

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 13A
Betty Vandiver Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: [This is an interview with] Mrs. [Sybil Betty Russell] Elizabeth Vandiver, the wife of former governor [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.]. The date is January 22, 1994, and it's taking place at the Vandiver condominium at St. Simon's [Island, Georgia]. My name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Mrs. Vandiver.

Vandiver: Good morning, Hal.

Henderson: Thank you for granting me this interview.

Vandiver: Well, we're delighted to have you and Teena [Ann Henderson] with us. It makes it a fun time.

Henderson: Permit me to begin with your parents. Please describe them for me and the influence that they had on your life.

Vandiver: Well, that's a big question just because I've never thought about how much influence they were, but of course they were terribly much, especially Mother [Sybil Nanette Millsaps Russell]. Daddy [Robert Lee Russell, Sr.] died in 1955, which, of course, we all know that's nearly forty years ago. My childhood memories of him are very clear, and I know how much he loved us. In fact, one of the things I have to tell you is that Daddy was dying of cancer, and we knew that, and he was in Emory [University Hospital], and Ernie was going to be inaugurated on Tuesday in January, and Daddy, though he was so ill, he willed himself not to mess it up, and he died on Friday after the inauguration. And I've always thought, you know,

[if] there is a will, there's a way. And he did, I'm sure, fight. And Mother got to go to the inauguration and be with the children and take care of them, and then Daddy died on Friday.

Of course, you miss him so much, and forty years later you realize how much you really have missed him. And, of course, as we'll probably get into it `cause I won't go into it right now, but his death precipitated a whole lot of things for me that might not have been possible, so in a way Daddy was a very solemn, serious man, and, I think, had a lot of judge--he was a judge, and he had those qualities that made him see both sides of a question. Daddy, I have to tell you, always, no matter what it was, no matter how small a decision [that] had to be made, whether Betty could go to the University of Georgia for a spring dance or not, Daddy would think about it for a day or so, and he would think the pros and the cons. "Now if Betty goes or if she doesn't go" And he made all those big decisions after a day or two of thought.

So he was a very serious person, and Mother worshipped Daddy. It's amazing really how Daddy was her guiding star. Everything centered around Daddy. And we all knew it. We knew she loved us, but she centered around Daddy, and it was a wonderful thing to watch, and it was sad that she had to be left [alone]. She was fifty-four when he died, or fifty-three, which, you know, that's an awfully early age to lose somebody that you thought you were going to live the rest of your life with. But she worshipped him.

I suppose she got more independent when Daddy died. I don't remember the transition, but when Daddy died, she, of course, had the four children. She had like thirteen grandchildren, and she just absolutely moved into our world. And she's probably one of the most remarkable women I've ever known, just the way she handles herself. And she never talked about anybody; she loved you for what you were, and she didn't try to change you. I still miss Mama real much.

Every morning I think, "Ooh, I've got to tell Mama that," [laughter] 'cause she was quite unusual.

They both had lived in Winder all of their lives. I know one of my favorite stories is that Papa Russell [Richard Brevard Russell, Sr.], Grandfather Russell, said to Uncle Dick [Richard Brevard Russell, Jr.] and Daddy, "I don't care which one of y'all marry her, but somebody ought to get Sybil Millsaps in our family." [Laughter] And so I feel like Daddy won out, and Uncle Dick never married, so, you know, they got her in the family.

Henderson: Please discuss your brothers and your sisters for me.

Vandiver: Well, we had a fun time. We really were very close. My older brother, Bob [Robert Lee Russell, Jr.], who I guess was as close for Ernie to have a brother; Bob was probably as close as he ever had to having a brother, or having a brother his own age with the same interests. He had the half-brother, I know, but he was much older and was out of the state, and so Ernie never really knew him as a brother. And then when we married, Bob and Ernie just clicked. It was just a wonderful thing to watch their relationship. Ernie has missed Bob so much. But Bob died at forty with cancer, and he left Betty Ann [Campbell Russell] and five children, and we all love Betty Ann as much as we love Bob or anything because she's such a wonderful person. And the five children we've all tried to help as much as we could, you know, to give them a normal . . . Of course, Bett was so wonderful.

Anyway, he [Robert Lee Russell, Jr.] died at forty. He was a judge and a lawyer, and he served in Guadalcanal. I'll never forget during the war, the big war, he was on Guadalcanal, and he and I had quite a correspondence going. I have all of his letters that he wrote, you know, sitting in foxholes. He would correct my spelling and my grammar. I would write him a long

letter, and he would spend his time during, I guess, lulls or whatever correcting my English and my commas and then send them back to me. So he and I were very, very close.

Now my younger brother is Richard B. [Brevard] Russell III. Bob was Robert L. Russell, Jr., and then Richard was Richard B. [Brevard] Russell III named after Papa Russell. And he was three years younger and just a sweet boy. Richard and I are very close. We don't see each other that much anymore. He lives in Winder, and he married Pat [Patricia Randolph], who is just a wonderful wife for him. And they have four children. And, gosh, I'd have to stop and count grandchildren, but he has three, five, seven, eight and one on the way. So his family is still growing. And he practices law in Winder, but he's retiring bit-by-bit, month-by-month, is what we call it. And he loves to fish, so they have a place down at Islamorada, Florida. And they go down there in January and stay kind of until the middle of March and come home. But they really enjoy going down there and fishing. Oh, he fishes every day and he talks about the sizes and so forth. He really is quite a fisherman, and, as I say, he's working into retirement month by month, and he hasn't got much left, I'll tell you.

Then all of our pride and joy is . . . Mother always said I prayed for two years for a baby sister. I wanted a sister. She said I refereed the brothers, all the time stood between them when they were fighting. I'd stand between them and they don't hurt each other. But I really wanted a baby sister. And I don't know what happened. I don't know, but eleven years later Mary Ina [Russell] was born, and she's been all of our joy. As I say, she's eleven years younger than I am, and she lives in Danville, Virginia, and her husband's a judge [Judge James Franklin Ingram]. He was in the Naval Air Corps--Marine Air Corps--Jim would not like that. They married after she finished Randolph-Macon [College] and he finished VMI [Virginia Military

Institute] and his four years of duty, and they live in Danville, Virginia, and they have three children and two grandchildren. So when we all get together it's just a wonderful, wonderful thing. They come down every October 12 to this place [St. Simons], Jim and Ina do, and we celebrate Columbus Day. [Laughter] Columbus Day in Virginia might be bigger than it is down here, but they do take a big holiday, so on Monday he can come down, and they come down on Thursday afternoon and stay until Monday night, and then they go back to Danville, and it's just our four days together, and we have a wonderful time. She's a joy. I wish everybody knew Ina.

Henderson: You were born into a very famous family in Georgia history, the Russell family. Would you discuss the Russell family for me and the influence that you think that it's had on the history of Georgia?

Vandiver: Oh, gosh. I don't know. I was, and, you know, there have been times that I can appreciate people. You're not ashamed of it. It's something you're proud of, but you can't be proud when you're fifteen, and all anybody wants to do is talk about an uncle or a grandfather or something. And it's hard when you're that age, I think. I saw that in my own children, but I guess if you grow up like that, you just handle it the best you can.

I tried to go to Virginia to school to get away from Georgia. I thought if I could just get out of the state, I could be Betty Russell, and nobody would connect me with anybody. And the funniest thing, Hal, I went to Sullins [College] in Bristol, Virginia, and the first day I was there I had a note on my desk saying that Dean [Dan] Metts would like to see Miss Russell. And so I went down to Dean Metts, he was the dean of students and he taught the advanced English classes and that kind of thing, and he called me and he said, "Miss Russell, I am so delighted to

have you at Sullins," and said, "But I have to tell you, your grades are not quite sufficient for my English class, but I want to tell you I told your Uncle Dick I would take care of you. He and I were roommates at Barnesville." Well, it just blew the whole thing because I had gone up there, you know, thinking . . . Well, Dean Metts couldn't take me in his English class, and he and I probably didn't say very much from then on, but, you know, you can't get away from it, and there's no point in trying, but you don't have to, hopefully you wouldn't take advantage of it.

And I was trying hard. I think children of people that the name is recognized all over; I think they do have a little hard time with that. And I know my children probably did, too, because it's hard for somebody to always know, to compare you to your father or all they talk about would be your father. They don't look at you as a person. You are a son of somebody or a daughter of somebody.

Henderson: You mentioned Senator Russell. What was your relationship with Senator Russell?

Vandiver: Well, I was Lady Betty. I was fortunate in that big family of Russells. You know, there are over 180 of us now. But at that time, Grandmother [Ina Russell] and Papa Russell had thirteen grandchildren, who were all grown up. They had thirteen grandchildren, and then the little boys, as Mama called them, started getting married, but they were much younger than Mother and Daddy. And they started getting married and started having their grandchildren, but at a time in my life there were only thirteen grandchildren for Grandmother and Papa, and all of these thirteen grownups to play with. And they all thought we were special. There were only. . . . Well, Hugh Peterson was the baby, so it stopped with Aunt Pat [Patricia Elizabeth Russell] and then that's where all the grandchildren came from up to that

point. And we were all special to them because they all were such a close family. You felt like you had an awfully lot of mamas and daddies. Everybody had to take care of Betty.

