

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection  
OH Vandiver 16A  
Samuel Ernest (Chip) Vandiver III Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part A)  
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**EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON**

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with Samuel Ernest Vandiver III, better known as Chip Vandiver. The date is February 27, 1994, and this interview is taking place at Governor Vandiver's home in Lavonia [Georgia]. My name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good afternoon, Chip.

Vandiver: Good afternoon, Dr. Henderson.

Henderson: Let me begin by asking you a question about your father [Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Jr.]. Would you please describe your father as a person and as a parent?

Vandiver: Well, it's really hard for me to separate the two . . . because the qualities that he has a person, you know, have filtered into his parenting style. He's very honest, direct, very little guile about him, if you won't say an answer, he can use prosecutorial fervor to get it. I can recall many [laughter] incidences of prosecutorial fervor, but on the other hand he's a very loving and sensitive person. I think what I've always felt about him is that he expects an awful lot from his children, and he expects an awful lot from the people that work for him, people that he had dealings with and associated with in the legislature. He turned right around and expected an awful lot from us.

He was a demanding father. But when the crunch came and there was a crisis in any one of our lives and through the course of any person's life and their relationships with their parents, when the crunch came, he was right there. And at that time, he was not a demanding person and he was not accusing you of this, and demanding that and wanting to know this. It

was just all: What can we do to sit down and get this worked out? How can I help? What can I do to help you and what can I do to support you? I think that quality is what made him successful in his public life also. I mean, he could be demanding but if someone had a problem, he certainly had open ears and an open door policy in style.

Henderson: Okay. Let me ask the same question relative to your mother [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver].

Vandiver: Well, I know this sounds real trite, you know, because every one says this, but I think that my mother is one of the most unique people I have ever known and observed in my lifetime. She has an infinite capacity for patience, and sweetness, and understanding, and sensitivity, and. . . would make a real good psychologist, psychiatrist. I think from her we have gotten whatever social graces we have. We have gotten a feeling for other people and how our actions affect them. She was always the one that would tell parables and try to relate life's lessons to the little everyday things that happened. Just an infinite capacity for love and just a very, very special person.

How that differs from a person and a parent is really hard for me to tell. I mean, I feel very fortunate to have received more than my full measure of it and, like I say, whatever good manners and good grace, my ability to get along with other people, by and large, comes from her in the way that she would, in a roundabout way, teach us these little lessons. I can see it today. I can see her trying to do the same thing with my children. It's interesting for me, now, to sit back and see her attitude and then know full well that she did the same thing with me. She's just a wonderful, unique beautiful person.

Henderson: What influence has your father had on your life?

Vandiver: Oh, a great influence. He was an exceptional person throughout his life. He exuded a lot of the leadership qualities that you would expect of someone that was in public office and rose to public office. I think a lot of that may have had a reverse effect on me, to the extent that he was always in the limelight and that limelight kind of, you know, would shine on us as his children also.

I was never one that really particularly liked the limelight. I think, as I recall, class elections and things like that, I kind of went out of my way not to run for something or went out of my way not to do things, just because I felt like I was already being put in a special category when I was getting hauled around places and things of that nature. I would make an effort to kind of fit in, not to do those things that would make me stand out further, 'cause I felt like I was already standing out enough. What was your question now, I forgot?

Henderson: [Laughter] The influence that your father had on your life.

Vandiver: He has taught me just some real basic tenets to live by: Honesty is the best policy; never tell a lie, that we should strive diligently every day to do our job. These are things that I guess I don't recall him, you know, sitting down and giving me lecture after lecture after lecture, but I think it was mainly just small things. When I had mentioned earlier he was a demanding person, [I meant] he had a very clear idea of how he wanted us to be as people. I think that idea had to do with more of a honest hard-working productive servicing. He would tell us, "I don't care whether you're a garbage man." I think he told me this a hundred times, "Son, I don't care if you're a garbage man. You can load garbage cans on the back of a truck, but if that's what you choose to do, I want you to be the best damn garbage man there is." [Laughter].

I think, just like with anyone as you go through life and as you reach different crossroads and make decisions about your life, you go back and it's like you have a library of these sayings and these values that you've been taught and you pull them out and examine them at that time and make decisions based on them. I think it's kind of--he's given me a very large library of things such as that to pull from and to use when it comes time to make a decision in my life. So, I mean, he's had a great effect.

Henderson: What influence has your mother had on your life?

