characters. I did a series of those, and the base commander just loved what I did with that paper. I applied for a direct commission at that time. I was frustrated because I did not go to OCS, and even the base commander attached a letter to it, a very nice letter. Then, I also applied for a position on a new magazine the Air Force was starting at that time in St. Louis called *Air Force*. They were recruiting people, and along comes the orders for me to go to St. Louis to work on *Air Force* magazine. The base commander rejected it and said [I was] needed [at Mountain Home]. A few weeks later, along comes the orders for OCS in Texas. He could not stop that, so he put me a nice attachment to the application and I went down to Texas and got my commission. We had a [OCS] newspaper there, and I worked on that. I worked on the

yearbook as an upperclassman. I went to New York and went to the officer's information and education program, which was training in journalism.

P: Did you ever have any formal training as a cartoonist?

B: No. The only training I had was two or three courses at Florida State. One was design, and one was oil painting. As I said earlier, so much of this was designed toward fine arts, abstract, impressionistic art that was kind of in style at that time. I really did not have much interest in that, but I wanted to cartoon. I wanted to illustrate. That is when I just started doing it myself. I studied all the cartoonists, Willard Mullin, who used to do the great sports cartoons, and looked at all of them. I did a comic strip for awhile called Rod Carson, and it was modeled after Steve Canyon [comic strip]. It ran in the *Flambeau* in Tallahassee a few weeks, but doing a comic strip, you have to stay with it. So, I was just searching when I started doing these sports cartoons, and then, actually here, I drifted into editorial cartoons.

P: Which editorial cartoonists do you admire today?

B: There are several. [The late] Jeff McNelly [was] great. He is a [University of] North Carolina graduate. [One of] my great heroes of all time [was] Herb Block [Herblock], who is still going in his eighties at the *Washington Post*. Bill Mauldin was really my idol. I collected all of his books. I have read everything he has ever written, and his great cartoons. Cartoonists today are better than they ever were.

P: Oliphant , [Mike] Peters . . .

B: Oliphant, yes, he is real, sometimes, vicious cartoonist, but very effective.

P: What makes a good editorial cartoonist?

B: It is the irony, the satire, the fact that you can crystallize an idea about an issue into comical form that would cause the reader to react, chuckle, laugh, say oh yeah. It can be a vicious art. Caricature, historically, has always been a terrible[y] powerful weapon, even in the early centuries in France and England. [Many] caricatur[ists], many of them went to jail because they lampooned the king or whatever. The editorial [cartoon] is simply a pictorial thirty-second thought that appears on the editorial page that does visually what a written editorial does. I was an editor who believed in local news and local issues, and most of my cartoons through the years have dealt with Pensacola and regional topics. Very local.

P: But it has to be recognizable, right?

B: Right. Occasionally, I do national [topics], but I always thought that cartoon could be powerful in trying to persuade people. It worked, I think, in such issues that I had through the years as when we were trying to create Gulf Islands National Seashore. I did, maybe, 100 cartoons ripping the people who opposed it and trying to put across the idea. So, a cartoon has to have punch, irony, satire, humor, ridicule.

P: Would you use that to illustrate an editorial you had written?

B: Yes. It [is] always more effective to have the visual, the graphic, [published with the] editorial that you write. Now, we do not always do that anymore. I [still draw] one on Sunday, and it is always local. It might be a legislative issue out of Tallahassee or something here in the community. Editorial cartoonists today really kind of stand alone. Most of them are kind of independent of the editorial page.

P: Do you know of anybody else who writes editorials and illustrates them?

B: No, and the book I wrote [*Drawing From an Editor's Life*] has this in it. A gentleman by the name of Judd Hurd is editor and publisher of a national magazine called *Cartoonist Profiles*. He is an old-timer; he used to be a cartoonist. So he called me and says, I understand you do your own editorial cartoons. I said, right. He said, I have looked around, and I have never heard of that before; would you write me an article? And I did. It covered about twelve pages. He used several of my cartoons. It was [entitled] "An Editor as His Own Cartoonist," and I am the only one he ever heard of who did that. It is unusual, but cartooning was really kind of my sideline activity as an editor of a newspaper. I did it because I enjoyed it, I thought it was helpful, but I was primarily an editor. Sometimes, I would write the editorial at the office, go home, and that night on my kitchen table draw the cartoon. [They were published] together.

P: I have talked to several editorial cartoonists, and it is interesting how they work. Some of them, like McNelly, for example, get an idea and then spends a large portion of time trying to draw what he wants to say. Is that how you work?

B: Yes. You [strive for] an idea; you use metaphors. You know, you can use things out of classic literature, *Alice in Wonderland* or whatever. You do not use so much the old symbols of the past, like Uncle Sam. Well, McNelly us[ed] that because his work has got some of the old classic. He truly dr[ew] an editorial cartoon. Many of these younger ones who I see just do what we call a gag cartoon. It is funny, dealing with the Internet or dealing with [topical subjects]. It is not really issue-oriented, but McNelly ha[d] a creative way of taking the editorial cartoon and creating a classic scene where it is almost subtle in what he does. Yes, you have to do that. You deal with symbol. You play around. Sometimes,

you do just a really make-fun thing of local people. In this county, for example, we had what I called in editorials through the years an old dirt-road board for our county commissioners. They would make some of the most really old-time 1930s thinking, here in a city that was trying to get into the twentieth century and advance. I began to draw cartoons, and I would put them in wagons and straws in their teeth and straw hats and create a country band with them singing. They are all in [my cartoon book], but you use those kind of things and you are really making fun of them, but you are trying to make a point. It is strange. These guys who I have ridiculed and lampooned through the years all want copies of them to hang on their wall. So, yes, that is what you do. That has really been a very pleasing part of my career, drawing, because I really love to [create cartoons]. My goal as a youngster was to write and illustrate my own books, and I love illustrated books. The only vehicle I could get into was newspaper work. I love the daily business of newspaper. No two days are alike. Everything is different. You start over every day. It is the only industry where you create a product every day, and it is always different.

P: You first came to the *Pensacola Journal* in 1953. You worked for the *News Journal*. That was the afternoon paper, is that right?

B: The News Journal is the name of the company. We had the *Pensacola Journal* morning and the *Pensacola News* evening. We had two papers. On Sunday, it became the *Pensacola News Journal*.

P: So, you came to work for the . . . ?

B: I worked on the *Journal* as sports writer for just a few weeks, on the morning paper and the Sunday paper. I was made sports editor within just a few months because the fellow I worked had been drafted in the Army. He was a bachelor—he was older—but he wanted to go in the Army, so I became sports editor. I worked for the morning paper and the Sunday paper.

P: A lot of people who are editors and publishers started in sports. Why do you think that is?

B: I could not think of a better place for a young man to begin because what you deal with in sports is a human drama. It is almost like you are describing a stage play. Sport is competition. It is human drama. It has all the elements of a good story, winning and losing. It gives you an opportunity to write freely because sports writers, even though many of them use too many adjectives and overwrite, it is a great place to start. And I recommend it. The only problem is that sports, to me, was such a limited field that all my friends and associates were coaches and athletes. It is a world in itself, and when you have other interests, pretty soon you say, well, I have to get out of this. Now, a lot of people never lose it, and they

want to stay and make a career of it. The great Red Smith and Fred Russell in Nashville, who spent his entire career as sports writer but wrote literature. He was protege of Grantland Rice. His columns were just a piece of literature, so he saw sport as a human drama. The same with Red Smith. When you read his columns, they were universal. They had a theme to them. He was not just covering the Yankees and the Dodgers. He was writing about the human condition more than anything else. So, they were writers more than they were sportswriters. I reached a point where I was interested in other things. I was interested in editorial writing, and I was sort of interested in political science. That is when I backed out of sports, about 1958, and I went on the afternoon *Pensacola News* [as] news editor. I did the telegraph; I laid out all the pages.

P: Let me go back a little bit into sports. What did you mainly write about? What did the Pensacola paper cover?

B: That is one of the reasons it was limiting. Most of our coverage was high school sports, in this area. We did not have a university. Occasionally, I would get to go to Gainesville to cover the Gators on a big event, but mostly we were just interested about here in the panhandle, all these high schools. We covered the entire panhandle all the way to Quincy, covered every game. They would call them in, and we would run a complete account. We had two editions of the morning paper. It was fun. You would take a high school kid recalling a sports game, take their facts and write a story and put a headline on it, ask him questions and develop it as best you could and try to cover everything out in the panhandle. You would have the opportunity to write a column, go interview people, but it was not like, say, a sports editor at the *Times Union*--they were near Gainesville and they could talk to the coach and cover the university system. Today, of course, we have the pros. We did not have that. The only thing we had in those days was the Senior Bowl in Mobile, which I covered. That was kind of a big event in those days. It brought all the pro coaches to town and you got to interview them. But it was prep sports, and after a while of that, you began to see bigger horizons. That is when I was fortunate to get out of sports.

P: Let me get a definition of your job as a news editor. Exactly what did you do?

B: As news editor, I worked telegraph, which we call wire service.

P: That is AP and UPI [United Press International]?

B: Right. I edited that, I worked the wires, I laid out front page, I laid out all the pages of the entire newspaper, except for women's pages--in those days, we still call[ed them] women's society pages--and sports. That was a tremendous challenge and quite a contrast to sports; you deal with hard news and you ha[ve] to be fast with it. I was not writing as much, although we had reporters at the

courthouse or the police station; they would phone in stories or phone in fax on deadline and I would take them and write the story. I found myself suddenly being able to tighten up these stories. Unlike sports where you had the liberty to flow, you had to write it tight. That was a good school for me, to go from sports where you kind of have a wild, loose, featured approach to things, more so than hard news, where you have to tighten it up and get it on the page.

P: Did you assign reporters, or did you just edit?

B: I just edited at that time. We had a managing editor of the afternoon paper who [supervised] the reporters. After he completed all the copy, it would come to me, and I had to place it on the page, lay out the page and place the photographs.

P: When was your print deadline?

B: We had a print deadline at about eleven o'clock in the morning and then another one at one-thirty. We had two editions.

P: So, you would get a lot of the late-breaking night news for the afternoon paper.

B: Right. Afternoon experience is, to me, better than the morning experience because what you have to do [is]—the morning paper has come out, and it has all the news in it—you have to come back by ten or eleven o'clock in the morning, and you have to get a fresh angle to everything. Most news would be considered old. You have to go through the morning paper and look at this lead on the county commissioner and [find] an angle that this morning paper did not cover? You have to find [a fresh approach]. It lends itself—or it did then; all this is passe now—to write news with a second-day lead. It lets you write it more loosely in a featur[ed] form. Take the hard news, and give it a softness at the beginning in order to get a new angle for the next day. Otherwise, you are repeating what was in the morning paper.

P: Plus, there had to be some new information. If there were a fire, you might now have the names of the victims which you did not have before.

B: Right, and it is evolving. Fortunately, you get breaking news early in the morning, crime or fire, and then you run with that as your lead story because that is what you have. In those days, we had pretty large street sales. This is also passe. Street sales were important to our afternoon paper because you would bring that paper out around noon when people were going to lunch, and you have a big headline on a breaking story, people are going to buy it. That has all changed.

P: Yes, because that paper was never delivered, was it?

B: Yes, it was delivered.

P: So, some people got morning, and some people got afternoon.

B: Yes, because the afternoon paper at one time had a larger circulation in Pensacola, as it does in some cities, than the morning paper. The edition that goes to the home was the final edition that came out about one-thirty. By the final edition, you[‘ve] cleaned up the paper [and] gotten rid of big headlines [designed for street sales]. You had to take what would not be too important at a later period and play it big to try to attract the reader’s eye in the day. Not to be sensational, I am not talking about that. I am talking about, you have a big fire in the city or in the county, you play that real big. By the next cycle, you may have something else that is better. So you have an opportunity to do a quick edition and then fall back and clean it up for the second edition. That was a tremendous experience to me. I loved page design, which today is done on a computer. Macintosh Computer, they just put all those elements and pop them together in a few minutes. In those days, I had to take my photographs and crop them, I had to size all the stories, and as my biography shows there, I won [state awards] five to six years in a row [for] the best design in Florida with the afternoon paper and our circulation. So, that was a lot of fun, and it was really helpful for me to develop the idea that you can take news and do a second-day lead to it. I remember one of the old editors. You would say, the *Journal* picked that story clean, and there is nothing there we can do, and everything is covered. So, you always went into these stories in the morning paper and looked at what they did not include and try to find another angle. That is the kind of essence of news.