I remember one time Uncle Dick wrote me after he went back to Washington or something and sent me a dollar and a half. He said, "I do believe that you can find a lipstick shade more attractive than the one you had on when I saw you last." And it was these kind of things. He really cared about all of us. And sent me that dollar and a half and told me to buy a lipstick.

Another funny thing is after I started having my children, Uncle Dick thought he really knew how to take care of babies. I don't know how much he knew, but I remember one time Beth [Vanna Elizabeth Vandiver] had the hiccups, and she was about six or eight months old and she hiccupped and she hiccupped, and I couldn't do anything about it, and he said, "Lady Betty, I think you need to give that child some water." Well, back in those days you had to boil the bottle, boil the water, you know, sterilize the nipple. It was an undertaking to give a baby a little bit of water. So I went back in the kitchen, and I rattled bottles and ran water and made him think. . . . And, of course, by the time I had done all that, her hiccups had gone away, but Uncle Dick, well, he was going to make me give her some sterilized water. But he was a loving uncle, and he did, he loved all of us and felt like we were all his.

But that's a fact of a close family. All the uncles and aunts felt like every child was theirs. I felt very loved all the time I was growing up because all of the uncles and aunts made you feel that way, too. So Uncle Dick was a very caring person with all of us, and, well, that's it, he just loved all his nieces and nephews and was interested in what we did.

I remember one time Nancy [Ernestine] Green had christened a ship, and Jane Bowden had christened a ship. These were my two older cousins. And I, one time [when I was] about fourteen told Uncle Dick, "Well, I think it's about time I got to christen a ship." Just mentioning, but knowing that he had done. . . . Jane did the *U.S.S. Savannah*, which was a tremendous one. They were living in Savannah at the time. And so I just mentioned it and forgot it probably. And when I was sixteen I got a letter from the Navy Department, and he asked me to christen, they asked me to come to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and christen a submarine. So I got that thrill because Uncle Dick--and it was during the war, you know, 1943. We had to go by train because you didn't have gas. Oh, it got to be a big family affair. My brother was stationed in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, at the time in the Marine Corps, and so it was a huge reunion. Half the family got on that train, and we went to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and I christened that [submarine]. And as a sideline, a boy from Georgia was second in command of that ship, and, of course, there was no way to know that, but--wait a minute, I've got to think of . . . Alcorn, Frank Alcorn, who lives in Jacksonville now, he was second in command of the *Parshe*. And I have a beautiful silver bowl. This was back when they really did things up great. Got a beautiful silver bowl that's from the staff and crew of the *Parshe*. The *Parshe* had quite a fabulous record during World War II. It's been scrapped now, but through the years, we've kept up enough to know that the *Parshe* had a great record during the war of tons of Japanese ships that they sunk and so forth. So that was quite an experience for me. He didn't get to go. Uncle Dick wasn't there, but half the aunts, oh, I think we had two or three [or] four aunts. And Daddy and all the cousins went. It was just a great family event. So we all went to Portsmouth and christened that submarine.

Henderson: What was it like growing up in the small town of Winder, Georgia?

Vandiver: Heavenly. [Laughter] Just so wonderful. There's something about Winder. Even now people who move to Winder and stay there five years, they hate to leave. And it's changed so much, of course, but when I was there, it was just one of those ideal little towns for people to grow up. You didn't have to worry about anything. You went to the drugstore every afternoon after high school and had you a piece of lemon pie and a Coke with vanilla. You know, I was a cheerleader for four years, tried to play basketball, and I didn't do very well with that. I was too short at the time. I was like 4' 10" until I was about eighteen, and then I just put on a big spurt, as Ernie says, and grew to 5' 2½".

But it was wonderful. I had some of the closest friends. I guess your high school buddies are some of your closest friends because you're learning so much and you're sharing so much. And so my high school friends. . . . We lost one of them last year. But Jerrye [Griffin Short], Colleen [Outzs Williams], Louise [Eavenson Estes] and Betty, we were the TPs. And nobody knows what the TPs stands for but us, and right now [Samuel Chip III] Ernest Vandiver would give his eye teeth, my son, would give his eye teeth to know what the TPs were, and I'll never tell him, because we were four of the closest girls, you know; if you saw one of us, you saw all four of us. We lived together. And we all cheerleaded and went [out] on the night [of] the ballgames, like Teena. We were all in the Beta Club together. Just growing up.

You could ride your bicycle anywhere. Now see, you have to understand, we lived two and a half miles out in the country, out at the cemetery, close to the cemetery now. And I had to ride bicycles an awful lot in order to enjoy all the great things about Winder, Georgia, because Mama and Daddy. . . . Back then you didn't just get in the car and go somewhere. Children

didn't have cars. At sixteen you didn't get one. Mamas and daddies were still running you up and down the road. I know Mama furnished a ride. There was a man that lived down below us. He just died not too long ago. But Mr. [Clarence] Day came by our house every afternoon, and his daughter was in school, and Mr. Day was supposed to bring me home. And if I didn't ride with Mr. Day, then Betty's job [was that] she had to walk. And of course I never walked all the way, Hal, back in those days. You had all your friends and the mamas and daddies, and somebody would stop and ask you to ride, and you'd ride with them, and they'd let you out at the end of the drive, and you'd just walk on home. But if I didn't get a ride, I had to walk that two miles home every day.

Henderson: What were some offices or honors that you held while you were in high school? Do you recall any?

Vandiver: Oh, gosh. Well, my daddy always worried about it. I was the secretary and treasurer of everything, I think, that I was ever in, and I don't know why they elected me, but Daddy hated me taking care of everybody's money. He just thought that was, you know, "Why do you want to be the one?" And I did, though. I think you learn. You went to the bank; you drew those little checks; and you collected the dues from the Beta Club, you know, any club that you belonged to.

And back then we didn't have all that many clubs, if you think about it. If you think about 4-H [Club] and FFA [Future Farmers of America] and all of those have come on since the '40s, for heaven's sake. But anyway, any clubs that I was in, I was always secretary and treasurer. Call the roll and count the money. And that's what Daddy said I did the most of, and run around asking for money. That bothered my daddy. But it was like getting--now, you run

around getting ads for newspapers or for the school annual or for the weekly paper. That's not the way we did back then. We didn't have an annual, and we did have a little paper, but you had to go around and collect money for the cheerleading uniforms, and you collected money for the choir, and you collected money--Daddy said, "You just got to go. . . . Here they come, all those little young people running around town collecting money for something, and then Betty had to keep it," and Daddy was really not crazy about me collecting money and being the treasurer of all those associations, but it was fun, and it just made you. . . .

And then we consolidated. It was an interesting thing. It was Winder High School until the tenth grade, and then they made it into Winder-Barrow [High School]. And the students who had been out in the county came in, and you made a whole new batch of friends from people that you didn't know before, but you got to know them in the last two years. I still enjoy going home. My class has always had a reunion every five years, and it's fun to go back and see them.

Henderson: You mentioned that you went off to Virginia to college. What did you major in while you were at Sullins?

Vandiver: Well, there you were either preparing yourself to go on to college--I mean to go on the junior and senior [years]--or you were taking business courses. Most people took two-year courses of business. A lot of people took art. It was kind of a place, really, during the war, I think, when I look back on it now, it probably was just a wonderful place. I loved it better than any other education place I had. I loved Sullins, and the friends I made up there are some of my dearest friends right now.

I was just working toward a general diploma, so that I got rid of a lot of English, Spanish, math, got rid of a lot of those courses that you have to get so I could go on to Georgia, the University. I majored in sociology with a minor in psychology, but you had to get rid of all those English and math and Spanish and chemistry, all those things. And I did that up there. And then you got a general diploma and went on to the University of Georgia with most of your required subjects taken care of. And when you got to Georgia, I was, as I said, a sociology [major] and psychology [minor].

I was going to save the world, I thought. I was going to take care of all the social ills. Had a job at [Henry] Grady Hospital, which I never got there. But I had applied, and Dr. B. O. Williams, who was head of the sociology department, he and I figured out what I should be doing, and it was to go to Grady. You have to remember this is 1947, and there wasn't a whole lot of social work at Grady. You just went. It's wonderful the way it's done now, but back then I was going to be in charge of helping the people come in to get help; that's as simple as it was. As I say, I was hired by Grady. Ernie came along and I never made that, so I never got to Grady. I wrote and told them I was sorry; I had other plans.

Henderson: Well, that leads me to my next question. How did you meet Ernest Vandiver?

Vandiver: Oh, that's a long . . . it's really a funny, funny story. It's got a little bit of everything in it that's funny because, when I was a senior in high school, he graduated from law school. This was 1943, and you have to remember the war was going on. He had finished law school and had six months before he was to be called into the Air Force, or he knew that it was six months, I guess. I'm not sure about it. Anyway, he knew he had six months. So he and his father came over and asked Joe [Joseph Dillard] Quillian if he could just hold the office down

when Joe was out and so forth and get some experience with the law. And he had finished law school, and so he came to Winder. And I can really remember the ripple that this young new lawyer in town caused because, I mean, after all, not many people moved in and moved out. And Ernest Vandiver came to Winder to just practice law, just to kind of hang in there for six months before he went in the Air Force.