Vandiver: I think I kind of answered that question before, but I think she's responsible for most of our sensitivity, those sensitivities that we have to other people, the understanding that we've got. I think all three of us, my sisters and I, all are real good empaths, and that's because our mother constantly explained to us someone else's side of the story and why what we did, or what we said, or the actions that we took, how that might effect them, you know, positively or negatively. Through that and through this sort of Socratic method that she has of teaching this, she's made us all real empathic with the people that we deal with on a day-to-day basis. For me, that ability to do that is crucial in what I do 'cause I can sit down with somebody and talk with them for twenty or thirty minutes and I feel like I know them a whole lot better than they think I do.

That's just mainly from her and like I say, the methods that she used to teach us these little lessons of life. Humor, she's got a good sense of humor, and she's engendered a good sense of humor in all of us I think. You can see it. My father, he's got a good sense of humor too, but he was always telling stories with the guys. We could hear that and it was funny and it was a good sense of humor, but Mama would--you know, we have our own jokes, our own

rituals and things that we'd did. I think it has a lot to do with our--over all of our attitudes as far as--everybody enjoys life a lot and a lot of it has to do with her joy, the joy that she takes in everyday.

It sounds just as corny as it can be, but everyday is "Isn't it a beautiful day?" and "Did you see the flowers?" and "Isn't the air nice and warm?" or "Cool and crisp? " or "Isn't it nice, the cold weather?" or "Great the heat?" or whatever it is. There's something found good in everyday. If I can sometimes peel away the layers of all of these troubles and concerns and problems that I think I have, I can get back to her philosophy and it makes me take more joy out of life.

I mean, she has a little girl philosophy about life. You know, she probably still thinks that we live underneath a big blue bowl. She used to tell me this, you know, that that's what the sky was. It was a big blue bowl and heaven was on top of the bowl. I swear, she still thinks that. [Laughter] Men have gone to the moon and she saw it on TV and she still believes in that blue bowl.

Henderson: How would you describe your father's personality? Easygoing, reserved? How would you describe it?

Vandiver: It depends on the situation. I mean, he has a--and politicians are like this. This is not a bad thing. I look at some of the old film of him when he's running--I think I mentioned to you earlier, Michelle [Fleming Vandiver] went over to Athens and pulled up everything that WSB had during his tenure in the governor's office, and so we've got like seven or eight hours worth of tapes of old TV clips, and it's the inauguration and it's clips and news conferences and things of that nature that he had. And in those things, he looked severe. I mean, reserved is not

the word for it. It is intense and I think that's what the people of Georgia wanted at that time. It was not an angry young man, but it was a tough personality. We're here; we mean business. When he said he was going to cut out the corruption and organize and streamline government, he meant it and he evinced this demeanor that, you know, [said] I'm here doing the people's business and I'm not going to put up with any malarkey and it was in all of his press conferences. He gave a mad speech, not kinder and gentler speeches.

We were carried around all over the state and sat there on these podiums behind him. I can close my eyes and see those things and I can remember at a time, especially when he was running for lieutenant governor, that it scared me, you know, because he was using the same tone with his speech that he used with me when I had done something wrong.

It went through a pattern of course. You're a student of all of this. It was a long flowery introduction with our next lieutenant governor or governor or so forth and so on, people screaming and hollering, a brief period of time where there's a thank you to the people of Coffee County for having me here and thank you so much to a certain individuals and so forth and so on, then the crowd would get impatient with all of this stuff 'cause they weren't there to hear this. What they wanted to hear was a Eugene Talmadge stump speech. He must have listened to hundreds of those as an eighteen-year old. He was out campaigning for Gene Talmadge, and these are the people that he looked to as oratorical mentors to a certain degree. I mean, he didn't affect some of the colloquial sayings and things of that nature. I don't think he was comfortable doing that, but he was very comfortable with the fiery political speech.

I think he always felt like that's the best speech he gave, you know, when he got mad and then it was the "roll-up your sleeves Ernie" and he could roll up his sleeves, "undo your tie,"

and he'd let the tie off and get that coat off, and get a good sweat going, and a good roll going, and get the hands going, and what all is happening there, and it's almost evangelical in its nature. That's one part of his personality and sometimes he'd get stuck in that. I think he really has, like I say, he really has no capacity for guile, so when he acted like that with those speeches, and with the constituents, and the hope-to-be constituents, he felt like it was only honest that he take the demeanor and everything else and take it right into office and to do business just like he said it, just like he said he was going to do it. I'm sure there were compromises along the way and things of that nature, but by and large, I think he did his very best to run the state the way he told those people on the stump that he was going to do it. I think he kept those tenets in his head every day.