P: What was the circulation of the Pensacola papers around 1964?

B: The *Journal*, the morning paper, was about 65,000 daily, 80,000 on Sunday. The afternoon paper was 30,000 to 40,000. Now, at an earlier period, back in the 1950s, the morning paper and the evening paper had about the same amount of circulation. It was a different time. We did not have television, none of that. Then, you began to see the decline of the afternoon numbers. Advertisers preferred the morning paper because they had more circulation. I fought for years to keep the afternoon paper alive, tried everything I could to salvage it after I became editor. So, it was about 85[,000] on Sunday, the *News Journal*, and the p.m. paper, the *News*, was 35,000 to 40,000. Now, by 1985, when we were forced to close out the afternoon [edition], the circulation [had] dropped to about 12,000 or 14,000. It was not viable anymore.

P: That was pretty true around the country, was it not?

B: Yes, it affected everybody. Afternoon papers just no longer had a purpose. Everybody tried everything they could. What I did with the *Pensacola News* [was

to] turn it into a total local newspaper. The *St. Petersburg Times* had done that with the *St. Pete Independent* after they bought it. The entire paper was local news, except on the back page [for] national [news], in total contrast with the morning *Times*, so I said we are going to do that here. We tried, but people's time and recreation had changed. Neighborhoods had changed. Television began to dominate. One of the saddest days of my life was when I read that television is now the dominant source for news. That was sad for me.

P: So, in effect, people would not read the afternoon paper. They would come home and watch Walter Cronkite [anchorman, CBS news].

B: Right. The afternoon paper was old by then. All you could do in the afternoon paper was develop stories which were interesting featurized stories, in-depth kind of [enterprise] that they could not get on a thirty-minute telecast. That was the only hope for it.

P: From 1964 to 1966, you were the editorial page editor for both papers. What primarily were your duties in this position?

B: I [wrote] the editorials and design[ed] the editorial pages. Now, we had another person on the *News*. He and I shared. I had the *Journal*, he had the *News*, but he died with cancer and I had to take over both. That was quite a chore. I had to do morning editorials and afternoon editorials.

P: You wrote all the editorials?

B: Yes. The *Journal* had a stack of, I think, three editorials. [For] the *News*, I redesigned the page so I did not have to write quite so much. I wrote one long one and one short one for the *News*. That was a chore. I did that for eight months, both newspapers. You still had all the editing chores in the old hot-type [process]. You had to pick [the] cartoon and select your syndicated columns and lay them out and edit them, make them fit, and then write the editorials, and I [was] still doing the cartoon, but I was a lot younger then and having a lot of fun with it. It was quite a chore, and I learned a great deal. I found that editorial ideas come to you, play[ing] off the news. I did not use much canned stuff. A lot of papers would look to editorial services, which are frowned on totally. I looked at some of those but I said, good Lord, that has nothing to do with Pensacola and Florida; we do not need that in our paper. So, I tried to write them, and I tried to keep them as local as possible.

P: What is the hardest thing about writing an editorial?

B: Getting the idea. Writing it is, to me, fairly simple. When you have a problem, what is the problem, what is the solution, what is the recommendation? But finding ideas, and you have to go through [the] newspaper every day and pick up

ideas coming out of the county commission, city council, environmental issues, even plain neighborhood issues, clean water, and find a new angle to that, and develop your policy. You [must] have a policy, principles that you believe in. Ours, fortunately, on a medium-sized community newspaper like the *Pensacola News Journal* [was primarily] local. We had [an old expression] called Afghanistanism, where you could take an issue in Europe or in the White House or on the West Coast and just have all kinds of fun criticizing it or criticizing the president for not doing something or criticiz[ing] the [Nikita Sergeyevich] Khrushchev [former Soviet Premier] or [Muammar] Qaddafi [Libyan leader], and your voice is not going to reach that far. But where is your area of influence? It is here in the proximity of your readership, proximity being one of the elements of news. If you can be persuasive toward your own home town, then that is the value of a newspaper editorial. Many newspapers, even larger metropolitan newspapers today, have understood that. I mean, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* write national and international editorials daily because they are recognized [as national publications]. But most newspapers, even the *Miami Herald*, probably the *Times Union*, if you read the editorial pages, many of those topics are on Florida and regional issues.

P: Would you write an editorial on the Elian Gonzales [Cuban refugee youngster] case?

B: Yes, [such] issues [warrant comment]. You cannot ignore certain bigger issues that [affect public affairs]. You also write about Social Security, you write about the military, because that affects everyone, even local[ly]. You look for military topics because we have a tremendous military establishment here on the Gulf Coast in Pensacola and Fort Walton Beach. Any kind of issue about military, pay, armament, [training, budget] can be localized, can be adapted to [activity] here. So, you always look for those, yes, but you cannot ignore the bigger issues. I mean, a war in Bosnia, you would have an editorial. You would have something to say about that because even Pensacolians are very [affected]. But, you do not just daily, routinely, criticize what Congress is doing, although a lot of times there is an opportunity to criticize Congress about issues that might pertain to our area. So, you look for those angles.

P: Would you consider yourself, at this time, conservative or liberal?

B: I sometimes call myself a Jeffersonian. I believe in absolute individual freedom. I believe in small government. I am pretty frugal and conservative when it comes to spending the taxpayer's dollar. I am very liberal on human rights and civil rights. I used to be more conservative in the sense of the Goldwater/Reagan era conservative. I was more into that at a certain time, but I am [also] a strong environmentalist. So I could not say that I am a true conservative. A lot of things that the true liberal does, I do not want to be a part of it. I believe in family values.

I believe in the American system. I believe in free enterprise. I think the perception was when I ran the editorial pages is that I was probably more conservative than I really was. I always stood up for the black American rights, even in the early days. In the 1960s, the paper was pretty progressive in that. But we believed in free enterprise, respected it. An editor has to sometimes be cognizant of the fact that in a newspaper, you do not do it because the newspaper has to survive and flourish, but you have to [consider] the total community. Many editors have publishers who believe that the advertiser needs a little attention. I never had that problem, and I worked for five publishers; the only time we would ever take on business was if it was a legitimate issue and it rose above the [perception of] just [taking] care of the advertiser. I never had that problem. You do have to be sensitive that business is important to a community, but so [are] the people's rights, so is the environment, so are governmental controls that prevent overbuilding and [serve] people's interests. So you have to do a balancing act. I would never consider myself a right-winger. I have done a lot of patriotic editorials on holidays, the duty editorial that so many editorialists detest. They do not like to write a Fourth of July editorial or a Memorial Day editorial or on the [anniversary] of Pearl Harbor. I loved those because it gave me an opportunity to take an issue about America and talk about it. I would consider myself more moderate, if that could be. A lot of people would say you are muddy, wishy-washy. That is not true at all. You have certain principles. I think you can study [Thomas] Jefferson, and he did not think government ought to do everything. He thought people ought to do that, and I agree with that. I think contrary to what happened in research on him in recent years that he really believed in freedom in his own context, the individual, and he also gave us the First Amendment, he and others, which is treasured by all of us, the right to speak, assemble, religion, and certainly the press. It is certainly not a press amendment. It is just freedom, the linchpin; we all have to work to protect that.

P: Let me ask you some specific issues and get your response. What was your reaction to both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965?

B: I thought both of them were needed, had to be.

P: Did you get much criticism for taking those stands in the panhandle?

B: Well, yes, a little. In this area, as conservative as it is, we did not have that kind of turmoil that you had in Mississippi or South Alabama. Pensacola, being a harbor city, has always had a little bit of sophistication to it in that regard. Out in the rural areas, you have a lot of heat. Those things were necessary, and we recognized it. Even before *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954 desegregation case], my predecessor, Marion Gaines, was advocating desegregation, and we carried that on. No question, we criticized Dr. [Martin Luther] King. We thought he might be going too far, but we were not alone in that. Everybody was saying that.

You look back on it now and say the man really did a tremendous [service] for this nation, but at that time, the idea of people protesting and walking in the streets was a little bit foreign to us. Our paper thought protest and that sort of thing just was not the way to go. We preferred more sitting-down and working-out [dialogue], which was not going to happen. You need that kind of agitation from time to time to make things happen, but I think generally, overall, we were pretty supportive of that.

P: Did you comment on St. Augustine in 1964 or Birmingham in 1965, or Selma?

B: Yes, we did.

P: Did you think those demonstrations were extreme?

B: Not really. I cannot recall whether that was that big an issue here at that time. Now, we kept calling for both sides to calm down and sit at the table and work it out. The violence that occurred in Birmingham, yes, we hit that hard. Of course, anytime children are killed at church, you have to [object]. We did not get much criticism on that. We had some local marches here led by a civil rights leader, and we met repeatedly with that group, trying to work it out. The paper was trying to be a mediator, and we never had any real violence. We had the lunch counter sit-ins at first, and one of our hospitals was not hiring blacks. We had a problem at Escambia High School over the Confederate flag. They had opened a new high school, and their nickname was the Rebels and they had the Confederate flag. For that, I did a page one editorial saying that we have to end this. We almost had a real violent confrontation at that school. Guns were flashing. We had a couple of old politicians who jumped in, including Senator W. D. Childers. [We] said, we have to stop all this. I was part of a group here in town that mediated that, kind of called off the dogs and got those people out of it. The courts later ruled that the flag had to come down, and they changed the name of the school. I think they are the Raiders now. That all smoothed over. What I am saying is that we were trying to find a middle ground to bring the blacks and whites together. I reviewed a book several years ago. These old editors were liberals in the South, including [Jonathan] Daniels [editor, Raleigh (N.C.) *News and Observer*] and Hodding Carter [editor, *Delta Democrat-Times* (Greenville, Mississippi)]. There were about six editors of this book, and I reviewed it for the *Florida Historical Quarterly*. These people preced[ed] me. They were my predecessors. Marion T. Gaines was an Alabamian from Mobile, and he was perceived in his career as a very liberal [editor] because he pushed a lot of things. Before that time, he was a very close ally with Leroy Collins, in those early years. What I found out was that those so-called liberal editors of that time—and they did not call themselves liberals, they called themselves moderates—wanted peace between the blacks and the whites. They did not necessarily want an integrated society, but they wanted equal rights for everyone. When Dr. King

came along, they did not like him. They thought he was an agitator. Their perception of equality was still grounded in the Old South idea, that we ought to have a separation of races. It was interesting. Then, a later generation comes along and realizes that we have to have a melting pot, that we have to come together, that we need a colorless society. I wrote an editorial about what King said about a color-blind society. We need that. So, I guess my editorial thrust was moderate to liberal at times and somewhat conservative. Al Neuharth [founder, *USA TODAY*], the president of our company, used to say the editorial page should never be predictable. If they know you are a right-wing newspaper and what you are going to say every day, you are playing to the choir. You have to be unpredictable and be loose. Think about the issue. Let the issue determine what you are going to say about it, as long as you keep a common thread to [basic editorial principles].

P: Did the paper always make recommendations in political races?