Well, of course, we knew exactly who he was. He says he knew who I was. I don't know that he did, but he did go to a lot of the basketball games. I remember that, and we were cheerleaders at that time, you know, and there's nothing more exuberant than a senior in high school who's a cheerleader for the basketball team, and so he probably couldn't help but hear me if nothing else. But anyway, he came to town for six months and then he left.

And then I graduated from high school and went off to Sullins and then came home and went two years at Georgia. And, see, I'm Presbyterian enough [that] I believe these kinds of things are supposed to happen. I finished all my required subjects in March, and Daddy said, "Why don't you just go on back one quarter and just take some easy courses or just sit in on courses and live at the sorority house and just enjoy a quarter. You've been going to school since you got out of high school." Now that is something I can back up and say. I always--my summers were long if I was not in school. I went to Wesleyan one year. I went to the University of Georgia one year, just in between courses 'cause I really . . . I don't sit very well. Usually I move around a lot. I've got to stay busy. And so I had gone to school every summer, and Daddy said, "Just go back and enjoy this last quarter." And that's not really like my daddy 'cause he really thought you ought to be doing something worthwhile, but I said, "No, I think I'm just going to come on home and rest," 'cause my job at Grady didn't start until September 1.

I said, "I've got big plans for the summer, but I'm just going to come home and rest from March 'til June." So they said okay. And, of course, I was close enough to Athens that I ran back and forth and saw everybody, but I just went home.

Well, on May 1, Ernest Vandiver came back to start practicing law with Joe Quillian, four years later. He had served his time in the service. I'd gone to school and had finished college. And he laughs and says Judge Russell would have killed him if he'd even tried to date me when he came four years earlier because, you know, he was an old man. My goodness. Let me see, he was twenty-five and I was sixteen. You know, Daddy probably would have looked [laughter] funny at that. So he didn't speak to me, as a matter of fact, that four years ago [sic], but then when he came back, he called. Oh, this sounds so corny, but it is true. It's so funny because back then you didn't call and ask people, not in Winder, Georgia, you didn't call and ask them for a dinner date. Well, Ernie called me and asked me if I would like to go out for dinner. Well, my brothers howled. They thought that was a hoot that this man was going to take me out and feed me. [Laughter] Well, we didn't have many restaurants in Winder anyway. One of them was the Judd Tavern, and we went to the [Judd Tavern]. And he called and asked me, and when had our first date on May 1, and we went to the Judd Tavern and had supper and went to Athens and went to a movie and came back to Winder. And then, as I remember it now. . . I don't even know what night that was; it's not important. But, say, like the next morning or two mornings later, he called and asked me to go out to supper again.

And my daddy--this is a funny story--my daddy was holding court in Texas. He was a federal Court of Appeals judge, and he had to go to Texas and New Orleans, and in those days you didn't run home every weekend; you had to stay for six weeks or two months. So Daddy

had left sometime prior to May 1, and Ernie and I started dating, and then it just got to be a nightly affair. I swore I'd never tell this because I didn't want my children to know it could happen so fast, but I got my ring--he asked me to marry him, and I got my ring in the middle of June. And we decided that we wanted to get married. And Daddy came home from New Orleans or Texas, whichever it was where he was holding court at the time, and Mama says, "I think Betty is pretty serious, and she wants to get married." And Daddy said, "To whom?" Because in all this time, that six weeks it took us to decide we wanted to get married, Daddy had been gone, and Daddy didn't know anything about Ernest Vandiver.

But anyway we filled him in in a hurry, and we ended up marrying in September. We had a very, very whirlwind romance. We went together. We got engaged in the middle of June. And Daddy [unintelligible] said, "Well, why don't you wait until fall?" 'Cause I was ready to get--we wanted to get married. I told him, I said, "We'll marry on your birthday, and that's August 19." He said, "Oh, no, honey. You don't want to marry in August. Why don't you wait until the fall and have a nice fall wedding?" Well, you could tell where that was going. Daddy was trying to put it off long enough to see if we really were serious because it was quick.

And I'd much prefer it--not for me; it was exactly like I would want it, but I would love for any of my children and my grandchildren to know somebody a little bit better. But it took. Here we are forty-seven years later. But it was very whirlwind, and we did marry in September, September 3, as a matter of fact. And it's funny because I noticed that Betty and Carl [Edward Sanders] married--we married on Wednesday, and they married on Saturday. And that's funny because I wanted to marry on Wednesday. Everybody gets married on Saturday. Now why I wanted to get married on Wednesday I don't know. And Daddy said, "Why don't you wait until

the fall?" And I said, "Well, okay, I tell you what I'll do. We'll wait until the first Wednesday in September." And that was fall enough for me, and so Daddy went along and we had a pretty wedding. We had a good time. And it took 'cause here we are forty-seven years later.

Henderson: What was it about this man that you saw that you decided this is the man I'd like to marry?

Vandiver: You know, I still can get. . . . And it makes it sound, like I say, it sounds so corny and so something, but he is one of the most sincere, sweet people. I mean, he really is. Of course, he has--[laughter] when I say sweet, he is basically a sweet, sweet person. He gets upset with things, but he's still [a] sweet upset person. He really looks at things logically, and you hear about opposites attract. I'm a . . . I say loudmouth, talk all the time. But he really, he is so sincere and so sweet and basically good that you just knew it. It was just something about him; you knew it. And it didn't take long to find out that when he said something he meant it. He told you exactly what he thought about something. And if he didn't want to say something, to this day, he won't. . . . He measures his words very carefully, and you know when he says something he's thought about it just a minute before he speaks. Now me, I just shoot off, you know. A lot of times I say I'm sorry, and I go back and apologize and wish I hadn't said that, but when he says something, you know he means it 'cause he's given it enough thought, or it's just a basic gut reaction to whatever you've asked him. And if he doesn't want to tell you, or if he's got something he doesn't really want to. . . . Just day-to-day things, you can ask him something, and if doesn't want to get into it, he just doesn't say anything. And you know that's kind of a closed subject. I just saw him for what I think he still is.

Daddy was worried because I'd had several friends get married, and that's a funny story. Ernie went to ask Daddy for my hand in marriage that first Sunday after Daddy got back from New Orleans, and they were sitting out on the screened porch, and my bedroom was up over the screened porch, and of course I was hanging out the window [laughter] trying to hear what Daddy and Ernie were talking about. And Ernie told him, you know, that we'd fallen in love and that he wanted to take care of me. And it was just the sweetest little thing that he said. Daddy said, "Well, I hope y'all won't do anything precipitously." Well, I didn't know what *precipitously* was [laughter] because I'd finished the University of Georgia, and I'd finished high school, but I had to go and get my dictionary and look up *precipitously* because I wasn't sure what it was, and Ernie said he didn't think we were. We had given it quite a bit of thought and that we thought we knew what we were doing. And, of course, Ernie was older. I think if I had to recommend anything to a young couple, that the man be more mature and the man be able to more or less guide. And he certainly has never tried to be dominant, be the boss. That's not the way it is, but probably my Grandmother Russell had something to do with that. She was a firm believer in the father, the man being the head of the household and the wife being more or less, not subservient, that's not the word, you know what I mean? It's just that somebody's got to be the leader. Somebody's got to be the strong one. And Ernie is the strong one in our family, and it suits me fine. It's been that way for a long time. And yet he listens to me. And a lot of times that strongness will give way to my side of the story or whatever my leanings or my thinkings of whatever we're discussing. And he listens to me and he gives me, to his credit and maybe to mine, he does listen, and a lot of times it doesn't bother him to admit that my idea is better or something. But that gets back to that basic evenness that if he thinks he's right, then, buddy,

you're going to have trouble, but if he's willing to listen and get the other side of the story, then he's fair with that, too. So it was just all sorts of things.

The sad thing is when with all my high school friends that we had stayed together, and I came back home from Georgia, and they were there. And some of them were still in school, and when I told them that I was going to marry Ernie, one of my friends, I'll never forget, Jerrye said, "Oh, Betty, he's older than you." And I said, "Yeah, I know that." And I said, "But it doesn't make any difference. That's all right." And she said, "Yes, but just think. When you get old, he'll be gone." And I said, "Jerrye, that's the worst thing I ever heard. That's not the way you're supposed to look at this." Well, it's so sad because out of the four friends, Jerrye, Colleen, Louise [and Betty Vandiver], I'm the only one who still has a husband. And Jerrye still laughs and says, "Do you know I worried about him being older than you?" But she lost her husband several years ago to cancer. Louise divorced, and Colleen, her husband died several years ago. So I'm the only one left with my old man. And I wouldn't, you know, I just Jerrye laughs about it, and I do, too, because we are getting a little older now, so. . . . But I'm the only one that's still got my husband.

Henderson: When you were dating, going through the courtship, did you ever discuss politics?