That's the business side, and the political side, and this is my mission side, but, I mean, you take the husband, father, brother, family side and there's a whole other part of his personality that I guess good friends and family are the only ones that have seen really. And that's a very happy fun loving--he's a good friend. He's a good friend to the friends that he has. It was kind of like he didn't want us to know what a good friend he was to some of these people or that he had in his head, I think, an image of what a father should be and he gave us the father part of it.

But you could see him with his friends, you know, when they play golf, come back, cooking steaks on the grill, couple of cocktails, and he was a fun person to be with, and I used to see all of this all of the time. I'd mentioned to you earlier that I would be a fly on the wall type person, and I would see all of this and I would see him enjoying other people and them enjoying him. Then it was kind of hard for him to turn around and put on the father [laughter]

when I had sat there through all of this, but I think gradually--he was great to me. During the time that we were in Atlanta and he was really involved in politics, I got to go on quail hunts down at some of the big plantations down in south Georgia. I played golf all the time at the different country clubs around Atlanta, you know, as a ten-, eleven-, twelve-year old. I'm sure I was a pain in the neck to have, but he took me; he took me all the time. He allowed me to meet and be with these people that he was sharing his political life with and who were his friends. That was wonderful for me. I mean, I think it gave me a wide-ranging experience of people and, by and large, these were all the most successful people in public life at that time. I got to be with them and share good and bad golf shots and good and bad jokes that they told, and their attempts to be humorous and their attempts to be real people. Then like I say, I also got to see them turn around and be somebody that appeared to be different [laughter] when they had the cameras and the microphones on.

Henderson: Let me ask you the same question relative to your mother. What was her personality like? You alluded to this previously, but let me go back to this question.

Vandiver: Well, I think she's a wonderful politician. Now let's see, I mean, I've already mentioned the fact that's she's a loving, caring person and sensitive, and has a good sense of humor and a child-like attitude. All of which is very endearing to me, but she is a consummate politician. And by that I mean it in the best sense of the word. She can remember everybody's name, she can remember everybody's wife's name, everybody's children's name, where they went to school, when they got married, where they were living at any particular time. We used to stand in long reception lines. The kids were there just because we were supposed to be there, kind of like ornaments, and, you know, "He has a nice family too." And we would go. It'd be

my father and my mother and then we would go in age. So I would be next to my mother and then Beth [Vanna Elizabeth Vandiver] would be next to me and Jane [Brevard Vandiver Kidd] would be on the end. Mama was a wonderful ventriloquist. Somebody would be coming down the reception line to you and she'd say, [whispered] "Henry Thompson, Vidalia, Georgia, wife's name is Peggy." [Then Dad] said, "Hey, Henry, how you doing?" and [it would] allow my dad to shake his hand real big and then [he] said, "How is Peggy?" And if she had time, she could give him children's names.

You know, he had a lot of other stuff on his mind and he's not one of those people, although he's got a wonderful memory, he can remember who was four doors down from him in high school or who his bunk mate was when he was in the Air Force many, many years ago. As a politician you meet that many people and you're expected to know them, and if you don't know them it's going to hurt you. You know, they are going to think, well, by golly, he didn't even remember my name, and if you remember their name they just beam like sunshine.

She could remember everybody and she made it a point to remember everybody, and she helped him on a daily basis and she could do it and they never even knew it. They had no idea that she'd even said something; it's just like he was one of those amazing politicians that never forgot someone that he met, never forgot a face, so forth and so on. Well, my mama never forgot, and she would take care of all of the correspondence and the nice things, the nice things that Southern ladies do when they send out those thank-you notes and thank you so much for the coffee and so much for this, and, I'm sure, she never missed a lick. She still doesn't miss a lick.

She allowed him to--I think, her feelings about what her job was. . . . I mean, she was a full-fledged partner in this political process, full-fledged partner in this getting elected part. It was to help him remember, help him categorize things, help . . . . I mean, my mama and daddy rode around this state in five different automobiles from. . . . I mean, 159 counties is a lot of county [*sic*] and they kept their own list of, you know, who the newspaper editor was, and who his wife was, and what their children were and who was the county commissioner, and who worked on the board. They had the big compilation of records that they basically did when he was running for lieutenant governor 'cause my daddy he could have . . . .