B: Yes, they did during my time. As a matter of fact, they started it, really, back in the 1950s. I always advocated that very strongly. There were times when we thought that maybe we were not adding anything by adding our voice to it, and there were movements to kind of say, why don't we get out of this business? Especially after Watergate, when some of the Florida papers, including John Knight and the *Miami Herald* said, we will never endorse a candidate ever again. They do now. I never thought that because here is my theory: if you, as a newspaper, have a voice, have a page devoted to opinion, and you take a position on whether to build that parking lot over there or whether we ought to have a park over here or whether we ought to save the bayfront or whether the sheriff is getting out of line and is a little bit too loose with shooting criminals, if you take those positions daily, when it comes for the time for your people living in your local precinct or local governmental unit, state or national or whatever, they have to make a decision to pick their leader. The newspaper ought to have the backbone to come out and say what it thinks about these candidates and make a recommendation, not an endorsement. I used to call them endorsements. In the early years, publishers and editors would endorse a man for governor or president, and he could do no wrong. They stayed with him, and they were either Republican newspapers or Democratic newspapers or Whig newspapers or whatever. I always thought that we would just take it within its course. Today, we say X ought to be president, or we recommend him, tell the reader why, and move on. The next day, if he does something after he is elected [that] we disagree with, we take him on. That relieves you of this burden of having the allegiance connection to the political candidate. Now, the *News Journal*, under a new editor now, Randy Hammer, I think, is determined that they will not endorse political candidates again. They are just going to get away from that. I disagree with that. I serve on the editorial board still, and I explained to them why, that you have to have the stamina to do it, and you get heat. It is a crazy period in political

seasons. If you do not endorse a candidate, he rips you, you know, you are slanted and all that, but you have to do [stand on principle]. All you are doing is making a recommendation. Now, readers perceive that wrongly. They think you are in bed with the candidate you are endorsing, and you do all kinds of ways of trying to prove you are not by offering the opposition space on the editorial page to sound off. We always did that. If it was a two-candidate race, we recommended [one] person, and [the other was given] equal space, 400 words, and we [printed the response]. That helps. Then, we opened up our Letter to the Editor page to let people talk about candidates.

P: Do you think your recommendations had much impact?

B: On certain races, they had a lot of impact. For instance, judicial races, which are often non-political. People would run for judge in Florida, and about all they would tell you was where they went to school and who their wife is and their basic biographical [information]. They cannot say a word about political issues under their code. I found through the years that we used to elect more judges than we do today. In the large election in November, usually, you had a pretty large selection of circuit judges running or county judge. We found that our recommendations were [effective] a lot of times, because people do not perceive those races as being partisan or political and they look to the newspaper [knowing we had] researched them, and [they will follow our] recommendation. Now, if you get a hot sheriff's race in this county, the newspaper might not be as influential as that because that gets awfully partisan and bitterly brutal sometimes, and other factors carry it. That should not deter you from taking a position, a logical sober analysis of what the person can offer in the office.

P: Let me go to a specific race, 1966, Claude Kirk and Robert King High [former mayor of Miami]. Do you remember who you endorsed in that one?

B: We endorsed Kirk.

P: Why?

B: We were taken with him, and I got to know Claude later on. I mean, gosh, what a character. We thought he had some good things to offer Florida. He was a new voice. King High [came] to Pensacola, but we did not know much about him. Kirk struck me as being someone new, and Republicanism was coming on in that time. That is the reason we went for him. King High was South Florida. He was also pro-labor, and my publisher at the time was anti-labor because we had problems with the ITU [International Typesetter's Union], and he was a strong businessman. So, that was the reason. We got to know Kirk. He visited us quite a bit, and I thought he had a lot of strengths. I wrote, I do not know how many, columns about him through the years. He was funny, a stand-up comic. It was

unbelievable. I wrote a column recently about him. He wants to be buried on the Capitol grounds in Tallahassee, and I saw a little squib in the paper. He said, me and Andy Jackson [sic] belong there, and it just gave me an opportunity to spell out all of his [comic episodes as governor].

P: He told me he wanted to be up there so he could keep an eye on them.

B: Yes. I [wrote] in the end of a column that he needs his own little spot of ground up there. He is funny.

P: When you look back at his years as governor, how do you assess him?

B: Of course, we opposed that teacher strike in Florida. The teachers really took us on. We were not against education. Our newspaper was [always] strong with public education, but we did not like the idea of teachers walking out at that time. It caused a lot of grief here for us; the teachers would meet in our auditorium and rip the newspaper. Kirk did not do anything to try to mediate that. He flew off to California during that teachers' strike. He [became] a comic figure. We later got to know Kirk and were critical of some of the things that he did, a lot of things. Then, along comes Reubin . . .

P: Well, Kirk was a strong environmentalist.

B: That is one of the things. He brought Nat Reed [Kirk aide and pro-environment figure] into the government, and I liked that. I got to know Nat later, a wonderful man. Yes. As a matter of fact, there is a University Press book out on the Claude Kirk years that I read and reviewed in a column. We got a whole different perspective of Claude Kirk. There are a lot of things that are now [standard] in Florida that Claude Kirk introduced: Wackenhut [private detective firm] he hired to be his police force. You know, everybody perceived him as Nixon's guard and all that, but now it is the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The environmental movement. So he did a lot of things.

P: What about when he fired the superintendent and took over the Manatee County school system? What was your reaction to that?

B: Well, I thought that was terrible. A good friend of mine [Bill Maloy] was sent down to run it. Maloy [later served] on the Board of Regents. Claude goes down and sits in the superintendent's chair and says, we are going to take over this school system, and Bill was his aide. Claude gets up out of the chair and says, you take over, and he went back to Tallahassee. Bill said he just sat there trying to do something, and it was crazy. Yes, he did some crazy things, and I acknowledge that. He got a lot of support here because I think here at the paper, the Goldwater era was changing attitudes, and we liked some of the things that were

said in those days. Things began to change and along comes Kirk, who was sounding that same [theme]. In a later time, Claude went absolutely off-balance. He came here and [spoke] to the Panhandle Tiger Bay Club, advocating creating a new state, to be carved out of south Georgia and south Alabama and west Florida, and he would be the emperor and he would have his own horse marines. I mean, for an hour, he [mesmerized] the audience with these wonderful stories. But we did like him in the beginning and, of course, a lot of people did.

P: If you had to assess how politics has changed from the time you started writing editorials today in this area, what would you say? Is it, for example, more Republican now than it was?

B: Oh yes. The registration in Escambia County, I believe, is still a Democratic majority. Now, our neighboring counties, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa, where Fort Walton Beach is, and the Air Force influence, is all Republican. It has changed. But, these Republicans are old Democrats. See, Florida used to be a Democratic state. It was really a no-party state. Everybody just happened to be [a] registered Democrat. You know the old theory, your granddaddy will turn over in his grave if you vote for a Republican. There were very few Republicans here when I came. Only a handful. Today, just about everybody is calling himself Republican, but they are really not any different. They are not Rockefeller Republicans. They loved Goldwater and they loved Reagan, and that is really what has changed it. They are no different. They are little more conservative. They do not want government to do quite as much. They want to change everything. They want to come up with these vouchers for schools, which I disagree with.

P: A good example would be W.D. Childers, who changed to the Republican party, but he has not changed his philosophy at all, has he?

B: Nope.

P: From 1966 to 1969, you became editor-in-chief. Number one, how did you get that job? Number two, why did you take that job?

B: I got that job because when Marion Gaines retired after a twenty-[six] year career, I told him I would love to write editorials. I was news editor. He said, go see the publisher, Braden Ball. Braden was not a journalist. I would say he was a businessman. He said, son, the job is yours. I worked with Mr. Gaines a few months. Mr. Ball loved my editorials. I was a little more middle-of-the-road conservative than Mr. Gaines. Gaines had broken with Ball because he was more LeRoy Collins moderate-to-liberal than the publisher was. In those days, our publisher, Braden Ball, was a part of that faction in North Florida with the old Ed Ball empire. They were not related, but they were very close friends and Braden had the power-of-attorney over his holdings in this area. He was very

close to him. So I had to walk the line to my career with that, although I resisted it. But I wrote his editorials for about a year, and he liked them. They had taken the management of the newsroom away from Mr. Gaines—now, he is my predecessor—and they made him just editorial page editor because the publisher did not like his editorial [philosophy], and that is the way he got around him. He created an executive editor's position, and he picked a fellow who was really the managing editor of the *Journal*, Harold Stokes. Harold was not grounded in editorials; he was just news. But, he drifted away and became, really, kind of an alcoholic, and the newspaper slid along for about a year. So, one day, Mr. Ball called me into his office and says, can you run that department over there? I said, sir, I can try. He said, you are the new editor; you go back over there and call them into the conference room and you tell them that you are taking over as editor. I was thirty-four. I went back, and I got them all in the newsroom conference room, and I told them, Braden Ball just named me editor-in-chief of this newspaper. All these guys I had worked with, some of them had been there longer and they thought they might have a shot at that job one day, and there was a little coldness there for a few hours but it [subsided], and I took over as editor. That is how I got the job, because he was so pleased with the work I had done, first on the news, winning some awards, and then writing editorials--some of them got into the *Congressional Record*, and I had won some awards with them, and he liked what I did. I later had to fire this guy who had been executive editor, so when I got to be editor-in-chief and told him and we went back to the newsroom, he went back to his office. I went in and sat down with him and said, listen, you run the newsroom and I will just write the editorial[s], and we will just operate like we were doing before. He said, okay, I will try to help you; I understand; it was not your fault. Well, a few months later, he kind of bombed out on a project we had. I had asked him to do something, and he did not do it. He went hunting instead, and he had lost interest. So, the next Monday morning I came in and told the publisher what he had done. He said, you go over there and fire that son of a bitch right now. By the time I got back to the newsroom, he was cleaning out his office. He knew he was finished. He relocated and worked on the desk of the *Miami Herald* for awhile, and then he got a job as managing editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser* and stayed up there until he had emphysema and he was retired.

P: At this point, who owned the paper?

B: Gannett bought us in 1969, but when I became editor, John H. Perry. Perry's father bought these papers, including the whole newspaper here, in the 1920s and put them together in the News Journal Company in 1924.

P: What influence did he have on the paper?

B: Very little. Now, the older Perry, John H. Perry, Sr., was a Kentucky libel lawyer.

It was almost Scripps-Perry [instead of Scripps-Howard]. He [considered joining] Scripps [but] Perry went out independently and began to buy newspapers. [He] saw a frontier in Florida and came here and began to buy [other] smaller papers that did not have any money, a lot of them [with] Ed Ball's [financial support]. [Perry and Ball] were close. He died in 1953. I came here in 1952, so I never knew the [senior Perry]. Braden Ball had been one of his publishers here and in Panama City. [He] went to Panama City to develop that paper. John Jr., as Mr. Ball called him, grew up partially working here, learned to fly an airplane in Pensacola, and he looked on Braden Ball as a father figure. But John lost interest, or had no interest, in the newspaper business. By 1969, he started selling off his newspapers. Ours was the first to go, to Gannett Company for \$15,500,000, which sounds like very little money today, and then all the others began to split up. Palm Beach went to Cox, and Freedom Newspapers bought Panama City and Fort Walton Beach, and, Ocala [went to] the *New York Times* now. Anyway, John had twenty-seven newspapers in Florida. The reason I knew that the end was coming [was], we had a Perry managers' convention in Palm Beach [in 1968]. [As] the editor, I had to write the publisher's speech. They had us all go to Palm Beach. Perry comes in, and he was supposed to speak to us as newspaper people, media people, and his whole thrust of his speech was all these charts and graphic things he was showing us about his submarine [and oceanography].

P: That is what he was working on, inventing the midget submarine.

B: And Braden Ball, one time he actually said, John, what are you really interested in? He said, well, I am interested in plumbing; I like to put pipes together. Well, he went on with the oceanographic [research and development], and by 1969, he decided to [sell] his newspapers and we were the first to go, I think. At one point, the publisher here, Braden Ball, thought that he and I and some other people around town might buy it independently, but I think Perry [preferred a proven media company]. Gannett made such a bid, and we joined Gannett Company in 1969. I was very pleased with that.

P: How did things change under Gannett, and what influence did they have on you?

B: They had a lot of influence, of course, but they did not change much, other than they instituted a better financial reporting system to the new corporation. Perry let his publishers pretty much run the paper like they owned it. Everybody in town thought Braden Ball owned this paper. They never heard of John Perry. He never came to Pensacola, and he let [Ball] operate it. Gannett was becoming a public company, and they owned a lot of newspapers and were buying [in] Florida. They put in new rules in that regard. I anticipated what they might do here, and I redesigned the paper, based on the paper *TODAY AT COCOA BEACH*, as it was called then, later renamed *FLORIDA TODAY*. They had opened the four

front sections to all news, sports, local, living. We did not have the press capacity to do what they did with that paper down there, but I got the press people together and I said, can we open up this newspaper? But, we did not have those four sections. We had two big sections. Sports was inside. It was jumbled up, and I did the best I could to straighten it out. So, Mr. Ball—and I called him Mr. Ball because he was like a father to me—told me, you have been fussing to me about that, and he said, we are going to try to do that. So, with angle bars on the press, we were able to get the four-section newspaper, in both the morning and afternoon, by the time Gannett got here to talk to us, and they were impressed with that. I had read everything about Gannett and some of the things they were doing, and I was making sure we were on the ball team. They were very good to me. They were good for [our] company, a large corporation provid[ing] resources for a medium-sized newspaper. Perry probably would not have been able to do [so, and we had an expanded press] operation by 1974. They built a new pressroom, expanded the building, began to put in [computers to replace] the hot-type operation in the 1970s, [with] all new equipment.