Vandiver: [Laughter] Oh, did we talk! We argued. I left out one little incident back there when we were talking about getting to know Ernie. When I went to Georgia, the University, the summer before my senior year, I was staying over at Mary Lyndon in the dormitory. Miss Lois Lampkin was the housemother. Back then we had housemothers, and we had to sign in and out and do all that kind of stuff. And she called up one night, and I had just

washed my hair. I had a great roommate, Carol Pittman from McRae. Anyway, she was just more fun. We both washed our hair, and this was going to be the night we were going to do for ourselves. We'd wash our hair and fix our nails and get real pretty.

Well, Miss Lois called up and said some of her old boys were back and would we come down and meet them and so forth. And we said, "No, no way. This is our night. We're going to do our nails and we're going to fix our hair and so forth." And she said, "Oh, please come down." She says, "They've come over here and they're looking for some girls to go just to the Varsity. Just ride around with them a little bit." And Pitt and I just thought that was a hoot, that Miss Lois was calling us and wanted us to go out with these men that she had known when they were in school before. And after the war they came back and they went around to see all the housemothers that they had known beforehand.

Well, Miss Lois called up there [and] wanted us to come down. "No, we aren't coming. We're not coming." And she really did. . . . She finally came up and said, "Y'all please come down." She said, "These are nice boys." Well, that was the summer that there were like thirteen people running for governor, and Hoke O'Kelly and Hope Willis and [Ellis Gibbs] Arnall and [Eugene] Talmadge and, gosh, I don't know who--Fred [Frederick Barrow] Hand. I mean, that was the summer that there were so many people running for governor. Well, I didn't want to talk politics and we fought, as a matter of fact, [laughter] 'cause I had decided I was going to be for Hoke O'Kelly. He was from Lawrenceville as well, as I remember. And I called him my neighbor, and I decided--and, see, I had never been for the Talmadges, never had I. That gets back to that 1936 hard election when I was at a most formative age probably.

But anyway, we fought politics that whole night, and we did, we went with our hair rolled up, which was horrible. I wouldn't do that now for--and I wouldn't recommend it, but I don't remember whether I went with it rolled up or whether it was just wet, but, anyway, it was not a very successful night. And we did, the four of us went to. . . he had a friend, and the four of us went to the Varsity and got a hotdog, and . . . what do they call that chocolate drink? Anyway, we went and we rode around and we talked about old times, and he showed places where he had lived in the old Phi Delta house and the law school. We did all of that, and then that was the end of that.

But then when he came to Winder the next May I remembered him because he was working in the Talmadge campaign headquarters then in 1946, I guess it was. He was working for old Gene, who was running. It was Gene, wasn't it, in '46? Well, then there was Gene and Arnall and [Melvin Ernest] Thompson. Wasn't that the year? Anyway, whatever, that was the year that they had all the big mess, wasn't it, with the three governors and so forth. Well anyway, that was the year that we just absolutely fought about Hope Willis and Hoke O'Kelly and so forth, and it was fun, but, you know, it gave us a lot to talk about is all it did on the first date. But we did have our first date, a very disastrous [date] as far as I was concerned, in the summer of '46, and I didn't think I'd ever see him again.

Henderson: Because of talking about politics?

Vandiver: No, just because he was just--Miss Lois had come up and asked us to ride around with them and so we did. You know, back then people didn't go as steady as they do now. You could go out with somebody on Wednesday night, even if you thought you liked

somebody better that you were going out with on Friday. You could still go out with somebody else. You can't do that anymore, I don't think. They don't do it that way.

Henderson: How did your parents and the Russell family react to the idea of you marrying a Talmadge supporter?

Vandiver: Well, everybody loved Ernie so that I guess they all, if they had any reservations, they didn't show it, except one aunt, I remember one aunt--I heard this. I do not know that Aunt Marguerite [Mrs. James Bowden] said this, but I do think she probably did because she was a very strong-opinioned person and one of the more out-spoken ones of the thirteen, but I understood that she couldn't understand why Betty was marrying a Talmadge man. And of course that gets back to those hard feelings of '36. It really got rough in '36, and nowadays it's not that rough, I don't think, because everybody's more gentlemanly. They wear shirts and ties. On television they have to be nice to each other or it shows, but back then in '36 it was a rough campaign.

Henderson: How old were you in that campaign?

Vandiver: I was nine, and I have really, as I say--I'm going to go back to that in just a minute--everybody loves Ernie so that Aunt Marguerite, of course, loves him too. And now I have two little stories I have to tell you about that. When we decided to get married on Wednesday, September 3, "Big Boss" Bill, who was the oldest daughter of Miss [Nancy] Green, decided we ought to have a family reunion. It was right after the war, and everybody'd been scattered and they needed to get together. So she called everybody together for the weekend before the wedding.

Well, it was [laughter]. . . . Poor Ernie, he had to meet, you know, like a hundred Russells in one day and try to remember their names and who went with whom and what child belonged to whom, and, by that time, we had gotten up to about a hundred people, I guess, because all the little boys, as Mama called them, had married and had their families. And, see, I'm so lucky. I was in several of their weddings. I was in the Peterson wedding and then I was in Uncle Fielding [Dillard Russell] and Aunt Virginia's [Wilson Russell] wedding 'cause I could be the flower girl. I was four and five and six years old by the time they got around to getting married. So they were all in college and in high school when Mama married Daddy, see, so she always called them her little boys. So I was fortunate to be kind of raised with some of the young ones.

But anyway, Ernie had to meet all those people on the weekend before we married on Wednesday. He handled it beautifully 'cause he's always been good about meeting [people and remembering] names and keeping faces and so forth straight. It comes in good, you know, with politics, but he was really wonderful that weekend. We had a nice wedding and I could go on for a long time about our wedding, but the other thing I wanted to say about 1936 was [that] I can remember Gene Talmadge accused Uncle Dick of having paved sidewalks in Russell, Georgia.

And, see, we all lived in Russell, Georgia, two and half miles out of Winder. And he accused Uncle Dick of paving the sidewalks of Russell with state money or with federal money, I guess it was, by '36. No, I guess it was state money, but anyway, he accused him of that, and I can remember the big sign and I can remember the big to-do when they put the sign up: "\$100 Reward for Anyone Finding a Paved Sidewalk in Russell, Georgia." And we put it out there in

front of Grandmother Russell's house. It was a huge sign, and we had people out there looking for the paved sidewalks in Russell, Georgia, where there're still not even a paved driveway, [laughter] much less a paved sidewalk.

But that was the kind of thing, and, you know, it was bitter. Politics was a rough, rough game a long time ago. You know, Papa Russell, I can remember my daddy talking about the people who would ride by their house and throw rocks at their house, and, you know, yell ugly things when Papa was out in court. Now Papa ran for nearly everything. He ran for governor and senator, and he was never defeated for anything--I mean, he never won the Senate or the governor[ship], but every time he ran for judge or anything judicial, he won.

And I've never have understood that exactly, but Papa Russell served on every court. He was . . . a D.A. [District Attorney] is what they would call it now, when he and Grandmother married, and they married in like 1888 or 1887, I believe. And he had always been in the law and some of part of the law, legal system, and he always could get elected. And that's back when you ran for chief justice and you ran for court spots, which they do now to a point, you know. Now most of them get appointed. But Papa ran and he won every time he ran for anything judicial, but he never won as governor or senator.

And he had collected a lot of enemies along the way. You can imagine that. He ran on the local option ticket in 1916 when he was running against Hoke Smith for governor, and. . . that's a funny story. His first three children were girls and then Uncle Dick was born, and so there were four of them. Papa ran and Grandmother, Grandmother's father was a Methodist minister down in Cherokee Corner in Oglethorpe County, and he ran on the local option ticket, which was to let every city or county vote whether they wanted to sell whiskey or not, which

now is what everybody has. But back then that was quite radical, and the Methodist preachers condemned him from the pulpit, and he lost, and he probably blamed it on that altogether, but it probably was not all that.

But he, Grandmother, and the four first children left the Methodist church and went into the Presbyterian's, and after that I have two Presbyterian preachers as uncles. You have Uncle Fielding [Russell], who was the biggest layman in the Presbyterian church in Statesboro, and I've always thought that the Methodists outdid themselves because they lost nine Russell children who went on to have big families, you know, and everywhere they go they're active in church.

But they're all Presbyterians except those first four, and even one of my aunts, like at ninety . . . oh, Aunt Ina [Mrs. Jean K. Stacy] must have been eighty-nine or ninety, she joined the Presbyterian Church in Winder. And I think it's kind of like a homecoming. Grandmother Russell, that was kind of her second home, with the Presbyterian Church. She fed all the little preachers that would come every Sunday from the seminary in Decatur, and a lot of this has nothing to do--but I think it has a lot to do with the way I feel about things. We had Peter Marshall as a student to come to Winder and preach in the Presbyterian Church. And he was just as good as a student as he was when he went on and became so famous. He was the Billy Graham of the Presbyterian Church practically.