For instance back in 1966, when he was going to run for governor again and had his heart attack, he really, he could have won that race and done very little campaigning 'cause he was still fresh in the minds of the voter. Although he had gone through a rough time with the integration of the University and with the way people's attitudes were at that time, at this point in time, four years later, people were just really beginning to realize what a good decision that was 'cause they were seeing the turmoil and the unrest in other places that we had basically kind of side-stepped and avoided. He had a good reputation with the press, I mean, it was honest; it was cost-cutting; the purchasing department was under control, there was not any hint of graft anywhere; the state had gotten on a good sound fiscal footing; and he had gotten through a very tough difficult time virtually unscathed except for the growing pangs of a Southern state trying to move into this part of our history. I think he could have sat right here in Lavonia and made a strategic speech two or three times a week at different places and won that election going away. He wouldn't do it because that wasn't fair; that wasn't the way it was supposed to be done. He had it in his head that if you are going to run for office then you've got to go to all 159 counties.

You've got to walk the street of every town and every one of those counties. You've got to talk to the folks in every county and I mean, he lost that senate race in '72 because of that philosophy of campaigning.

I mean, here he is with two or three days left in that senate campaign and he's somewhere down in southwest Georgia trying to make that last county because he promised that he was going to campaign in all 159 counties in the state. All of these other candidates, [David Henry] Gambrell and [Samuel Augustus] Nunn [Jr.], were on planes hopping from Savannah to Macon to Augusta to Columbus to Atlanta to Rome and basically doing what they needed to do from a media standpoint to get the word out, and he's down there walking the streets in that Vandiver bandwagon going from county to county because he said when he started, he said, "I'm going to campaign in all 159 counties," and he did. He campaigned in all 159.

But it was the old kind of politicking. It was county unit politics in a time when the county unit system wasn't there, but he felt like it . . . . When he had his running for governor, and he was talking about, you know, the four main planks of his platform, one of which was the county unit system, I think he believed in the county unit system. It wasn't a matter of a machine, a Talmadge machine, or some machine being able to control who got elected, as much as it was he had lived in a rural county, a small county, and he really believed that that county should have just as much say so as some other county. He believed it so much I think it cost him that election in '72 'cause he was down there campaigning in counties that had seven thousand people in them when he needed to be some place else. But it's just kind of--he's stubborn [unintelligible] I've got lots of stubborn qualities too. I think a lot of them are probably our Dutch heritage and I mean, you can tell him something and tell me something, and

if I don't think that's right [laughter], then it just doesn't change. I'll keep my opinions and you can have yours.

Henderson: In his political campaigns did you play a role in any way?

Vandiver: Like I said, in his earlier one we, Jane and Beth and I, we kind of played an ornamental role. You know, here is our lovely wife, Betty, and three lovely children, Chip, Beth, and Jane. We'd stand up and people would clap and we'd sit down and that would be it. And we all would get in the car and go to the next place. But in the senate campaign, I think I tried to play a role. I was probably more of a pain in the neck that I was a help. I mean, I think my ideas were good. My ideas then, back in 1972 are the same they are now.

I thought that what he was doing as far as this bandwagon, although a nice thought, was, to a large degree, a waste of time. [It was] not totally a waste of time, but as the days dwindled down, as they say in the song, to me that was the last three or four weeks when that election changed. I didn't agree with what was going on. I don't know whether--have you talked to Homer [T.] Flynn?

Henderson: No.

Vandiver: Well, that would be an interesting person for you to talk to. The old field marshal, one of Daddy's National Guard compatriots, and the person who managed his senate campaign. The old field marshal would stay up in Atlanta and call around. He enjoyed being in the office and whatnot. But I didn't think that there was much of a statewide let's-get-elected view to what was going on. I wanted to do some things differently than the way they were getting done, but then I was just a kid and I was in my second year of law school and not really--I don't know that anybody took me very seriously.

I felt like I had a pretty good idea about what needed to be done, but, I mean, I helped. We ran the Youth for Vandiver and that part of the campaign. George Woelper and Keith [Allen] and myself and several other people our age; Doug Kidd, my sister's husband's brother; we all lived in Atlanta and basically worked on the campaign all that summer, but I don't know how much of an impact we made. We tried real hard. I mean, we basically handled the put up the signs and the bumper stickers and all of that, that part of it.

Henderson: How would you have changed the strategy if you had had the power to do so?