P: How many papers did they own at that time?

B: We were the [second] in Florida. They later bought Fort Myers. I forget the number. They have about eighty-five now, and they have twenty-something television stations.

P: But, then, they were not that large, right?

B: No, they were beginning to move. They bought the large group in California about the time they bought us, San Bernadino and the Spiedel newspapers. They were acquiring them pretty regularly at that time, so they had about sixty, I think, at that time.

P: What was Al Neuharth's position at this point?

B: He was executive vice president for the company when they bought us, and Paul Miller, who was the very revered son of [an] Oklahoma Methodist preacher [and] who was president of the Associated Press [was chief executive]. He knew every publisher in America [as] president of the Associated Press. [As] president of the company. [He] had hired Al Neuharth [as] his heir-apparent. Al had made a name for himself in Detroit and Miami. He was the senior city editor of the *Miami Herald*, but he had gone to Detroit under Lee Hills. Al became CEO in the 1970s, and immediately started expanding the company and [taking] it public. He is also the one who, [when] Braden Ball ended his career, sent Jim Jesse here as publisher. Prior to that, he chose me to be associate publisher with the goal of taking over the *News Journal* when Braden retired.

P: I am interested in what you think of *USA TODAY* as a concept for a newspaper.

B: I think that *USA TODAY*, now, is a solid good-reading newspaper. I take it in my home and read it every morning. At first, I thought it was a bit flamboyant and flashy [with less than quality] content--not much worth beyond the headlines. For a commuter newspaper sold in airports, it might have been fine. But it has settled into being a real strong newspaper, as its circulation indicates. The concept of a national newspaper has merit, [but its] problem is [a lack of] base. It has no home, other than the nation. That, to me, lends itself to having lost something. In the newspaper business, we live in a city, in a region, but [*TODAY*] is a newspaper that talks to America. Used to refer to "we"--"we" are drinking more coffee than we used to. I thought all those things were very silly. A lot of that was Neuharth's influence; he was trying to be totally different from what his good friends on the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* were doing. He had an idea which first manifested in Cocoa with *TODAY*, and he just took that [concept] and, with the help of a lot of people, brainstormed an idea that they could launch a newspaper that could be sold all over America. The technology was there with the satellite to feed out of the Washington area [to printing sites around the country], and it worked. Now others have refined what he started and turned it into a household word, as far as newspapers are concerned.

P: How important were things like the graphics, the colored weather map and things like that? Did that help circulation?

B: Those were very helpful in the beginning, and the pioneer was the *St. Petersburg Times*. Back in the early years when television was coming on in very vivid color, newspapers had to find ways to be more attractive. *St. Petersburg Times* really was a pioneer of the early graphics in America, as far as I can determine, at least certainly in Florida. But I think they were probably too gaudy, too much, wasted too much space. Now, they are more modest with graphics. Pictures are better than graphics. Graphics [must have] a purpose. [*USA TODAY*] did have a [large] splashy weather map; then suddenly every newspaper in America was emulating. But I notice [most] have gone back to smaller maps. All of that was not necessary, but it was an effort to create a newspaper like it was a television screen, in print. I cannot fault it. I do not totally agree with its design. As a [student] of newspaper design, there are a lot of things I would not do, [but] they seemed to enjoy [experimentation]. But in the graphics age with computer[s], you can [create effective images], column rules and borders and everything. I spent the early part of my career, in the early 1960s, getting rid of all those column rules and opening it up to what we call white space between the columns. Now, they are putting all these rules back in, borders and ribbons, because it is so easy to do with the computer. It used to have to be done manually, and printers resisted. I tried to clean it up. That concept changed because of all the electronics, the technology. But *USA TODAY*, to answer your question, is, I think,

a very valid and important element to American journalism in its time. It took some adjustment. I have often wondered, it has no base; you read the editorial page, you have to deal with worldly issues, and, really, the nation is their base. Whereas the *Wall Street Journal* is a business newspaper. The *New York Times* has a New York base. The *Washington Post* is a political capital of the world. They seem to be home-based, not in a provincial way, but at least they have, you know, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*. That, to me, might be a little bit of a handicap for [USA TODAY]. They have colorful writing. They have some good writers. They have helped enterprise a lot of [stories] that other newspapers now follow, [like] writing tight short stories. I do not always like that; sometimes you get too cryptic [and] miss [elements of the story]. You read a good strong story in the *Miami Herald* and the *Washington Post* about an issue, and you have a full understanding of it. You read USA TODAY, and you get the cream off the top of the milk, so to speak.

P: One of the criticisms is that it is now “McNews.” People do not read newspapers very much, and this is really a lesser form of what we might consider a regular newspaper. So, a lot of critics do not like USA TODAY because it is too short and too lacking in information.

B: And that was its design, a quick read, you know, the McPaper and all the criticism of it at the time, and it won the top award for the best paragraph, that sort of thing. But it put Al Neuharth and Gannett on the map. Gannett had some image problems. They ran small-town newspapers, and [USA TODAY] gave them [stature]. So, USA TODAY is a new dimension to the printed word at a time when some of us in the back of our minds have fear that the day is coming when the printed page is going away and it is all going to be electronic.

P: Will there be a day when you will get your newspaper on the computer and you will not actually have a physical newspaper printed out?

B: I do not anticipate that until, maybe, another generation. I think the printed word is going to be around a long time. We are so attuned to that, picking up books and newspapers. It is going to take a long time. My granddaughter [works] on the computer, and she can find anything. She may, by the time her children come along [see] her children reading electronic books. I think it is going to be awhile, but it has changed the whole concept. Newspapers are different today. They are going to have to be different. That is the reason for USA TODAY. We are looking for new angles. Public journalism is coming [in vogue], getting back to your community, getting involved with your community. Get close to the readers, and ask them what they think. There are all these kinds of devices that editors have been trying throughout my career, to find the key. At one point, we were concerned with writing. I recall years ago I was excited about this. All the editors go to American Society of Newspapers Editors in Washington or wherever, and I

always talked about [how] we have to improve writing. Well, we should have improved writing all along, but we were improving writing because we wanted people to read these stories because they had television and everything was instant news, radio, a car radio and all that. You have to do something. You have to write your story so that they are so compelling, people have to have them. Well, that was a good move.

P: What were your greatest media competitors? Obviously, television, but was radio also a competitor to the newspaper?

B: In Pensacola, we had one radio station. As a matter of fact, our company owned it. It was called WCOA, [for] Wonderful City Of Advantages. It had a real good news staff, three or four or five reporters who were out covering the same things we were, had several newscasts a day. They were our principal news competition, along with Channel 3 here, WEAR television. For a long time, television, in its beginning, they piggybacked off of us. As a matter of fact, we had an agreement with [WEAR-TV once]. They could use our newspaper for news. They would give us credit. A[n anchor] would end his newscast by saying, this is from the *News Journal*. They never did invest much in a news staff. It was usually one or two people. Really, the competition for news was not [bothersome]. We did not have a monopoly, necessarily, because people did listen to WCOA radio for local news and they read us and they would listen to Channel 3. We did not have a situation like, say, the Tampa/St. Pete area, where you had competition everywhere, or other parts of Florida. The *Mobile Register* next door would try to come into our market but not with much success. It was an Alabama newspaper. That is another thing in this area. We are sitting here in a corner of West Florida. We have to go east across the panhandle to find readers, a sparsely-developed, mostly rural-county area all the way to Tallahassee. We cannot go west because we run into Alabama. The *Register* has the same problem with us when they try to come into Florida; they are an Alabama newspaper. Now, the *News Journal* has tried through the years to cover Alabama. We used to have an Alabama news page, because the county between Pensacola and Mobile Bay is Baldwin County, one of the largest counties east of the Mississippi River, a huge geographic area. A growing area, and those people trade in the Pensacola area. So, we did develop a market in that county, so we would carry Alabama news as best we could to try to attract those people. So, that has been a hindrance for us. Back to your question on competition, that is probably all the competition we have, other than the shoppers, the weeklies, the little giveaway papers that spring up from time to time, but they were not a real threat. As far as competitive edge, news-wise, WCOA did not affect us that much, it was still radio and newspapers.

P: And because of the physical location, you were not in competition with the *St. Pete Times* or the Orlando paper.

B: No, we did not have those papers coming into our market. It was not feasible for them to haul a newspaper that far. You used to find the *Times Union* for some reason. I do not know how they do it with the new ownership, but when I was growing up, the *Times Union* just saturated North Florida. Even the *Jacksonville Journal*, which no longer exists. My dad took the *Jacksonville Journal*. You do not see those in the market anymore, and it would not make much sense for them. We cannot even do well in Tallahassee. It is so far away, and it is costly to get the papers there. We must look at our immediate readership because the advertiser knows that these are the people buy[ing] his products, and he buys ad space from us. So, we have to serve him more than to go out and try to get these large numbers of circulation, which are not profitable from a standpoint of the newspaper. You just settle into your region, and most newspapers, I think even the *Times Union* and maybe the *Miami Herald*, all have just carved out their little areas.

P: When you took over, what specific goals did you have as you started out?

B: My goal, number one, was to be the dominant newspaper of the panhandle. We were the only morning-daily in the panhandle at that time. Fort Walton was a small daily. Panama City was afternoon. The *Tallahassee Democrat* was an afternoon at that time, or they may have gone morning by that time. I cannot recall the year they went morning. They finally realized, like everybody else, that morning was the way to go. But, to try to be the dominant and best-read and the most influential newspaper in west Florida, because we were the largest. We had an opportunity to go out across the panhandle all the way to Tallahassee, or the Apalachicola River, and serve all of those counties. I was a little naive in those days. I thought you could do that easily, but it turns out that the economics of hauling newspapers to Apalachicola and St. Marks [is not profitable]; you might get it to De Funiak Springs and Fort Walton Beach [in nearby counties]. That is okay, but getting all the way across the panhandle...we used to have strong readership of our newspaper in Quincy, Florida. We were the only morning newspaper serving them, and they could get [night] baseball scores. They could not even get them in the *Times Union* in Quincy because they sent out that earlier edition. Tallahassee was afternoon. The *Dothan [Alabama] Eagle*, which comes into the panhandle and that part of the country, was afternoon. They were all afternoon newspapers. Now, they are all morning, and we, at the *News Journal*, had to finally realize that our area is from Walton County west. We have to fight now with Fort Walton Beach, which has a pretty good little daily newspaper.

P: And Panama City as well.

B: Yes. They have pretty good circulation, and they are right on our doorstep here. In those days, we did not have that problem. We owned the Fort Walton paper.

We had the radio station here, and the TV station was about the only news competition, but we never looked at it that way. I never thought of us [as] hav[ing] a monopoly and it [would] not matter [about coverage]. I wanted the [region] covered because I wanted to improve the quality of the newspaper, to make it be in demand of the readers of this area. That was really my overall goal.

P: When you took over, were there some specific problems, either financial or in terms of circulation or editorial, that you had to deal with?