But Peter Marshall was so great, and John Talmadge and McCloud Frampton, all these Presbyterian ministers that have really gone on to mean so much to the Presbyterian Church. They used to come to Grandmama's house every Sunday, and if Grandmama couldn't feed them, Mama brought them home with her because the little church was so little they couldn't

afford a preacher, and so they would send a student down every Sunday from Columbia Seminary. And you got to know these men who were such good people and staunch believers. The church really meant something to all those people, and Grandmother Russell, she thought they were all her boys. So it was really something, you know, and here I've gotten off the subject, back to the Methodists.

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: Well, actually, when I was thinking about Daddy, how these thirteen children grew up with their father running for something all the time. I can remember Daddy talking about how late at night people from town, and we were considered out in the country, of course, but people from town would come and ride by and throw rocks at the house. And it would scare his mother so because they were taking their feelings out against the children because Papa wasn't there usually. He was off running for something or holding court or something somewhere.

But Daddy said he can remember trying to keep the little children from being more scared than they were because Daddy was one of the older ones. My Daddy, I think he died remembering who in town, who in Winder, were so thoughtless or so, you know, blatantly cruel to Grandmother because it would scare [her] with thirteen children in the house, or ten or twelve or however many at that time, for somebody to come by and yell ugly things and throw rocks at the house.

And Daddy remembers that, and then we were talking about 1936 being rough. There was nothing like that. I don't mean that. Daddy also. . . . Oh, I'm so glad. I'm glad we talked

about that because my Daddy, I've always thought and think Uncle Dick really gave him the credit of being more or less the brains behind all [of] Uncle Dick's campaigns. Daddy managed all of them, and now I guess the statute of limitations is long gone, but in 1952, when Uncle Dick was nominated for president of the United States, Daddy was all ready by then a federal judge, and he also was a court of appeals [judge] by then. And Daddy was hidden out in Chicago 'cause he wasn't supposed to take any part in Uncle Dick's thing 'cause that was the Hatch Act and all that kind of [stuff], and it really--we used to meet on the fire escape. Daddy was there, and, of course, I don't guess I ought to really say that, but everybody from Georgia knew that Daddy was there 'cause Uncle Dick had always counted on Daddy being there, and Daddy always managed the campaigns. And Daddy was not the kind that would've ever gone out and run for anything, but he took great delight in managing Uncle Dick's campaigns and being advisor on so many things.

Funny story: Uncle Dick would not nominate Daddy nor would he vote for Daddy to be a federal judge. Senator [Walter Franklin] George handled it because Uncle Dick would not have any part of it because it would look like he had done it, and, yet, I like to think that Senator George knew he was one of the most capable men to be a federal judge, and so he put his name in for nomination. And I remember Mama telling me, "Daddy's going to be nominated for judge." And at that time can you believe she said, "And we'll be making ten thousand dollars a year"? And that was going to a sure ten thousand.

See, Daddy was a country lawyer and that's one of those things, you get cases: they may can pay you, they may not can [*sic*], and this was in 1940 when he was first appointed judge.

And he was appointed district judge for the Gainesville northeastern circuit. But anyway, Daddy did. '36 was a rough campaign, and Daddy was managing Uncle Dick's campaign.

Henderson: Let me go back and ask you a question about your grandparents.

Vandiver: Well, I was really blessed, Hal. Well, Mother's mother and father had only two--well, they lost their baby, but they had only two children, and her brother never had any children. So we were the only grandchildren on the Millsaps side. I was named after Betty O'Sheilds Millsaps, and her family, they were both Barrow County families, farmers, the Smiths and the Millsaps. My papa was Green Smith Millsaps and he was kin to all the Smiths in Barrow County.

And so they were all big farmers, and, of course, bless Papa Millsaps heart, the Depression and the two cents a pound cotton did him in. He was quite a large farmer until that came along. I can remember watermelons in their front yard, just so many watermelons. And they'd let us play on them, and our feet would go down between watermelons, and, you know, those are the kind of--but anyway, they lived in town and without them my social life would have been nil because nobody drove cars and boys couldn't get cars. And so I spent every weekend in town with Grandmother [Betty O'Sheilds Millsaps] and Papa so I could have a date on Friday night and a date on Saturday night. And Grandmother Millsaps was a cutter. She thought you ought to wear fingernail polish and have a permanent. I know when I graduated from high school and I was going to school in Virginia, Miss Betty, we called Grandma, Miss Betty presented me with a pretty, pretty fur coat. She thought I was going to Virginia where it was going to be cold, and she thought I should have it. When I graduated from Sullins she gave me my ring that I love better than anything just because she gave it to me. I remember going to

the Southeastern Fair every year with Grandmama and Papa. They would take us, and we'd go by all the exhibits and see all the farming stuff 'cause Papa was still into a lot of that, and we'd go by and see all the equipment. We'd go by and see the cows and the chickens and the pigs, and then they would go and find them a good seat and turn us loose on the midway, but we had to go through and see all that stuff at the exhibits and so forth first, and then they'd turn all three of us loose. And they'd take all three of us to the Southeastern Fair.

I don't know how old they were, and, you know, back then I'm sure I thought they were ancient [laughter], but they probably were not ancient at all when I was--let's see, twenty-seven, thirty-seven, I'd say, well, they were ancient at all in the twenties. You know, they were probably thirty years old maybe, and I just thought they were ancient, but they were probably forty or forty-five by the time [I] got around to thinking how old they were. But they were wonderful, and then Grandmother Russell and Papa, like I say, I'm so fortunate 'cause I knew all four of my grandparents well. Papa Russell died in 1938, which I was eleven years old, but I had lived next door to them all my life, and so Grandmama and Papa, I've always thought I was lucky one.

I used to resent my cousins coming to spend the summer with their grandparents because I never got to go to spend the summer with my grandparents, but I was with them everyday, 365 days out of the year, or as much as I wanted to be with them, or as much as they could put up with me running in and out. But I was so fortunate 'cause I did get to know them, you know, as people. And Papa Russell was, as I say, he died in 1938 and then Grandmother died in 1952.

I used to go up and stay with Grandmother Russell because they just wanted somebody in the house with her. So I'd get my lessons and eat supper and get dressed for bed, and then run over and spend the night with Grandmother, and then get up the next morning. And she would feed me breakfast most of the time, and I remember I learned the Ten Commandments and I learned the Lord's Prayer. I remember learning all these things 'cause, as I say, she was as close to a saint as I knew. Everything was based--you can tell her father was a Methodist minister, I guess, because everything, the children, my catechisms, you had to know your long and short catechisms, and you had to know all those scriptures, you know, and she taught you. I can see her stirring grits and making oatmeal right now, teaching us verses. So I was blessed. I had both grandparents, [laughter] both grandmothers are both different likes and dislikes, and I guess--I don't know whether I walked a fine line or whether I just got to be me because I was going to make both of them happy, I hoped, because I loved them both so much.

Henderson: Let me go back to the time that you were at the University of Georgia. Were you a member of a sorority, and what were some of the activities that you engaged in?

Vandiver: Well, I was not the most active person in the world, but, you know, I've decided now, Hal, that transferring is not the way to go if you can help it. If you remember, I went to Sullins my freshman and sophomore years, and I went to Wesleyan the summer between my freshman and sophomore years, just to go and get a couple of credits off. And then I transferred to Georgia, and, yes, I was an Alpha Delta Pi, A D Pi, and I was real happy in my sorority. But I know now, when you look back on it, that as you transfer as a junior and you go into a sorority, they know that you're not going to be there long enough to enhance the sorority. You're not going to be able to be actively get [sic] into many things as a junior that you might as

a freshman, and most of your pledge class are freshmen. They're going to be there for four years, and you and one or two more are juniors, and you've got that edge of being off at school for two years that these other girls, an edge or whatever it is. It may not be an edge, but you do have two years on most of them.

I thoroughly enjoyed being an A D Pi. I do think girls would get more out of it if they go in as freshman and go in as a freshman class of sorority sisters and work in that class, you know. But I enjoyed being an A D Pi and got to live in the house two quarters, the last two quarters I was at Georgia I lived in the house, and that was a nice experience. I lived in Lucy Cobb for a year and Mary Lyndon for a quarter and loved my Lucy Cobb days. I had some of my best friends at Lucy Cobb, and, you know, now they restored it, made it the Carl Vinson think tank, and it's a beautiful, beautiful building. It needed repairing, I will say that for it [laughter], but that was nice--some of my friends I made at Lucy Cobb that year were just wonderful.

Henderson: When did you realize that your husband had political ambitions?

Vandiver: You know, I guess it's kind of like learning to walk. You just don't know when it comes on you because. . . . I guess I should have known. I guess the first thing is we got married and I really thought we were--in fact, I think he thought that, or maybe he didn't. I don't know, but he was practicing law with Joe Quillian, and we had our cute little apartment. We got married in September and had our cute little apartment. And in May or June, I guess, Herman [Eugene] Talmadge was running for governor in the '48 campaign, and he called and asked Ernie to manage the campaign, and this was to be really the manager. . . well, I don't know how to say that, manager's campaign, put it that way. And all of a sudden we were

renting a little house in Atlanta on Piedmont Road and we lived there that summer, and I was pregnant with Chip by then.