Vandiver: I would've run a more modern campaign. I think it was fine for Daddy to get in that van and ride through the small counties in Georgia. I think it was great to get people to have taken films of the bus going by and him getting on and off the bus and talking to different and various folks, but it needed to be more of a media-based campaign and it needed a concentration in population centers because that's where the people were that were going to vote. By and large, in 1972 we had had so many people move into the state in those ten years that there were many, many people that weren't sure who he was. They needed to have a good education about who he was, and what he stood for, and what he did, and the accomplishments of his administration, which were many, especially if you compare them to administrations that preceded him.

The one that preceded him just before he went into office, it was like a breath of spring in the State House. I mean, the rascals were kicked out and new people were put in place to make sure that that didn't happen again. From a fiscal standpoint, all that he was able to do. . . .

As I used to give a speech during his senate campaign, I would go to the places where he couldn't go, to the second string places, and I had my own stump speech, and as we said at the

time, and it was a praise that I remember on his state of the state address. I guess it was maybe the third year that we were in office and I always felt like we were all in office. He would say, you know, we did this, we did this, we did this, we did this, we built these buildings, we've done this school and so forth, without one thin dime of new or additional taxes, which was quite an accomplishment. You know, when you got a situation where [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] left the state's finances in a horrible state of repair. There was no reserve. To go from there and to basically do what politicians today talk about doing--we're going to go in and we're going to tighten our belt, we're going to cut these programs, we're going to streamline all these committees and whatnot, and we're going to put the purchasing on the firm foot, we're not going to give banks an opportunity to hold large amounts of state money and pay no interest, we're going to get the revenues we're entitled to and we're going to cut out the waste--and he did that.

He put the state in a firm--and a lot of what he did was unpopular, and, I mean, there were raises that teachers didn't get because we couldn't afford it. I mean, he is tight, tight, tight from a financial standpoint, and he carried that frugality into office. People needed to know that. In 1972 I think a lot of people that were from the twenty-five to thirty-five age thought of him as just one of those old-time governors. You know, they put him back pre-Lester [Garfield] Maddox. Lord, if we've got Lester Maddox and somebody was governor before Lester Maddox, then he must've really been a yo-yo. I'm not sure that they understood the difference between Marvin Griffin's era and when my dad came into office. They lived in those population centers. They'd moved there because [it was] where they had to go to work.

He would go to all of these different areas, but he, you know, treated Columbus just like Ty Ty. He spent as much time down there as he spent somewhere else. I remember in Atlanta especially-- he spent almost no time in Atlanta. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* came out as they do, they pick candidates and recommend and endorse and Reg Murphey endorsed, you know, said a couple of nice things about my dad but then endorsed Sam Nunn. I remember I was sitting in the office when we got the paper 'cause we didn't know what they were going to do, and we got the paper, and I remember him picking up the phone, you know, got out the phone book and figured out what Reg Murphey's number was and called him up and was talking to him. He said, "Reg, I think you may have just cost me this election." And Reg Murphey said, "Well," he said, "Ernie, he doesn't have a chance to win." He said, "We think he's going to be a good governor." He said, "We'd like to run him for governor, and we thought maybe we could go ahead and give him a little boost now, a little name recognition, endorse him." [He] said, "You're going to win." He said, "You're going to be in the runoff with Gambrell. You're going to beat the tar out of him, but we wanted to help the boy out." And I could remember him saying, you know, "Well, that's fine of you to help him out, but you may as just [laughter], you know, helped me right out of the Senate race."

Anyway, I've forgotten what the question was you asked, but I think what he needed to do was to run a more modern campaign and I think he didn't do that. It wasn't by virtue of the fact that we didn't have the money 'cause he'd been able to raise--the money he'd raised was, by and large, from old friends. I think he had enough to run the kind of media campaign he needed. I think if that campaign had been run strategically correct, he would've won. Now, whether that would've been a good thing or not, I don't know. It would've allowed him to reach

his lifelong goal, which I think was to be a United States senator. I mean, at one time, his goal may have been to be president of the United States but for a Southerner that wasn't possible. But he could have gone to the Senate, he would've been a good senator.

I don't know that he would be alive today to see his grandchildren as they are because nobody works harder when they've got a definitive job than he does. He is up early, fueling up on coffee for about an hour and then just running headlong into the day. Picture a cartoon character running through an office, papers flying. He is a tireless worker and straightforward and get the job done. By losing that election in '72, it allowed him to--very painful. It's the first time I remember him crying.

I remember the night of the election, and this kind of goes back to what I was just saying. There in the campaign headquarters and you probably heard this from my sisters and my mother, but we went out to eat that night and came back, and it was like the polls had been closed for thirty-five or forty minutes. We got back to the campaign headquarters and there were a bunch of reporters there, and I'm sure my dad was expecting them to say, you know, "How you feeling?" and "What do you think?" and so forth and so on. They came and they said, "Exit polls have shown that you've lost the election and that Sam Nunn is going to be in the runoff."