B: I had to straighten out a lot of things in the newsroom. I had a lot of people who were not competent. Some were alcoholics. We had a lot of that in those days. That is not a factor anymore. I began to try to recruit a better-educated reporter. The problem I had with that was, again, economics. I could not pay them as much as the *Miami Herald*. I use to hire people out of, like, LSU [Louisiana State University], they always loved to come to Pensacola because of the beaches. They would come to work for us, and in six months, they were working at the *Miami Herald*, because the *Herald* in those days was always looking for good people and they could hire them from us [with higher salaries]. We just could not afford to pay them that way. That is no longer as much of a factor with the paper here. It is [under] Gannett, and we got the salaries up to be competitive. I still do not think they are quite what, maybe, the *Herald* is paying, or the *St. Pete Times*. That was a problem, to get that level up. Number two, I did not have the newsroom structured properly to run two newspapers. I had a managing editor I had to fire on the *Journal*, and I had a managing editor on the *News*, and I let him just take over as the overall managing editor, over both papers, and created under him two news editors to run the morning and afternoon [editions]. That worked pretty well. I began to expand the sports staff. It was small. I put in a photo department that the newsroom had never really had. This sounds really old-fashioned, but we had one photographer and an assistant, so we began to expand that. We did not have an art department or a graphics department, and I brought in a graphic artist directly from Cocoa, who had helped develop *TODAY* there under Jim Jesse. His name was Bob Meagher, and he began to get us into the computerized graphics. I made a lot of revolutionary changes on this newspaper when I took over. First of all, one of the things [was] we were identifying people with race. You know, John Jones, Negro, arrested last night. I stopped that. We had the old women's page, called Women and Their Interests, and we had a Society editor. She had been here for forever. Her name was Hortensia Sublette. I had to retire her. She was getting old and was ready to retire. I changed the Society pages to what I called at that time Living. I call it Life now. It changed the whole concept of Society, got away from running all these weddings in big huge photographs and trains of dresses and all that, that was just dominating the page, and you could not get into the pages unless you were somebody. It was kind of a limited thing. I got rid of all of that and began to make it more about a light feature section. I got rid of all the segregated parts of the

paper that was still the old residue from the past, even though this was the 1960s. They still were identifying people by race, and I just quit all of that. We began to [respect] the civil rights movement, the concern for blacks. We had a debutante cotillion here that was kind of a social [event], and they always got a big spread with their daughters coming out and it was all-white. By that time, the blacks decided they would have one, too, and they could not get in the paper. I gave them the [same] space as the white. That caused me a little grief among the social gentry here, but that was the right thing to do. We broke those barriers in covering things that the paper really had never done before.

P: How did the role of women change, during the thirty years or so you were editor?

B: Tremendously. The *News Journal* during World War II had a most-all women staff. All the men were at war, and Don Hogan [ran the staff]. Anyway, [when I became editor] we did not have many women in the newsroom. [But] we did have a couple who were very popular. One named Pat Lloyd wrote a social column, a people column, and she was very popular in the newsroom. They had mostly just women [working on] the social pages. There were not any over on the other side. So, we began to change that, and I hired several people to come in and be reporters and cover City Hall. So, that began to change. Now we have about as many women as men in the newsroom.

P: In administrative positions?

B: Oh yes.

P: What about hiring of minorities?

B: I hired, I guess, the first black reporter, a woman. I forget the year. The problem we had and still have is you cannot keep them. There are not enough. They come here and stay a short time, and the *Tallahassee Democrat* or a Knight-Ridder will grab them, or some of the other larger papers. The *News Journal* now has [several] minorities. The assistant editorial page editor is black. He is from South Carolina and is a very good man. That is no longer a factor, but it was tough to find [qualified minorities]. I hired that first [black in the 1960s]. But it was hard to find them. We could not get them out of Florida A&M and Grambling. The first woman came from [Grambling], but she did not last long. So, we always had the opportunity for it, but we did not do it probably as well. Hiring minorities is still a concern in the newspaper business. That is the reason all the newspaper companies pump so much money into Florida A&M's journalism school. They are trying to groom young blacks for our business, because we have to realize that there is a black community which should be covered just like the other, and black activities. I remember Bob Haimen at the *St. Pete Times* talking about how we have to learn how they live down in the ghetto, what kind of language they speak.

We do not know anything about the way those people live. If we are going to get in there and get involved, we need to know that. Now, of course, that is different today.

P: How have reporters changed over the period of time?

B: Reporters have changed tremendously. I used to have some old-timers, three or four of them, who could come to work in the morning...I had a guy who come to work on that afternoon paper and he would write you a feature story that would stand up for the edition. By noon, he would have it ready. He would go down to the Coffee Cup, a favorite restaurant, find some character, develop it into something, tie it to the day's news, and he would have a nice feature. Then he would come to the paper and get on the phone, and he would take police stories and write them up. He would write ten, twelve stories during one news cycle. Today, you are lucky if a reporter writes two stories a week. You give them an assignment, and they have three weeks to enterprise. In the old days, I had reporters who could turn out those stories in hours, and that is still a frustration to me, why we cannot do that. Newspapers are not as immediate as they used to be. I find editors saving stories to Monday's edition because Monday is a light day, I am saving this story. I cannot believe that.

P: Are the stories any better?

B: No, not really. Well, yes. Say you are doing an environmental story or a story that is a little bit investigative. Sure, you have to have time for that. I am not talking about that. I am talking about just grabbing a story for morning edition that would be soft, reflective of something tied to the news. I do not see that much anymore. I used to have people, a guy named Ira Brock, who won the national headline award for feature-writing one year while he worked for us. This guy had honed his skills at the *Toledo Blade* as a rewrite man. He told me, all I did was stand there with those headphones all day taking stories from police stations. The reporters were all out forming these stories. I would get them together in a hurry. [He] learned my craft. I just always thought he was an ideal news guy. He could take any story. The thing about it—we wrote with typewriters in those days—he would type that, and he used these real short paragraphs. It was good-looking copy when you got it. You did not have to lay a pencil on it because it was there. Of course, today, writing on computers, they can do the same thing. But I have noticed that, and I am not trying to denigrate this generation of reporters. I think the system has just lent itself to giving them more time to think it out better and make sure it is right. That is good if you have the numbers of people to do it. I did not have that many.

P: Part of it has to do with lawsuits. You really have to be pretty accurate.

B: Yes, you have to double-check it. You have to check with lawyers, and you make sure. You have to go through a series of editors if it is a sensitive story, but I am talking about just routine stuff. A police story that might be just kind of interesting with the angle it takes. He could do that in a few minutes. I do not sense we have that anymore. I have always made a point of not criticizing the younger generation because I think some of them are much better than anything of my time. Better-educated. More interested, I think. So many times in the old days, we had a lot of cynicism, and people did not have the background. They were good writers. They had been schooled through the school of hard knocks on a newspaper, where you learned to put together a noun and a verb, and you could pretty soon put together a pretty good story. That is good, but they did not have...most of these kids today are college graduates. Unfortunately, so many of them are discovering that the newspaper way of life is not what I want. I want to go out and do something that I can make more money out of. It is one of the real problems of the profession today.

P: A lot of them are going into things like public relations instead.

B: Yes.

P: How has the newspaper audience changed over this period of time?

B: They are more demanding. I think, today, you can see that in the focus groups. They have these groups that come through the paper still that tell them what is wrong. The sophistication of the reading audience is much higher. I think what I am saying is that, in an earlier period before television, people who relied almost entirely on the local newspaper for their news were forced to take what they got. Today, they have so many choices that they can quickly tell where they want to have that newspaper or whether it is satisfying their needs. As you know, as more research is done, maybe the day will come where the newspaper will be more specialized; if you want sports, you get this. Yes, but the general reading audience is a lot more sophisticated today than it was when I started. Newspapers, I guess, are the last mass medium, and that is our only hope for them, in that television is so fractured with cable and radio is all talk and music. The Internet, of course, is a new one, and newspapers have tried to figure out how to get into that and make any money off of it. That is the new way. I always tell students, you know, radio came along and scared the devil out of the newspaper business. Here suddenly, you can hear the news instantaneously. And, it did not happen. I mean, radio went on and had its heyday, and the newspaper is still going. Along comes television, and suddenly they say, well, we are not only going to hear the news but you can see it instantaneously, and that is going to cut [us out]. Well, the radio panicked, and radio had to adapt. It did. It went to talk. It went to music, I guess, information you still hear on your car radio. Newspapers kept going and sliding along, about the same thing, and it is still

there. Then television began to fracture up into cable channels, and radio no longer was news, although some stations are all news, kind of the CNN of radio, but not local news, in our area anyway. But the newspapers have been steady there. Now, we have come into this total new electronic [age], you know, instantaneously printing electronic books that are printed out like this book here. I do not know what is going to happen beyond that, but it is still the last mass medium. You still read the crossword puzzle, the comics, the death notices, about what your local government is doing, read a little bit of the social news pertaining to your neighborhood. You have all that in one package. Unfortunately, it is printed on paper. I always go back to this phrase that I remember reading that Ted Turner said, and it was in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, one of the breakout paragraphs at the top of the article, and he said, the newspaper business is the only business I know where you have to cut down a tree that we need to keep us warm, to print the news that is old on the day it is printed. That is true. It is cumbersome, all the way from a tree in Canada or a forest in Canada to a mill to the *News Journal's* off-set press, and we are grinding it out and delivering it on your lawn. Here, you have an electronic medium that can pop [a] column [and news report] onto the Internet right into your home and probably down the road onto your television set. So I do not know what is going to happen there, but I do not think anything has changed as far as journalism is concerned. Our role is to keep the public informed and, in a sense, to guard democracy. We are in the business of looking after democracy, if we do our job as journalists. Now, that is a role we probably have traditionally developed for ourselves; we are the watchdogs. I do not think that is going to change. The newspaper, in my estimation, is still the place where a lot of that happens, because I have seen television do more and more entertainment. It was not news. It has come around and is a great thing. There is nothing better than when you have a tragedy in America, and you turn on the TV and there it is occurring right before your eyes. They can do a marvelous job of covering those or sporting events or whatever. You cannot get better than that, but not the day-in-day-out information that people need to guide their lives and pay their taxes. I am not sure that television always supplies that because it is not very sexy, to use a phrase everybody uses today, to talk about taxes and county commissions and garbage pickups on television unless it photographs well. So, you have all these elements, to me, that still says that some form of the printed page is probably going to be with us a long, long time.

- P: You mentioned two major functions of the newspaper, to inform and to preserve democracy, the First Amendment. What other functions does the newspaper serve?
- B: Entertainment. You look at a newspaper, and it has stories about people doing things, achieving things, or maybe humor. It has comics. The lightness of the day is oftentimes achieved through the newspaper. So, information more than

anything, but certainly entertainment.

P: How would you rate your paper compared to papers of comparable circulation? I do not know, would the *Gainesville Sun* be a little smaller than you?

B: I think Gainesville might be a little bit smaller than the *News Journal*. I do not know their circulation. The *News Journal's* circulation now is about 85,000 daily. It may be pushing 100,000 on Sundays. So, I do not know, but I would compare it with the *Tallahassee Democrat*, maybe the *Gainesville Sun*. It is difficult to say one does a better job on this or whatever. It is hard for me to say because I look at the *Democrat* in Tallahassee, and it looks to me like they are covering Leon County very well. I look at Gainesville and it's a university town. I cannot really judge whether ours is any better or any less effective. I think you have to judge a newspaper on how well it serves its area, not what press judges say about it and award winners and all that. It is important to our business and we all love those, but it is really circulation [that] works for you. I do not see any weak papers in Florida anymore. They are all great. I mean, I think Florida is really blessed with some great news. You know, the [*Miami*] *Herald*, of course, and the *St. Pete Times*. You look at all the others, the old *Fort Lauderdale News* and the *Sun-Sentinel*. Really great newspapers. The *Tampa Tribune*. Then, you get into what I call the medium size newspapers, Tallahassee, Gainesville, maybe Ocala, all of that level. They are all attractive newspapers. None of this old. Technically, they look good because they are printed on off-set presses now, as opposed to the old letter-press. We had a letter-press throughout my career until the year I retired, [when] we brought in, finally, an offset press from San Bernardino, California, [built] to print *USA TODAY*. We moved that press here and rebuilt it on-site, and now we are off-set just like everybody else. For so long, we were letter-press, and so was the *Times Union*. We [produced papers with a] muddy look to us. Today, all of these papers are [going off-set]. It took years for the off-set process to get to where you could use it in a major newspaper run. Off-set was okay for a little suburban weekly or daily where you had a small run. Today, every newspaper in America is on off-set. So, I cannot make a judgment on which might be serving better. I really think a newspaper has to be styled for its own area.

P: How have the letters to the editor changed over this period of time?

B: Much more literate, less vitriolic, although what you do with letters to the editor, you still get them from all kinds of people and you do not publish those kind.

P: You do not publish them if they are not signed.