He was manager of the campaign and I guess I should have known, but I remember Bob and Ernie, when the campaign was over, and I remember Herman saying, "Well, Ernie, is there anything, any job, anything you'd like to do in the administration?" after they had won. And I remember Bob, my brother Bob, and Ernie getting out a book and thumbing through to see if there was anything Ernie wanted to do. I don't know what would have happened if he had not taken a job. We probably would have gone back to Winder and practiced law the rest of our lives, but he and Bob decided being adjutant general would be a fine, good job, and that's where he started. And all of a sudden we were going to move to Atlanta. I never shall forget, the election was September the 8th that year, and Chip was born the 1st. That's another funny story; I'll tell you about that in a minute.

But anyway, on September the 1st we had Chip, and this was one week before the election, the next Wednesday. Of course, back then they kept you in the hospital for a week, and I went home by ambulance, went to Winder by ambulance with my one-week-old child on Election Day. [Laughter] And of course Ernie had to be in Atlanta, get all those reports and everything. It was lucky I was at Emory [Emory University Hospital] with Chip because he could come by and see me every morning and then go down to Henry Grady and work because that's where the campaign--I guess it was the William-Oliver Building--anyway, wherever the headquarters was, he went down. It was Henry Grady because I had always told him I was not going to walk through the Henry Grady Hotel [laughter] nine months pregnant on the way to have that baby.

And so I had the baby the day the lease ran out on that little Piedmont, [laughter] the house on Piedmont. I had said, "Well, I'm going to move from there to the hospital. I'm not going to walk through the Henry Grady." And, no kidding, on the night of the 31st of August I went into labor, and we moved out, and that poor lady that we had rented that house from, she had to pack up everything in the house and get us out because I wasn't packing on the night of the 31st. I was at Emory. So then the next week I went home and that was the Election Day, September the 8th, and, of course, Herman did win.

And then we moved to Atlanta. I won't be able to tell you why, but they had the inauguration in November that year. I guess it was because it was a special election to fill in the Gene Talmadge/Ellis Arnall. . .

Henderson: I think M. E. Thompson resigned.

Vandiver: M. E. Thompson, but anyway, whatever that was, they had the inauguration in November, and Ernie--gosh, he looked so--you know, if I'd known him during the service, I might have married him then. He looked so good in that uniform, but he really did just look beautiful in that adjutant general's uniform. But that was a whole new world for us. We moved to Atlanta and lived down in Colonial Homes. We lived on North Drive first and then North Circle, and then we got a first and second apartment instead of a second and third down on the drive.

We three moved in and we stayed down there until we bought our house up on Dellwood in 1950. Chip, he lived in Atlanta. We always kidded him. We had the best neighbors. We had two couples who were older. They were not that much older but they were older than we were. And without them Chip probably would have been [laughter] a different

person because one of them had two children, and one of them had no children, but they all helped me raise Chip. And it was just wonderful really, the friendships that we made down in that little circle of apartments.

Henderson: Does he ask your opinion about whether he should be campaign manager in '48, or does he just come home and say, "I'm going to be campaign manager"?

Vandiver: Oh, no, we talked about it, but it's funny. . . . I don't know if this, you know, you don't use all this, I know, but it brings up another little subject. At one time in our lives the other big decision--like, we'd been married, oh, six or . . . well, this was around Christmas, after we married in September. [Enoch] Smythe Gambrell, now you know who. . . E. Smythe. He wrote and asked Ernie to join his firm in Atlanta. Well, that's probably the biggest decision we ever made because we knew if he joined E. Smythe Gambrell's law firm in Atlanta, we would be in Atlanta probably forever. He would be an Atlanta lawyer for the rest of his life, and back in '47 Atlanta was not like it is now really, when you think about the changes that've been made in Atlanta in the last forty years.

But that was the first big decision we had to make together, and that was something that neither one of us really cared about--living in Atlanta the rest of our lives. In fact, we didn't really care about living in Atlanta on a full-time basis even then. We thought we were going to be in Winder, or I thought we were going to be in Winder. That was our first big decision, and, yes, he did [discuss it with me]. We've always made big decisions together. I mean, I can't think of any. . . . Ernie has to help me make a lot of little ones; I help him make a lot of big ones, but it's a give and take and back and forth, and you're talking about it just as hard and do both pros and cons and anti. . . you know, it's a lot of doing back and forth and. . . .

Henderson: Did you have any reservations at all about him moving into politics?

Vandiver: Never occurred to me to doubt what Ernie wanted to do. If he wanted to do that then I knew he was going to do it, and I knew he would--I don't mean I knew he would do it without my--but I knew if he was going to do it, he would do a good job, and if this is what he really wanted to do, then I wanted him to do it. Plus, knowing that it would be great if he did it because you need people like that. 'Course, being raised around politicians all my life, and I use the word sacredly. I hate, you know, I have fought--I guess I've had more to say on the soapbox about [how] people talk about the crooked politicians. They kind-of-run the word together, you know, like "crooked politician," and it's like every politician is crooked, and I have fought this.

And I think that's one reason I resent. . . ooh, I'm getting off on another subject, but I resent Richard [Milhous] Nixon. He was the epitome of. . . Ernie could not believe Richard Nixon would be a crook and lie to the people. He just could not believe that, and he and Beth [Vanna Elizabeth Vandiver] and I, Beth and I just never did like Nixon a whole lot, but then when Nixon did what he did and really brought just the curse [of the crooked politician]. As high as you could get in the United States, to lie to the people and so forth, he proved that point of crooked politicians to so many people who thought it anyway.

But they just knew it 'cause they had heard "crooked politician" all their lives. They never think about the ones who plod along and do the best they can and are so good and are so fine and honest and want nothing from it except to help, and they really feel a calling. I think it's kind of like a preacher. They feel a calling to help as many people as you [sic] can. And for Richard Nixon and other politicians that you can think of--you can think of them real fast, if you

can get going, you can think of a lot of politicians: [Spiro Theodore] Agnew, and I'm just going to say on the national level, but you can think of a lot of them.

And now, have you ever seen anything as bad? Really, I mean, you know, you've got all sorts of "gates." You've got these politicians, these congressmen, that have done things that you cannot believe somebody that. . . . They were trusted by enough people back home to vote for him [sic], and then to go up and make a sham of being a statesman or politician, you know. I know Ernie, his mother, I've got a little plaque at home that his mother gave him sometime. I never knew Mrs. [Vanna Bowers] Vandiver, but I think she did a good job [raising Ernie]. Anyway, but this little thing says, "A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman thinks of the next generation." Isn't that wonderful?

See, I think that's the way Ernie--Ernie worshipped his mother so, but I think those are the kind of things, and when I think about what crooked politicians have done to the name "politician." They're not all statesman; all these politicians are not statesmen, but more of them are good honest politicians than there are crooked politicians. But politician's an ugly word now, and I hate that because I feel like everybody, so many people I know and love are politicians. I've got cousins and uncles and everything that have run for something and tried to serve in the state and local and counties officials [sic], and I know they're all good honest people, and it hurts me so for them to just lump all politicians in this crooked politician image. It really bothers me.

Henderson: Let me go back to Governor Vandiver being adjutant general. What was the income that he made from that?

Vandiver: Oh, gosh, I don't know. When he was governor it was \$12,000. So I'm sure [laughter] it was less than that 'cause he. . . . I would. . . .

Henderson: Is it sufficient income to give you a style of living that you were comfortable with?

Vandiver: Well, back then, you know, yeah, we were comfortable. Of course. . . we were comfortable, yeah, but Ernie was lucky enough also that his father had always been an excellent businessman, and Ernie had been vice-president of the Georgia Seed Company. And Ernie had been able--he wasn't married so when he was in the service he was able to save some money 'cause back then he lived in the BOQs [Bachelor Officers Quarters], isn't that what they call the bachelors' quarters? He could live in the BOQs and eat his meals at the mess, and he didn't, I mean, we've never had very high taste either, which is fine, 'cause neither one of us wants to, we don't really want to live high, wide, and handsome.

And we've always been happy, and I would think that. . . . I can't even remember. I remember his daddy, for one of the Christmases, gave him some stock, and that's a funny story, gave us some shares of stock in the--you know the Franklin Discount Company, Franklin Loan now? When it was starting in 1948 in Toccoa, Georgia, by the [unintelligible], old, old, good friends of ours. Daddy [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver [Sr.] bought, and I don't know how much, but I know I got a little dividend about every six months, and that was the first. . . . I mean, my family has always been. . . . We had enough but never we had anything--and I thought I was in high cotton 'cause I got a little dividend every six months from Franklin Discount Company.

But then Ernie's a good investor, and he's a good businessman in addition, and while we were adjutant general, yeah, I think our rent was a \$120 a month. You [laughter] couldn't live

in Atlanta now. I mean, you can't find it, but that Colonial Homes, which were the newest apartments in Atlanta, [they] were like a \$125 dollars a month. And you had two bedrooms, two baths, and everything that now would cost you six or \$700, I guess, a month. I don't know.