He was not one with exit polls, and it was kind of a new technology at the time anyway, and, to him, people all over the state were just getting home from supper after having stopped by and voted after work. He was getting back to his headquarters for a long night of listening to the results come in because that's the way it was in '62 and '58. I mean, you had minions from all over the state calling back to headquarters to let you know what such and such a box was,

which has always been indicative of what Echols County is going to do and so forth and so on. He came back and he said, "Well, I'm sure [unintelligible]. It's early yet," and so forth and so on.

We went upstairs, and sure enough, you know, it came. Gambrell had his incumbent's percentage and Sam Nunn was there about one, varying from one percentage point to one-tenth of a percentage point ahead of him. It just seesawed back and forth. You know, we didn't get in the lead, and, of course, the big cities reported first and he thought, and rightfully so, having spent the time and labored in the vineyard, he thought that these small counties, these places that he had gone to that no one else had been to, that, yes, they would come in at the end, and that they would be what would pull us out of it and put us into the second place position. Everybody knew that we weren't going to win, but it was just to get into the runoff with Gambrell.

I can remember eleven-thirty, twelve o'clock that night, the reporters had left. They'd already declared Gambrell the winner and Nunn second place in the runoff with him, and Daddy would not give up. He would not admit that we weren't going to win, and I remember-- and I would not expect this to get into your book, but I would like to put it in the history--I remember sitting in a back office in that campaign headquarters and Daddy was calling these friends. I think there was someone in Appling County or something [like] that, he'd call them up and say, "How about such and such a box?" and he gave him the report and Daddy. . . . [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: He would write all of those down. He would thank him profusely for all of his good help and work and, you know, just tell him to hang in there, partner. [He] said, "You know, we are going to pull this out," and then he'd call somebody else in some small faraway county: "How about this box?" and "How about that box?" He was keeping a running total. I was looking down at it, you know, and we were dealing with hundreds of thousands of votes, and, you know, he was writing down Vandiver, 26; Gambrell, 21. It was kind of like, "Come on, guys, I spent the time down there; this is supposed to do it for me here. Everybody else ignored these places, wouldn't go to them. I went."

You know, politicians, as they run more, they know that there are a lot of votes that meet you on the street and shake your hand and tell you, "I'm all for you" and either don't go vote or go vote against you. It's just like that old "everybody that ate my barbecue voted for him." I don't know. Of course, it was a helpless, hopeless gesture on his part to try to add up all of these small numbers to do the trick. You know, "had they sent those numbers to Atlanta yet?" "No," and you know, "They're not reflected in the totals that we've got here. Is that right?" "Will that make a difference?"

But I could remember sitting over to the side, and I think by that time I had decided that probably all of the experts were correct and all the people that had said that this is the way that it was were correct. It's the first time I had ever seen my dad in what I thought was doing something that was futile. It was just--he was so desperate, so much wanted to win, and I felt so sad for him and I felt so helpless in not being able to do anything, and then it was the next day, ten-thirty or eleven o'clock in the morning after 99.99% of all precincts had reported that he finally gave up. I think he stayed up most of the night, making those calls, and I can remember

him and my mom and myself and family, and him crying. It was like he had let us down. He had let his daddy down, his long dead father, you know, twenty years dead. He had let him down. All these people who had worked so hard, he had let them down. He had a lot to give and he knew that he had a lot to give.

His capacity for work was phenomenal; his understanding of government and just the art of governance was such . . . . This is what he had been trained to do, that's what he'd been doing since seventeen, eighteen years old. It was the only thing he cared a whit about doing. He didn't care about being a lawyer. You know, that was boring. I mean, you're dealing with one case, one person's experience, and it's important but I mean, does it matter in the overall? Are we talking about changing the course of the state or a nation? Give me a decision that is going to have some long-term ramifications, you know; let's wrestle with that decision. I think from 1972 on, by and large, he has, for the last twenty years, he has not found something that has really engaged him to the degree that he wanted to be engaged. And I don't mean that in a negative way. He's had a successful banking career and he's been a successful businessman and has done several projects since then, but it didn't engage his complete attention. It was sort of like that part of me that is at my best has no place to go now.