B: No, we always require a signature. They have to be willing to have their signature. Now, we used to run their addresses, and I quit that because people

were concerned with privacy. We said, as long as we have it on record and we verify the letter, yes. Anonymous letters, we throw away. We might look at them, but we do not print those. Letters have gotten better because in order to get it published, you have to stick to a topic rather than [rambling without making a topical argument].

P: Do you cut them or do you print them in full?

B: We have a word limit, like 300 or 400 words, and if it is a few words over there, we still go ahead and run them. If it is too long, we send it back and say you have to cut it down.

P: But you do not cut it?

B: If it is too long, if it is two pages and you have one page, that might be too much to cut. If you ran half of it, the guy would complain that you cut my stuff and my main message was in the second page. If it is just a few words over, they go ahead with it. We have another vehicle at the newspaper I developed years ago, called Viewpoint, on the op-ed page. If you write a column about an issue, say 500 to 700 words, and you run it with your picture on it, we offer that to people who head organizations, voluntary or even politicians.

P: So anybody can write . . .

B: Yes, who might disagree with our editorial position. We call them Viewpoints, and they are columns. That has given the community and the community leadership, or people who might oppose what the newspaper says, an opportunity to have its own viewpoint on the same page. My view of the editorial page is that it is a melting-pot of ideas, our voice is on the left-hand column, but everything else on those pages is somebody else's view, either syndicated columns, cartoons, letters to the editor, or viewpoint articles. I figured it up one time, and we run far more words from other people, the local voices, than our words. After Watergate, I go back to that, and it seems to me that everybody [felt] guilt that we had brought down a president. Here at the newspaper, you know, we have to change our ways. Then, we had to open up the editorial pages for everybody, and all these editorial boards started developing. Bring in the best minds on the newspaper, and let them think out issues, which we did too, along with the other papers in Florida. Open up the editorial page, and have more voices to it, kind of a melting-pot of ideas and not so much dominant where the editorialist is going to tell the people in town how to think and what to do.

P: Did you get more letters over the years?

B: Yes. When I took over, we had a page of letters we ran on a Sunday because

you had to gather them all up and save them to run on Sunday, and we did not have any space during the week. I started [publishing] them daily, like all papers are doing now. Yes, and then on Sunday, the op-ed page is filled with nothing but letters, and people want articles on pros and cons.

P: Who chooses the letters?

B: The editorial page editor.

P: Based on?

B: Based on first-come, first-serve. At a paper our size, we try to be fair to everybody. If you write a letter and it is reasonable and it conforms with the rules we have laid out—we do not tell you what to write—you will get in the paper. If you have a letter that libels somebody, if you run a letter that libels the guy, the newspaper is responsible, too. You have to be careful in that regard, and you have to be sensitive to other issues. And make sure it makes a point. People sometimes like to write a religious sermon or poetry, so you have rules against that kind of thing. But we try to get everybody in, and that was another problem. We [had] so many letters coming in, they got backed up and would run late.

P: How often did you use syndicated columnists, and how did you choose which ones you would use?

B: We use them daily. Most syndicated columnists [write] three a week, and you pick and choose from those and run them on regular days. You always try to get the ones that were popular and representative of a variety of viewpoints, whether liberal or conservative. You try to get a balance and not let all of them be conservative [or] too liberal. The idea is you really need both sides of the issue in the paper. That works pretty well as long as you can convey to the reader that you have been fair about it. Make sure they are good writers. They recently added Molly Ivins, who writes a humorous column out of Texas, and they added Walter Williams, a black conservative. He writes an interesting piece, and that gives variety. I always add James Jackson Kilpatrick, a beautiful writer. He was a true conservative but just a good writer, a constitutionalist. We always had [William F.] Buckley and Ellen Goodman and various others. Dave Broder, the best political reporter out of Washington. So you choose them based on not only their skills as reporters and writers, but make sure that you have a variety of political persuasions on the page.

P: But you chose them, and not Gannett?

B: Oh yes. That is another thing. Gannett used to have a slogan, we make a business of not running newspapers. Even though they inherited me in 1969,

never one time did Gannett ever tell me what to write, not in my entire career. I was fortunate in that regard. Editors really have to be sensitive to what the company is, but as far as the editorial position that the *News Journal* took during my career, that was under my direction. In the latter years after we had developed an editorial board, which I chaired all those years, composed of the publisher, who frequently sat in or sometimes chose not to, the editorial page staff, perhaps the managing editor, a lot of minds came to work on developing about what we would say about issues. We would meet a couple of times a week. We did not meet daily. Most of that was in my hands and the editorial page editor. We would together, come in and talk it over, based on what the editorial board had discussed. That is the way we operated daily. We had to choose the columns, and I was responsible for that, working with the syndicates and the same way with the various cartoonists. I had a whole stable of cartoonists that we ran, ran those daily. Mine ran usually on the weekend. That was under my direction.

P: Did you have any problems with advertiser discontent with your editorials, and would that affect what editorials you ran, or advertisements?

B: No. I never had any direct situation where an advertiser might have been upset over what we said editorially. They may have disagreed with us, and probably did a lot of times. We were probably a typical liberal position, and they were coming at it from a business standpoint. I never had that problem. The only problem with advertisers [was] sometimes we would get a story that had the wrong slant to it, and they would be upset, that you ought to put my position in, or, where is my side of the story? That would be something newsroom would do, and that happens frequently. You get a story that is just not all complete, and the some of the advertisers would get upset. We had the car dealers all upset with us, and they had a boycott here a few years ago.

P: Did they pull their advertisements?

B: Yes, not because of anything we did editorially, but it was some stories that we were running. It was strange. We ran them about the environmental concerns of automobiles, AP stories mostly, wire stuff. It was not our enterprise. Then, we ran a story that was developed locally about one of these companies that will sell you a car almost by mail, and you can get it much cheaper doing that. Here was a big spread they ran one day on the business page, and the publisher at that time tried to encourage them not to run that story, to hold it for a day or two, and he was absolutely right. They ran that story and did not worry about it. In a story like that, you got, I can buy a car cheaper by this process than I can going out to one of the lots in Car City. It stands to reason, in my view, let us get Car City's view of this. You know, if I can buy a car cheaper than you can sell it, what do you think

about that? They did not get both sides. And when it came out, they [the car dealers] got real upset, and one of them led a little boycott. It did not last long because they needed the advertising. I never had the editorial part of it, and I will tell you why I think that is true. I think most people who understand how newspapers operate understand that the opinion page is opinion. They say, well, I did not agree with it, but you have a right to say it. The reason I think we did not have any problem is that we were always very careful in an editorial not to make the grievous error of misinformation or casting people in a bad light unnecessarily. Cast the issue in a bad light, maybe, if you need to, but not the individual or the commercial concern or whatever. Most editorials dealt with public issues, not necessarily advertisers. You know, you are dealing with county commissions making public actions on taxes and that sort of thing. Now, we did have a lot of opposition for some of the things we stood for in this county, like consolidating government. We tried to consolidate city and county. Back in those early years when I was first made editor, that was one of my first [campaigns], and we just lost like crazy because people did not want to change their form of government. I think three times during my era as editor, we tried to [establish a] charter government, which failed each time. And, at least three times, we advocated an appointed school superintendent, which failed each time. One time, it came within one vote in this county of passing. Strange. It came back a few years ago, and it failed pretty bad. Now, I think there is another thrust to try to do that because it is really, you know, I think that is the way to go, have a political body that is elected by the people as your board of directors and then have a professional administrator. Those were the things, and there would be a lot of opposition to that, mostly political opposition, not necessarily business or advertising opposition. I found through the years that many people who advertised stayed as far away as they could from public issues, because they were concerned with satisfying the customer and making money for their company, more so than they were interested in public issues, which very well may have been one of the problems in a community like this where the chief leaders, the giants of enterprise, just are not as involved in public issues as maybe they ought to be. They let, sort of, the dregs, to use a phrase, run the courthouse. [But] not so much City Hall because we have always had a very progressive and a very clean and workable City Council. This city is well-run. It always has been. There is not much political partisanship. They do not run by political party. It is a city charter, and they have a professional city manager. That is the reason it works so well, as opposed to the county commission which [continues] the old style. It brings a lot of people into the local government who really ought not to be there, and they make a lot of mistakes and create a lot of editorial fodder, which I thought of for years. But I have not had that pressure from advertisers. The only ones I have had is when some reporter would goof up a story so badly that it affected an advertiser. I had a guy writing us a consumer column one time. He went out to get his car fixed, and they messed it up. He got into a real argument with them [and returns] to the *News Journal* and [criticizes]

people who repair cars and just brutalizes them in a column, in kind of an oblique way. The guy called up and he was really upset. It turned out that the reporter would not pay his bill, and we had to fire him. So, when you take an issue like that and make it personal in the newspaper, you can get yourself into real trouble. I tried never to be personal or involved in anything like that.

P: Is there any advertising you would not accept?

B: Yes. There is a lot of stuff that is turned down all the time by the newspaper. There are rules, and there are principles.

P: Can you give me an example?

B: Well, some of the sexually-oriented stuff, although now they have a classified section, you know, of couples meeting. But, I think they have had some issues like that where people [with] fly-by-night products come to town and want to plant an ad, and it is not credible. They have turned some of that down. Yes, I think advertising people really have some of the corresponding rules that [editorials] have had. In the newspaper business, a lot of people come in or telephone and have all these odd products that are off the wall. *USA TODAY* printed some of them when they first started, and they were scams. You have to be careful in that regard. As far as the voice of the advertiser to sell his product, I do not know. I can see some things that I would not want in the newspaper, in the interest of the public more so than whether we made revenue from it.

P: What about the relationship with the Florida Press Association or the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors? Have you been heavily involved with either of those organizations?

B: I was involved. I was, I guess, the second president of the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors. I went to the Florida Press Association when I became editor. The Florida Press Association is composed of not only weeklies but everybody. I think some of the editors, [like] John McMullen of the *Miami Herald* at that time, suggested we get together and try to form our own society, sort of like the American Society of Newspaper Editors, which I also was part of, and we met in Gainesville and formed it. John was elected president, and I was elected vice president. The idea was to get him in Miami and me in Pensacola. John, about mid-year, or not too long after that, was suddenly sent to Philadelphia. Knight-Ridder bought the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and they sent him up there as executive editor. He called me and said, I am leaving Florida, so it is yours. So, I really was, that first year, the president. So, yes, I have been involved. I went through the years to it until, actually, the last two years of my career. I did not go to much of those. We had an executive editor running the newsroom. I was running the editorial page by that time. I was really editor and vice president. I

worked closely with the publisher, and so I let them start, the younger guys in the newsroom, to go to those things. The paper was very supportive of the Florida Press Association through the years. I think they still involve themselves in the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors. They win a lot of awards from that society.

P: Did you cover the legislature very closely?

B: In the early years of my career as editor-in-chief, I was fortunate to have the dean of political writers in Florida, named Maurice "Moose" Harling, who will be remembered as Reubin Askew's mentor and also his press secretary for the eight years he was governor. Moose had a knowledge of the legislature and covered it thoroughly for us, and he was the only newsman I ever knew who was honored by both houses of the legislature for his long service [in] covering the legislature. We covered it that way. When Gannett bought us in 1969, Moose was still there, but he was getting ready to retire to go join Reubin. We created a Tallahassee bureau through Gannett, and then they began to cover the legislature for the three papers in Florida. That has been a source of concern to me and to the people who followed me at the *News Journal*. For years, we would send our own reporters to Tallahassee to cover our delegation and the legislature directly with daily stories and a legislative page. We have gotten away from that, and now we depend on a bureau with two or three people there, representing Fort Myers and *FLORIDA TODAY*. They cover all these delegations, and they do not get too close to either one of them. I think we are doing a disservice in that regard. That whole idea of political coverage has changed tremendously. People soured over government and politics. I go back to Watergate, to the beginning of that era where the president was thrown out of office, or forced out of office, because of misdoing. People just were disgusted, and a lot of the editors said, people just really do not care about politics anymore, and they do not care about sitting in long-winded meetings in Tallahassee or the county commission and detailing every little action they take; let us be more selective in what we do; when they have a big issue, we will cover it, otherwise forget it. We have gotten away from covering the major [action] that affects people the most--laws affecting your taxes. We have gone more to what we call people news, and what are people doing? That is good. I do not disagree with that, but we do not have that solid political coverage that I thought was important in my time. I look back on the *Herald*, the *Tampa Tribune*, which when I was at Florida State as a student was the Florida newspaper to read. Everything that was going on politically in Florida was in that paper, and it was really popular. Most of it in the *Herald* in those times. Then, of course, St. Petersburg does a good job today. They all are more oriented toward Florida topics than probably we were, although we covered this North Florida part pretty well and then kept our ear to the ground of what was going on in Tallahassee because we had important individuals in the legislative process. We had a very effective delegation that got a lot of things done, manifested by people like W.D. Childers

today, who is out now, and then Reubin Askew as governor and Dempsey Barron of Panama City, a powerful dean of the Senate, [all] from our region. So, we would have kept our ear to the ground with what was going on politically. I think that coverage of the legislative process leaves a lot to be desired in our newspaper now. I think even the editors there [now] would agree with me because you have a bureau situation that is not as effective as it could be unless you covered it direct. When you say I am going to cover the legislature this year directly from the *News Journal*, that means you have to take one of your reporters and send him to Tallahassee. You have to live in Tallahassee, and that is expensive. That is the reason a lot of them have gotten away from them. We will do it by bureau.