But it was sufficient, yes. The state furnished a car, so therefore we didn't have to have but one car 'cause [unintelligible], bless my heart--bless his heart, I've always said I just want wheels. . . you know, I want my wheels 'cause when I want to get up and go, I want to get up and go. So I've always had my car. It was a fun time because it was all the young people coming back from the war, and the National Guard was a wonderful organization. And there were grand people in it, and for six years we lived in Atlanta, and we loved the fellowship with all those people. And they were young and just back from the service, and we were all having our families together. And, you know, we could get together, and we could go out to Marietta. I know, the Naval Air Station, a bunch of us would go out there on Friday nights every now and then. And we were all having our families together, and I think back now on some of those people, and they were the nucleus; they were wonderful. They've always been our good friends.

But that was a wonderful beginning, and I think probably now you look back and you thought, "Well, the National Guard was a great organization," to get your foot in, if you were ever going to think about running for something 'cause you were going to have National Guardsmen, and they were the whole nucleus. That and the University of Georgia friends was the nucleus of a campaign, if you knew somebody in every town that would be willing to go to bat for you, and the National Guardsmen and the University of Georgia friends of both of ours [would help]. We know somebody in nearly every town in Georgia, and that's the beauty of being of being in--that's one of the good things about being in politics.

Henderson: Well, now, when you're going through this decision-making process about whether to be adjutant general, do you discuss the possibility that, if he is adjutant general, it will open up connections throughout the state, as you mentioned. Is that a major factor?

Vandiver: I don't think that's a major factor. I know it wasn't major factor, but I know somewhere back in there that that had to have been, if I'm ever going to do anything politically, and we have to remember now that Daddy Vandiver [Sr.], I think he was a great influence on Ernie's thinking. I think he knew from the day that Ernie was born that he wanted him to be governor, and [if] you hear this as a child, you know, and you get introduced as the "next governor of Georgia someday," or "future governor," I think it comes to you. And Ernie was real active at the University of Georgia. He was running for something all the time, running for president of the class or the Interfraternity Council or law school's officer or something, and so I know deep down in his heart he hoped to go into active politics, a successful political career. I mean, everybody wants to be successful, and if he got into something, he was going to work hard to make it be a success.

Henderson: What's your impression or recollection of Daddy Vandiver?

Vandiver: I wish I'd known him better. See, we married in '47, and then we had Chip in '48. That's the funny story I was going to tell you. Let me back up and tell that real fast. Chip, all of his life, and they say I make these things up, and I do not make them up. They happened at one time or the other, but my children declare I make them up. But when he was a little boy we always would have his birthday on September the 1st, and then Mama or somebody, we'd always go off on a little anniversary trip on the 3rd.

So we would say, "Well, [we celebrated] Chip's birthday, "Now we're going to go off and celebrate our anniversary." We got married, Chip [came along], and we tried to explain to him that we got married, you know, on the 3rd, and he was born on the 1st. And he told somebody, he said he was born two days before Mama and Daddy got married. [Laughter] And so that's always been a joke, and he said it, but he swears I made it up so he would be saying something cute, but he did. He said, "Ma, I've had my birthday. Now, Mama and Daddy, you know they got married two days after my birthday." So [laughter] that's kind of one of our family jokes. Well, I've forgotten now where I was going to. That was funny.

Henderson: I asked you about Daddy Vandiver.

Vandiver: Oh. He was the sweetest man, and he loved Ernie. He was so proud of Ernie, and yet he was aware that. . . . Daddy Vandiver was most unusual. I heard him [Ernest Vandiver] talking to you this morning about him. But Daddy Vandiver was a man; he had no--I don't think he had any levity. He grew up in a hard time. I remember Ernie says, and, of course, I didn't see this, but on his car, when he was a young man, forty, forty-five years old, on his car he said, "Talk business." And this was on the side of his car. He didn't have time for a lot of hanging around the corner talking or visiting with you at the filling station. He was out working.

And you have to remember he was forty when he married for the first time, and Ernie was born when he was forty-two. So he never had that young relationship with a son, and being the temperament he was of a worker, he never had that play time with a child that you would have if you had a child at twenty-four or five or twenty-three or four, when most people are having their first children and so forth. Ernie and his father didn't have that kind of relationship.

His father got him a pony. His father, you know, sent him to school and to camps and did things, but there was never. . . . He just was too old by the time Ernie got--and fifty-two isn't old but it's old to start playing baseball with your children. If you haven't played with them young, it kind of hard to start at that age.

So he really in essence was like an only child, and he was Daddy Vandiver's only child. And he had high hopes for him, and I think he lived the life that he would like to have, if he could have been that successful, and he was that successful in what he did, but had he been Ernie, he would have wanted to be governor; he would have wanted to excel to the point of working hard to get what he wanted.

He loved me so, and he and I just got along so beautifully, and I've got all the letters he wrote Mama and Daddy during our courtship after we decided to get married, all the letters explaining Ernie, that he could be stubborn, and that he was a hard worker, had good friends, but that. . . . Oh, I'd love reading those letters now. It does me so much good 'cause I kid him about the Vandiver stubbornness. But he told them all this, everything that Daddy Vandiver thought good and bad about Ernie and told Mama and Daddy everything, you know, "[I'm] looking forward to meeting you. Betty has won a place in my heart." He and I just got along beautifully.

Now, we had so little time because we married in '47, and Chip was born in '48, and Daddy Vandiver came to the hospital on the Sunday after Chip was born on Wednesday, and he had a stroke the next day. So we only had one year of him being up and around. And then you could tell he was beginning to fail, and we didn't get to Lavonia that much because Ernie was

busy with the campaign. And you just, you know how when you're young you don't realize time's going by so fast.

But anyway, Daddy Vandiver had his stroke on--and we moved to Lavonia after Daddy Vandiver had his stroke. And I remember that September the 8th. I told you about going home from the hospital with Chip on a pillow. Daddy Vandiver had a stroke and they took him to--he was in the Anderson [South Carolina] hospital, which is close to Lavonia. And the nurse-- 'course, back then you had to have a nurse when you came home from the hospital. Miss Ruby Jordan was an old family friend who was a baby nurse, who came and stayed with people having [children]. She came to Winder and stayed with me at Mama and Daddy's house while Ernie was finishing up the campaign and that kind of stuff.

They took Chip the next day, which he would have been nine days old, and I can see him [Ernest Vandiver] leaving right now with him [Chip] on a pillow, and took him to Anderson because they really didn't think Daddy Vandiver was going to live through the night. It was a nip and tuck, sure enough, and they wanted to be sure he saw his grandson again because that's all he ever really wanted was a Ernest Vandiver III. He wanted a son. He wanted a son; he wanted a grandson. And so they took Chip to Anderson the day after we came home from Atlanta and put him in the oxygen tent with Daddy Vandiver. And they said he rubbed his [Chip's] hands because, see, I couldn't go. Back then they kept you--[you] stayed in bed two weeks and that kind of stuff, but they said Daddy Vandiver just rubbed his hands and his fingers. And he was under the oxygen tent with him, and Daddy Vandiver recovered, [but] never completely. He was never able to walk without help or anything, but he lived three more years.

And we moved to Lavonia while he was in the hospital in Anderson. We moved to Lavonia and lived over there from September 'til January, I think. And then Ernie was sworn in November. So, I mean, it all is a happy, a busy, busy time there. But Daddy Vandiver got better, and he was able to come home. We got people to come in and live with him. We were always so fortunate with the people that would come in and fix breakfast for him, fix his lunch, and it was always a couple 'cause the man could do part of it, and the woman could keep the house. And we always felt good about Daddy Vandiver's situation.

And one of my favorite stories about him was when Chip was six or eight months old, or just a baby. He couldn't walk. I'm sure he wasn't running around. Daddy Vandiver said, "You know, I just don't believe I could ever love another child like I love Chip." And I said, "Oh, yes you could." I said, "You could love [more] children. You just think you couldn't." And you have to remember now: he had only one child, and he loved Ernie to--I mean, he was so proud of Ernie, and he loved him and so forth. It was just a real happy situation.

But then when we had Chip, he told me, he said, "I could never love another child like I love Chip." I said, "Oh, yes you can. You can. You just wait. We're going to fill up the house." I really wanted dozens of children. I said, "We're going to fill up this house, and you're going to love each and every one of them." "No, no. I don't believe I'll ever be able to love another one." Well, by the time we got pregnant with Beth and had Beth, Chip was all over the world. I mean, you couldn't hold him down for a minute. And Beth, we had her in October of '50. By Christmas we could go to his house, and he was in the bed by then, and we could put her up on the bed with him. And Chip, of course, was nowhere to be seen. He didn't have time

to sit down for anything. So, Daddy Vandiver didn't get to see Chip at that stage, but he could play with Beth, and Beth would grab his fingers and hold them and so forth.

And one time, really right before he died, he said, "You were right. You can love more than one child." [Laughter] And I said, "I told you so!" because he really didn't think you could love but one at a time, but that's an only child thing, a syndrome or something, because he thought this grandchild was it. His son was it, and one was about all he could handle. But it dawned on him that you can love, you know, lots of people, more grandchildren than one. The best picture of us that we have of him is at our wedding. Somebody took a film of our wedding and gave it to us as a wedding present. And it's the greatest picture of Daddy Vandiver that you can imagine. As a matter of fact, it's a picture of Bob and Daddy Vandiver together, my brother Bob that Ernie loved so. It's just the greatest picture you can imagine, to have them, you know, in front of the house at our wedding.