I've never really talked to him about it. I mentioned to him the other day, that I wished that he had found something that he was really interested in after that time. I mean, he did a lot of things well, but I don't think he gave anything everything that he had. As you got older, as you got into your 60s, it was easier to say, "Well, I'm retired now." He's been retired pretty much for the last ten or fifteen years. That's a shame 'cause that's like putting away a

thoroughbred racing horse, you know, when he's got another season left in him. It's just a lot of wasted potential and it's a lot of unrealized improvements in our situation.

I know that Sam Nunn has been an excellent senator and has done exactly what he needed to do, and he's got himself on the--chairman of the Armed Services Committee, which is where he intended to go, where he and my dad both talked about, you know, where they needed to go, to try to preserve the things that Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] had put in place for Georgia. I mean, you get [Senator John Cornelius] Stennis and Russell and all of those guys. Every military base for twenty years, with Georgia or Mississippi or--our economy needed it. It's hard for me to--I don't know what would've happened; I do know that he would've been there for Watergate during that period of time. I think that would have broken his heart. It broke his heart sitting here in Lavonia, Georgia. To actually be there and be called upon to make votes and during that period of time, I don't know how he could've done it. He did not believe that it was possible that the President would lie to the people. He, to the very end of that whole debacle, supported [Richard Milhous] Nixon and based on the fact that he would not, you know--He was on TV in a speech to millions of people, to all the American people and he said it; he was clear about it. And to believe otherwise is to believe that the President just lied. I mean, you can't even say shaded the truth, just lied.

I don't know how he would've--I'm sure he would've gotten through it and I tell you what when it became obvious that he had lied, he would've turned on him like a tiger. He would not have been an easy man to deal with in the face of that. You know, I don't know as to whether everything turned out best in the long run, I guess it did. You know, I mean, he's still here and he's enjoying my life everyday and I am really enjoying this time that we have as adult

males together here where we can have more of a one-on-one relationship as opposed to a father-son relationship. I don't think I would have this time if he'd won that election back in '72. I'd think he'd worked himself into an early grave and probably had a heart attack. You know, now he gets to see [Samuel Ernest] Russell [Vandiver] and [Regina] Leigh [Vandiver] and hopefully they will get to know him 'cause he has got a wonderful capacity for love and acceptance.

I think he's enjoying his life some now. I think ten, twelve, fifteen years ago, he was frustrated by the talents that he was wasting. Now I think he's more comfortable with the way things are; he's kind of accepted the fact. We used to kid him--we still do kid him. During the Persian Gulf War, he spent twelve, fifteen hours a day watching CNN [Cable News Network] and we kidded him. I asked him and I said, "You expecting Bush to call you up and ask for counsel?" and, you know, it was almost like, "Well no, I don't think he will, but if he does, by golly, I'll be ready." As far as being well informed, he's as well informed as anyone I know. He has a particularly conservative bent on some things and he has the capacity to be fairly liberal in some areas. It just depends on the kind of little nooks and crannies of social and fiscal issues. By and large, he's pretty much a staunch conservative, but he has enough of an opinion and his opinions are still founded in fact. It's not the ravings of an old man or anything of that nature. He reads five, six periodicals and puts in his two, three hours of CNN. I mean, he knows the players; he knows what's going on; he's got opinions, and if called upon by that great coach in the sky, he could go in and quarterback the team. I think he prides himself on that.

You know, like I say, we've enjoyed many, since I got back from Alaska, lots of happy times. I enjoy a lot coming over here in the evenings. I'll stop by two or three times a week

anyway after work before I get home, and we have a twenty, thirty-minute discussion, and sit around and talk with the folks and head on home. That's something that I didn't have for a long time when I was in Alaska, you know, just talk to him once a week on Sunday or something. But I appreciate these last seven years a lot and I'm glad he's here for me. I hope he's here for many, many more. He'll probably outlive me.

Henderson: Let me go back to the 1972 campaign. Why do you think he was not willing to accommodate and have a more modern type strategy? Was it the fact that he was too based in the old county unit system and he could just not shift, even at this late stage?

Vandiver: I think so. I think it's just like a mule plowing a field. He plowed that same field, time and time again, and the crops came up, and you're going to keep doing it the same way until the crops don't come up. That and I think the people he surrounded himself with were old time people. It's not like he was an ostrich with his head in the sand. He made those decisions. I think today he would say those decisions were wrong, that he should've done something different, but at the time, he thought they were right. I think if he could've utilized a younger approach and a more modern approach, he would've won. I mean, he lost by less than a percentage point as it was. If he could've just brought over some of those new people that had come into the state, I think he would've been okay, but, you know, like I say, maybe it all turned out for the best.