P: Describe your relationship with Reubin Askew.

B: Well, very close. He and I were at Florida State together. He was president of the student government when I was on the *Florida Flambeau*, and we got to know each other then. My wife took an economics class with him. He came to Florida State after I did. He had been in the Army. I knew Reubin, in those early years at Florida State, he denies it today but he used to sit around and we all knew that he was going to try to be governor of Florida one of these days. He said, no, I did not do that, but he did, I remember, and he was on his way. He was very popular as a campus figure. He [returned] to Pensacola. I was here in sports, but he was a young lawyer. I used to see him occasionally. He ran for the House and won. Then, when one of the senators, Phillip Beall, who was not very progressive, he took him on for the Senate, and at the *News Journal*, the old editor I have mentioned so many times, Marion Gaines, liked Reubin, and Moose Harling, our political reporter, thought Reubin had a lot of potential. They supported him, and he won. Then, when he got to be governor, I became very close to him, used to talk to him a lot, and we were very close friends. I did not always agree with Reubin, totally, on all of the topics. The *News Journal* did not endorse him when he made his first run.

P: For governor?

B: Right, and that is a source of embarrassment to me in that my publisher would not allow it. He did not like Reubin Askew.

P: Did they endorse Earl Faircloth?

B: No, we endorsed Jack Mathews from Jacksonville. I tried to mediate that as best I could. My publisher just said no. We had joined Gannett, by the way, at that time.

P: It was 1970.

- B: Yes, and he said, we will be no part of it. So we said okay. Mathews matched up. Then Reubin made such a strong run in that first primary. Al Neuharth, the president of Gannett, called up the publisher and really shamed him, said good Lord, Braden, you did not even support the local boy for governor. Well, we came back in that second primary, and I wrote a glowing editorial about how we had to have Reubin as governor. I would have supported him, even though I had not always agreed with some of the topics that he advocated at that time. I am not so sure that Reubin was all that liberal. He was in the LeRoy Collins school.
- P: Certainly on race.
- B: Yes. Reubin was not as strong on the environment as I was. I do not think he had a great grasp of it at that time. He is starting to change now. As a matter of fact, when I was talking to him recently, he sounded more conservative than I have ever heard him.
- P: Askew gives a lot of credit to Pensacola for boosting in his career, not just his law partners but the raising of money and also the newspaper. Do you think that is accurate?
- B: Yes. Reubin never mentioned the fact that we did not endorse him in the first primary. I think he understood what happened there. Braden Ball was part of a faction here, was a more old-time conservative throughout North Florida. Reubin was perceived as [too liberal]...he supported Robert King High. I saw an opportunity, too. Here was a guy who was coming out of North Florida. I did not think he had a prayer.
- P: Nor did he.
- B: I recall, we had an event at the old Martine's Restaurant, which is no longer here, honoring a guy who was dying of cancer. Everybody came and did a little testimony. Reubin was there, and we were leaving the place. [We] chatted briefly and I said, how is your campaign going? It had just started. He said, oh terrific. He pulls out this little notebook out of his lapel pocket, and, just see there, I am doing well. He had about six names there and they were local people, \$25, \$75, and I am doing well. Okay, [but] you better hit it for more than that. Then I went to the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors meeting in Fort Lauderdale, and we had all the gubernatorial candidates lined up for introduction and interrogation. Reubin was late, and he eased in the side. He sat off of the edge. You know, all these guys ready to go, and there he was, late. I was looking and I said, well, he is going to run late in this primary, but it was amazing. He raised a lot of money. That is what got him going. I found out later that some of these older people here in Pensacola, [who] thought Reubin was a little liberal [supported him financially].

They liked him, and they gave him his boost. Harvey Cotton, an insurance man here today, was one of his boosters, and, of course, Moose Harling, who was sort of like a father figure to Reubin. As soon as Reubin announced, he came in. He was a couple of years beyond retirement age, anyway. He told me, I am going to have to retire, and I am going to join Reubin's team. He went to Tallahassee with Reubin, and while Moose was an older man, he represented him in everything and did a good job and came back here and died a few years ago. He lived to be about ninety years old. Reubin used to come back over here and visit him all the time. He has a great affection for this town. He grew up kind of poor. He had to work hard. I have written several profiles of Reubin. I always said a person from Pensacola probably cannot ever be governor because he is going to be perceived as being too local, too provincial. Reubin, from the very beginning of his political career, had a total Florida concept, to everything he did. He was concerned with all areas of Florida. He was not an old West Florida "Porkchopper" who was going over there to protect all this. He never did do that, and that caused him a lot of grief over here because they said, oh, you are representing Miami and Orlando; you are not representing us. But he came across with that image of being an all-Florida candidate. He went south, and he had a pleasing personality. They picked up on him real well, and he did a marvelous thing. I mean, no one else had ever done that. He had a concept of the total state. He was not a provincial.

P: How would you assess his two terms as governor?

B: I think he did some great things. I look back at LeRoy Collins, who was a segregationist, but he had this progressive attitude toward moving Florida into the modern period and concern with what the courts were going to do with the schools and had a persona about him that led Florida, really, into a new era. Reubin came along at a little later time, after Kirk. As a matter of fact, he took some of the things Kirk did and refined them and improved them. I think he had a good career as governor, and he finally did some of the things a lot of people in this region thought he ought to do. He completed Interstate 10, which was not completed before he was governor. It had been languishing for a long time, and he finally got that completed. So, I think he had a good career, and I think he was a popular governor. I also have great respect for Bob Graham, who followed him and who, I think, just did a marvelous job as governor. LeRoy Collins, Reubin Askew and Graham, to me, represents what I would consider the modern era of transition in Florida in the capital, in Tallahassee. W.D. Childers, [who followed Reubin to the Senate] was a little squeaky-voiced guy on the edge of town who ran a store and who kind of made a little bit of a local reputation of selling Hula-Hoops. When Reubin ran for governor and abandoned his Senate seat, he announced he was going to run for the Senate. I remember a guy telling me, W.D. Childers is going to run for it. I thought, gosh, what is he thinking? We did not know W.D. Well, W.D. is a Florida State University graduate, he used to be a

schoolteacher, and he is a brilliant guy. He ran for it and won, playing this old country cracker. I remember after he got in the Senate, Reubin told me, he is one of the best senators we have; he reads those bills, and he knows what is going on; he knows how to operate. W.D. was a great admirer of Askew. He modeled a lot of what he wanted to do after Askew. So, I think Askew had a lot of influence on this region, and this region had a lot of influence on him.

P: I am certain that you believe that editors need to be not only community leaders but involved in community affairs.

B: Yes, definitely.

P: Let me point out two or three areas. One would be the development of the University of West Florida. Talk to me a little bit about how you perceived the importance of having a university.

B: That was 1967 when the university finally began. I thought it was a real breakthrough of ideas that was going to help this region more than any I could think of, in that we needed higher education. We had Florida State in Tallahassee and we had Tulane in New Orleans, and that was about as close, and we did have Spring Hill in Mobile, a little Catholic college, but we did not have any higher education. We did not have a research library in this region. Here was an opportunity to provide higher education for this part of the panhandle. You always had to go to Gainesville and Tallahassee, although that is not all that far in today's standard with our kinds of transportation, but it had been a hindrance. Here we were going to have our own university which would be a part of the university system. So I editorialized [and drew lots] of [supportive] cartoons, visited the campus with Harold Crosby, the first president, when the first bulldozer was on the campus, served as a president of the foundation for two terms, and have been very close to that school, not only as an editor but as a community activist. Yes, it is one of the big breakthroughs of my time. It changed the character of this area. Unfortunately, the University of West Florida has not grown like we thought it would in the projections. Some reasons for that, of course, is that we have not grown population-wise like the rest of Florida, we do not have the curriculum maybe like you do in Gainesville and Tallahassee, and students are attracted to those bigger schools. But it has 8,000 students now. It needs some attention. It is getting more attention in the community than it was before. There were days when we had to struggle to get people to support the foundation, but that is coming now. It is going to change. As far as my newspaper business, the relationship of the university to that was really one of the first breakthroughs. I attribute a lot of things that have happened here in this town to the coming of that university. It changes the historical program. In the beginning of the university, we had a little history department out there. A story by Bill Coker, who was first among the first [historians who] got involved with [research]

and [the findings] culturally changed the community. From the very beginning, we had an excellent library at UWF. Jim Servies, who came here from William and Mary College developed just a great research library, almost from the beginning. Great historical collections in those early years, which no one had ever done. So, it changed us, and I was proud to be a part of the campaign that brought it here. I was made editor in 1966, and I was in on the ground floor of writing editorials about trying to get it finally finalized. Some had gone back several years, and they had not been successful in that. It was originally perceived that they would take Pensacola Junior College and expand it into a four-year school, and then people like Reubin and others said that is not going to work; let us go for the university. We had John C. Pace, who was probably one of the more affluent in Pensacola, on the Board of Control. He said, let us [develop] a university. And that is how it happened. It was a great breakthrough.

P: Discuss your role as a leader in the development of Pensacola's historic preservation and how that has impacted the city.

B: When I first got into the news part of the business, first started as news editor and then as editorial page editor, I [developed] an interest in history, and I saw Pensacola as an old historic city with a lot of landmarks that were falling apart and not recognized. I began to write about it and how we were missing out on what could be perceived as tourism because we were not preserving what we had here, an old 400-year-old city that had some Spanish and early American landmarks that really needed [preservation]. I wrote so much about that, had so many columns on Sunday about it, how the forts were deteriorated, and, finally, the City Council decided that they wanted to do something about this. We had discovered that the old Seville Square was Spanish and that we ought to try to save that neighborhood. They appointed a historical advisory committee, and I was the youngest guy on there. I was chairman of it. We started with that, and it led to a survey being done of Pensacola to show that we had a lot of resources that had not been developed. About a year later, that board was expanded, the mayor took over, and it led to the creation of the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board through the legislature, which we were able to get because of Claude Kirk. He was the governor, and one of his chief allies was a fellow by the name of Pat Dotson from Pensacola who served on the Regents and also was a Bicentennial chairman. He died from cancer, unfortunately, several years ago. Pat was an advertising executive with a lot of vision for the city, and we came up with the idea of a preservation board modeled somewhat after St. Augustine and Vieux Carre in New Orleans. We studied all of those. We went down into St. Augustine and hired their director, stole him. His name was Earl Newton. Anyway, that is how that started, that preservation board which came into being about the time of the university. We came up with the Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference. I was working on that because that was going to bring scholars here