Henderson: In 1954 your husband runs for the office of lieutenant governor. Did he at any time consider running for governor in 1954 instead of lieutenant governor?

Vandiver: I don't think so. I never got that impression, and, like I say, my memory's [laughter]. . . . I'm not positive, but I don't ever remember thinking that he might be running for governor. I know we, in running for lieutenant governor, had to depend on the governors [gubernatorial candidates] drawing the crowd, and that also was the year [that] there must have been eight or nine [candidates] that year. And I remember everywhere we went all we could do was just work the crowd, or sometimes, it's according to where it was, as to whether Ernie could even get up and say something because the lieutenant governor [race], that was not the important race. Hal, I don't remember him considering running for governor. Now if he did,

and I feel like we would have talked about it, but that doesn't mean I would remember it 'cause after it's done, it's done. After it's gone, if we make up our minds, then that takes care of that.

But I do know that summer was the hottest summer, and your cars didn't have air-conditioning. And I remember thinking my hair was never so bad because it blew. You had to keep the windows down, and you had to go fast to get where you're going. By the time you got there your hair was out to here. And I remember thinking, "My hair." I remember one night it was so hot, and we drove from Louisville, and he was supposed to be in Griffin, say, the next morning at 10:30, or something like that. And we decided to just travel at night. It was easier. It was cooler to go from Louisville, which was next to Augusta, which is one of the hottest places in the world, and Louisville. [Laughter] We drove through the night to get to Griffin because it was so much easier than driving in the hot, hot day. And we just followed the governor's [gubernatorial candidates'] crowds all we could.

And that brings up--I don't know whether that's something. It may be the next step, but you remember I told you my daddy died in '55, January of '55? The lieutenant governor's race, I had wonderful help keeping my children, but we didn't go as much because all you could do actually was go on the weekend where the governors [gubernatorial candidates] were having rallies or something. So I had some good help with Ernie's family. [They were] awfully good about that. So it wasn't a problem. Babysitting wasn't a problem for the lieutenant governor's race because he only went on the weekends, or mainly on Saturday. Ernie made speeches at Rotaries and Lions and Kiwanises [clubs], but women didn't. I mean, the wives didn't even need to go or were not invited.

But that's when in '54 or '55 Ernie went in as lieutenant governor, and Daddy died. That's when my mother became my guardian angel. She needed something to do; I needed somebody to help with my children, and I've always thought about it. You know, if Daddy had lived, I don't know what I would have done. Things might have [been] done differently because Mother wouldn't have left Daddy for a minute. I mean, we all knew that, but Mama, just all of a sudden, she appeared, and anytime I had to go or do, there was my mama. And I felt better about her doing my children than about me doing them because she, you know, did them so well.

Then Ernie's sister, her. . . . Well, that's another story, but Mama helped the four years of him being lieutenant governor because, see, we moved back to Lavonia. And so during the legislature I was supposed to be up there practically the whole time, [but] not as much as they are now. Now they just move to Atlanta, but back then you'd go in for parties, you know, real often. And Mama could come over and take care of the children, get them to school, get them to [Boy and Girl] Scouts, get them to the things that worried me so about gone, and Mama could just handle it all. And I didn't have to worry about my children because I knew they were in better hands than if I was at home with them.

And [laughter] I really do believe it, the Lord has taken care of me as far as somebody with my children, and the summer that we ran for lieutenant governor Ernie's niece [Ruth Read] came back from Japan, and she was pregnant, and I said, "Ruth, you can move in," and they did. They had just come back from Japan, and she didn't have a place to live and that kind of stuff. I said, "Why don't you move in our house, and you and Henry take care of our house and my children?" And I had help three days a week [laughter] back then, and I said, "I'll see if Mary

Francis can work five days a week," 'cause she [Ruth] was pregnant. She was having her first baby in November.

And she said, "Well, we might can do that." So she and Henry [Richardson Read] talked about it, and they moved in our house while we were running for lieutenant governor, that summer, when you did start going everyday somewhere. And we'd go home on the weekends after the governor's [gubernatorial candidates] rally. We'd go home on Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday maybe we'd be at home running this campaign for lieutenant governor. And Ruth and Henry lived with our children and took care of them that summer, and we felt so good about them, with that couple.

But I remember one time they called me and said, "Beth is sick. You just have to come on home. We can't help her," and they told her I was coming. And she was well by the time I got there. I know now that my middle child, that that was one of those things that. . . . I remember I was in Augusta, and I went home, you know, as fast as you could. By the time I got home she was fine, and we had a couple of good days together and then it was back on the trail.

But she needed to know that we were still there 'cause at her age--she was three years old and she didn't quite understand Mama and Daddy being gone all the time. I mean, I'm sure now that you can look back and see that that was one of those times that she might have felt deserted. I don't know, you know, maybe something didn't agree with her, but it really was mainly missing Mama and Daddy, is what was wrong with her that time that they thought she was so sick.

Henderson: When you're out on the campaign trail, what do you do?

Vandiver: Oh, [laughter] I meet people. Well, we went in and out of stores. Nobody can believe this now because television is the name of the game. You can hit more people in

one five minutes of television than you could. . . but we would just go from town to town, and we would go in every store and hand out our little. . . [laughter] that's a funny story, to hand out those little brochures and tell them who you were and what your husband was running for and we'd appreciate your vote.

I can just remember. You almost used to do it in your sleep, just stick out your hand and say, "I'm Betty Vandiver and my husband, Ernie, is running for lieutenant governor." [Laughter] Hal, he had a brochure [made] up, and that might be something we ought to try to [find]: "This Is His Life." And it had a good picture of Ernie and on the inside it had a picture of all of his little family, and it had a picture of him as adjutant general. And as well as I can remember, it had a picture of him in the cotton field. It was a good brochure. I mean, it really was a pretty good brochure for back in '54 when we were running.

And you go in and your little spiel was "Hi, I'm Betty Vandiver and my husband, Ernie, is running for lieutenant governor. We certainly would appreciate your vote. Hmm, what a nice store you have here," or whatever you would say, you know, something. And one day after I had said that, oh, how many hundreds of times, I went in this store and I went through my little spiel and handed her this brochure, and she looked down, and she saw "life" and that's all she saw, I guess, and she said, "Oh, honey, I already take that magazine." [Laughter]

And I thought, Dear Gussy! You have been saying this all summer long. Do you think everybody thinks you're selling *Life* magazine 'cause she said, "Oh, honey, I already take *Life*." You know, it was such a blow to my something to think that you'd said [it] all summer. Maybe no one else was listening either, but it worked out fine, and he'd go up one side and I'd go up the other, and then we'd crisscross, and, you know, meet to talk to people on the streets. And so

then at the rallies, you'd just go around and hit circles and give everybody a card or a brochure. I loved it. See, you know, I love people, so it really suited me just fine to get wound up and hit everybody there if you could. I loved it.

Henderson: Is this something that Governor Vandiver liked to do, or he just felt like he had to do--getting out and mixing and mingling with people?

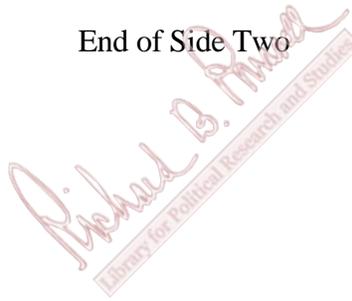
Vandiver: He didn't like it as well as I did, but, you know, he's not that "gladfellow-hail-met" [hail-fellow-well-met] or whatever that saying is. He's more reserved. His feelings are. . . and I love people. I love meeting them, I love hearing about them, and I wanted to tell them my story. And I did. I thought I had a good product to try to sell, and I was doing my job and doing the best I could to sell him. It was tiresome, and I don't say I loved it, but when I get wound up or get doing it, it was fun. You know, and you met people. It was so much fun to see the people you knew because we did after going to the university and being in the. . . . You know, they say you've got to go to the university if you're going to be in politics in Georgia 'cause you meet somebody from all over. Well, it's true. Ernie had made a lot of good sincere friends. He has a remarkable memory. It's amazing to me how he can pull a name out of a hat that he hasn't seen in fifty years. Yesterday we were with some friends, and they said, "Now who was that boy from Tenille, Georgia?" He was a Phi Delt, and they were trying to think who that boy was, and Ernie came up with Clem Brown, just like that. It's just something he did.

He remembers every camper he went to Camp Dixie with, and he can go through any town, and we have gone through towns that I have never even heard of and stop at the pay telephone and call some friend he knew at Camp Dixie in 1934. And he'll find that friend and

they'll talk like they've never been separated, and he just has that. He's such a sincere person; he wants to know you, and he will not forget you.

We have had some our funniest experiences of going through these towns and what we'll hear about, these people sixty years later, what they've done with their lives, you know, and how many times they've been married and how many children they have. We had one time this woman over in South Carolina. We stopped in some little town. I don't even remember which town it was now. . . . [Cut off]

End of Side Two



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