to look at our town, write books about us, and get us going. I served on that charter board of Historic Preservation and I was the second chairman, but as an editor, I thought I had to move on. You know, you cannot stay with everything, so I went onto the board of trustees of PJC [Pensacola Junior College]. My good friend Felton Harrison had become president and he said, I need you on the board. The junior college board of trustees had just gone over from the little old county [control] to an independent. So I served on [the PJC board] for three or four years. In 1982, Bob Graham appointed me back to the [preservation] board finally, and I was made chairman [that year]. I have been chairman ever since. Part of my responsibility in that board is to serve on the architectural review board. Two of us members of the board have to serve on it. I became chairman of the architectural review board [in 1982] and have been chairman since. All through the years, I served as president of the Historical Society for eight years, I have raised them \$500,000—I did not myself, but I led the campaign to raise over \$500,000—to endow the Historical Society so they could survive. They were depending on a little stipend from the city and county, and they did not have any money. They were just struggling. Now, they have their own museum and their own building. As a matter of fact, they have two buildings, and they were doing very well. I was involved in all of that, and I wrote the history of Pensacola. I just kept a lot about that in the front. I wrote a lot of editorials about the importance of history and the city and news coverage of the bicentennial and the coming of the 150th Anniversary of Jackson bringing Florida in[to the Union]. We had a big celebration here for that. [Then there] was the Galvez [Celebration in] 1981. I was chosen chairman of that commission. We got \$225,000 from the state and put on another bicentennial, and we restored all these areas that pertained to the Spanish, the park and everything. That was a lot of fun. We brought the *H.M.S. Bounty* here from St. Pete for a week. Most of what we did was community improvement projects. It was not fun-and-games in the streets. All of that, I have just been close to it all through the years. I did not overuse the editorial voice of the paper for the history, but every time I had the opportunity to write something about the importance of history to this area, I did it, not because I would get any monetary gain out of it, but because it is important to the character of this city. Most of my early work, and the thing that I really the proudest of, my crowning achievement as an editor, was Gulf Islands National Seashore. Now that was really a fight. It was all part of the historical movement, in that Fort Pickens was in terrible shape. Fort Barrancas had a fence around it because some kid had gotten trapped in there and almost died. The Navy fenced it off. He almost died. Pitiful. So, I began to write about that, the assets we were losing. We had started here in the 1960s for the Civil War centennial. I started it, the Civil War Roundtable of Pensacola. They were popping up all over the country, in Chicago and New York. The one in Chicago had been going since 1939. I was taken with that. Here was an intellectual study group. You know, you do not wave the flag; you just listen to speakers. I started reviewing books for the paper—I am sort of a Civil War buff anyway—and I began to write about how terrible Pickens was. Ed

Bearss, who is now a retired chief historian of the National Park Service, was a chief historian at Vicksburg. He came here and spoke to our roundtable because he had written three wonderful articles in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, just a detailed account of what occurred in Pensacola Harbor, the footnotes are longer than the article. He had just really gone into it. I figured he knew, so he spoke here and was a really nice man. I called him [in Vicksburg] one day and said, we need a national park. I said, Ed, how do you go about getting a national park? He said, well, it is not easy. He said, if you are talking about Pickens and Barrancas, you are going to have all kinds of problems, in that the National Park Service has more old masonry forts than they can maintained; Congress cannot give them enough money to keep these forts up. But, he said, you have some of the best beaches down there in the world. I said, are you talking about a National Seashore? He said, yes, that might work. I started it. So I wrote an editorial, about how we need to turn this into a national park. That came out [on a] Sunday [and] Bob Sikes, our congressman, called me from Washington [the next week] and said, I read your editorial and I like it, so I am putting a bill in. It started then. The community liked the idea at first, thought it was wonderful, and then we had the hardening of the opposition, mostly businesspeople and real-estate people, people who did not like the federal government. Even the Chamber of Commerce came out against us. I stayed right with it. We covered it thoroughly. I said, you will give the opposition their say in the paper, and we finally won with the help of many good people in this community, environmental groups, garden clubs, university faculty, average people who thought we ought to have a national park rather than just destroying our beaches with overbuilding. That was my proud editorial campaign because it really was a campaign. I made speeches, and I also wrote editorials, drew [150] cartoons. But we finally brought the people to our side and won, and Sikes got the bill passed. It was signed by Nixon in 1971.

- P: Talk about how Pensacola Junior College has served Pensacola and Escambia as a different institution from the University of West Florida.
- B: It is a very popular community college with a fairly high enrollment, both in regular students and part-time students and adult students in the technical areas and also liberal arts. A lot of people in this town have gone to PJC, and then they have gone on to other universities. Many of them today go on to UWF. So, it has served us well in recent years. It has grown to three campuses, one here, Milton and a west Pensacola/Warrington area campus. The student enrollment [exceeds] 20,000 [along] with the adult high school they have. Throughout the growth of PJC, it has always been a source of supplying the workforce in this area, particularly through its technical and vocational areas, nursing and dental assistants and [other technicians], and, in early times, auto mechanics and the vocations. So, it has a vital role [serving] the community well. Now, it is perceived, probably, as a more community-friendly institution than UWF. UWF has suffered through the years with problems of not being as close to the

community as it could be. Some of it has to do with its geographic location north of the city. That is something that they are trying to change. Now, at one time, the two presidents of PJC and UWF got together and said, why do we not just merge, put them together, join them. They were shot down in Tallahassee because, I think, the Board of Regents and the community college organization did not want to see that happen.

P: Because they might start doing that everywhere, right?

B: Yes. So, there were efforts to put them together in a friendly way. At one time, they thought they might convert PJC. As Reubin said, that would just become another teachers' college [and the region] needed at the university. So, I think jointly, they seem to do a lot of work together now. A lot of students I teach at UWF come directly from PJC. So, they work in harmony fairly well. Being a community that needs a workforce, a lot of businesses and engineering firms are always looking to PJC to supply that. So, it fills that aspect, as well as senior preparation.

P: What are the benefits and the negative aspects to the relationship between the community and the military, particularly the naval air station?

B: The benefit is that the Navy is a strong economic component to our community, as well as cultural. They have been here a long time, as you know. The old Navy Yard, since 1825, and the flying aspect in 1913, [continuing] today. The Navy is steady. It is there. It is a government payroll that provided jobs all through the Depression. It has always been there. We always had fears we might lose some of it, as all communities do. It is a sophisticated Navy. It is all flying. It is not what they call the deep water Navy, which has a reputation. Pilots marry girls from here, you know, and we are known as the mother-in-law of the U.S. Navy. So, the relationship is almost a love-in between the business or community and the Navy. I always make the cynical remark that we love the United States Navy. We love that federal dollar from the Navy. Then, the Congress will do something that violates the rules of these old-time conservatives, and they get all bent out of shape, but they do not mind having that Navy that brings the dollar here. It is that almost hypocritical attitude that you find anywhere. You probably found it in Charleston where that Congressman [L. Mendel Rivers] up there protected it so long. But, that lovefest with it, I always said that Pensacolans love the United States Navy and hate the federal government. I mean, not totally, but we do have that attitude. What has happened is that the negative (if it could be perceived as the negative) is that we have spent all our talent and energy and resources trying to protect the Navy than the other aspects of legitimate organic growth of the community, whether it be business and industry or culturally or educationally with the university, we let that suffer, trying to protect the Navy. Some of that attitude has changed in recent years. We finally realize, well, the Navy is there, but we

have an opportunity to be a tourist destination, if we work at it. We might be able to recruit some high-tech industry here, if we work at it. That has changed. [I see the Pensacola economy as] a three-legged stool. We have the military, tourism and a small amount of industry, although that has diminished a lot. That is what makes this town click. We no longer have the lumber element in our town. Our port has diminished. Really, we are down now to mostly the flying [in] Pensacola, Whiting Field in Milton and all these auxiliary fields around here. We have civilian payroll out there [that] feeds this community. So, we have that love relationship with the Navy, and it very well may have diminished our ability to diversify our community through new enterprises.

P: Comment on some of the great journalists of your era, people whom you either worked with or admired, not just in Pensacola but the whole state.

B: [One of] the old-timers in Florida I looked up to was Jim Clendenin in Tampa. I modeled my editorial page operation sort of the way he did at the *Tampa Tribune*. He was a good writer. He had a sense of Florida. The other one was Malcolm Johnson in Tallahassee who was an old-time editor, kind of a legend. He was Canadian-born and grew up in Jacksonville, but he had about as good a sense of North Florida as anybody. He was a little older than I. He wrote a great column. He was kind of a legend in Tallahassee. He was an AP reporter who became, in his later years really, editor of the *Tallahassee Democrat*. He had a sense of heritage and thought Tallahassee ought to be a green city. I was coming along at the same time, and I thought that was the way we ought to go. Those are two in Florida. Of course, I had great respect for John McMullen at the *Miami Herald*. He had a great newspaper. John Walters in Jacksonville was a good, dear friend. An LSU graduate, he was about as down-to-earth as anybody I have ever seen. He edited a pretty good-size newspaper, and you could talk to him. He just had a wonderful feel for people. The people on his staff were loyal to him. Those are the ones who really meant a lot to me in Florida. Fred Pettijohn in Tallahassee when I was a student. Fred was a great writer whom I did not know well until I began to hang around the *Democrat* and do a little work for him, just as a clerk.

P: He also started out in sports.

B: Right. He used to, as sports editor, write a poem. His whole column would be a piece of poetry about a ball game that occurred the day before, or something to do with the Gators. I was just intrigued with Fred's ability to do that very quickly. He was a very personable, nice-looking man who had gone to the University of Florida. Then, at a later period of his life, he wound up in Fort Lauderdale running that operation, and everybody in Florida greatly admired Fred Pettijohn. So, he would have to be one of my early models. I do not know anybody nationally. I admire a lot of great writers who came out of the newspaper business.

P: Let me finish with one major question. What did you want most to accomplish in your journalistic career when you began, and do you feel like you did so?

B: I indicated to you earlier that I wanted to put out the best newspaper in the region of my birth, where I had grown up and loved. That was it, a real quality newspaper. In a sense, during that period of thirty-one years as editor-in-chief of the *News Journal*, I became, kind of, two people. I was an editor, and I was out in the community. My publisher said, son—he used to call me that—you are an excellent speaker; get out and lead this community; you can do it. I took him at his word, not to go out and lead it, but to set forth principles and projects that I thought were important to this region, to help put us on the map and help us grow, the seashore, historical program, university, downtown redevelopment, bayfront redevelopment, modernizing the local government. All of those things, I thought were important. I not only wrote about them, but I participated in them, not in a political way. I never participated in any political operation at all, never gave a dollar to any political campaign or anything like that. That was not the issue. But I did serve on boards that were appointed by governors, to make things happen. That is a little bit frowned upon today in the journalistic profession in that you need to be standoffish a bit from these things, although attitudes change from time to time. I was an active, hands-on, community-minded editor. I hesitate to say what happens today, but I do not think you are going to find many editors who do those kinds of things. They do not serve on committees or chair boards, but I always thought that was important because it gave me a profile in the community, it helped me understand the community, it gave me ideas to work for as an editor. I was active. A lot of my younger colleagues would come along and say I do not know about that, chief, I would rather stand off. I used to have people work for me who would not even join the Rotary Club because they might be accused of having a special interest or something. That never bothered me because that really should not happen. Your service is for the community, not for your own personal gain. I like to think that I achieved both to a certain extent, not me totally, myself, but with a staff. I think we improved the paper. Also, I think some of the things I have done really have improved the community, and I am very proud of all of that. My name is on a building downtown. My name is on a road on the beach of the National Seashore. I was given my honorary doctorate by the University of West Florida for my writing and my work in the community. You know, at least that attests to what Dizzy Dean [baseball player] said, if you done it, it ain't bragging. That is the reason I mention those things. I think in a sense, in my own estimation, both objectives to a point, because I did modernize the *Pensacola News Journal*, changed the whole design of it, and added to the staff. At the same time, I was able to get out into the community and do things that actually became reality with the help of a lot of good people, providing that kind of leadership. I will go back to what my old publisher said, get out and lead; you can do it. Lead, I thought that was my role as an editor. Now, at first when

Gannett bought us, they saw a lot of this and they did not know about that, where I was overly involved in the community and maybe not spending enough time in the newsroom. But they were wrong. In the community was kind of after hours, and it kind of worked. I am proud of that. I would not take anything for having done it. I do not think I had many enemies at the end of my career. It has been pretty hard. There were a lot of tough issues in this community through the years. It was time to smell the roses and it was time to hit them over the head with a sledgehammer, and I think we did both.

P: Let us end on that note. I want to thank you very much for your time.

[End of the interview.]