Henderson: Let's deal with the question of rearing the family. Who was disciplinarian in your father's family?

Vandiver: It was sort of like--you mean the disciplinarian for us?

Henderson: Yes, for the children.

Vandiver: Mama took care of the small stuff and turned the large things over to the Provost Marshal who came in. She was not one who said, "I'm going to tell your daddy." She wouldn't tell him the small stuff for several reasons: number one, she probably didn't want him to know; number two, he was too busy to deal with it and she didn't want to upset him. It was only the large things. She would take care of the day-to-day discipline, the brush your teeth, the pick up your clothes, the stuff like that and kind of turn over to him the large transgressions. Of course, he got those by default if he happened to see them, but they were real good as parents because they would back each other up. That's something I keep talking to Michelle about. You know, maybe it's not important, but, to me, one of the most important things about parenting is that when your mother tells you to do something, right, wrong, or indifferent, the father is going to back her up 100 percent and vice versa. There's no wheedling something out of Dad that you can't get from Mom or wheedling something out of Mom that you can't get from Dad and they never did that.

I think my mama is a much more gentle, forgiving person than my dad is sometimes. I think it was very hard for her at some stages to back up some of his edicts, but she never faltered. I'm sure she did a lot of lobbying on the side, you know, and trying to go--but so long as it was an edict it was followed. They jointly shared the disciplinarian role, but if punishment was to be meted out, he would generally mete it out. We got in some mischief, both in the mansion and before and after that, but, by and large, we were lucky we made it through without getting scraped up too bad.

Henderson: How would you describe the marriage of your parents?

Vandiver: They complement each other very well; it's like a puzzle. You know, they kind of go together, and what's lacking here is made up for there, and they've accommodated this, I mean, to make what is a wonderful marriage. My mom--they're probably some women that wouldn't put up with him [laughter]. I mean, as far as--he's an old-fashioned guy, you know, he's the women-in-the-kitchen kind of guy, and it took a very loving, savvy, confident woman to basically accommodate his feelings about that. We always talked--you know, men talk about how the smart women really run the show and just make the man think that he's running the show. Well, she's very adept at that. I mean, he has the final decision but, I mean, she's planted enough hints and set her line of thinking out to the point where they have pretty much of an equal decision making capacity here. They lobby each other in very subtle ways.

They don't argue; my dad hates it and I'm the same way. My dad hates to argue; he can't stand to argue with my mother. So he just won't; if it gets to the point where there is going to be an argument, he just won't talk about it anymore [laughter], and I'm afraid I'm a little bit that way too. Together, I think they genuinely have a good time. They spend all their time together. They're either together here or they're down at the beach. My mama's job is to look after my daddy and my daddy's job is to look after my mama. She looks after him from a clothing, food, shelter standpoint, and, you know, I think here, as she's gotten older, she's gotten more independent, she's gotten more insistent on her way, and she'll take stands now that she probably wouldn't have twenty years ago, just because I think she's growing as a person today.

You know, I mentioned earlier she's very child-like in a lot of ways, and this to me is one of her most endearing qualities, but she's developed a--she's not a feminist. She would take that label as being an insult almost 'cause, I mean, she's doesn't want to be labeled in that way.

She--to be labeled strong, and to have strong opinions, and to equally share the burdens in a marriage, and to handle yourself and the house and things of that nature, she knows that she can do all of that. She's proud that she can do all of that, and as far as equal rights and equal pay and non-discrimination, they couldn't find a finer advocate, but do not call her a "feminist" [laughter]. Although she may espouse all of these feminist doctrines and qualities, she doesn't want to be a feminist. She wants to be Betty Russell Vandiver, and she wants to be a lady and all of those things her grandmama and her mama and all of those Russell women who were all comfortable being strong without taking on labels and things of that nature. She's got enough of a heritage in that and in all of those Russell women where she just doesn't want to be labeled anything that sounds politically incorrect.

But, I mean, their marriage is strong, and it's hard for me to picture him with anyone else or her with anyone else and I guess that's the same with all children, but I think they're fortunate to have found each other. And both of them, you know, had lots of girlfriends and boyfriends and lots of options and opportunities, but I think they truly were . . . . I don't know whether my dad was smart enough at the time to go in and pick out the very perfect wife for what he intended to do with his life, but he did that. She is that.

I think, from my mom's standpoint, I mean, she looks at service to others as an ideal above all others, her dad, her uncle, all of her, you know, she's got preachers, teachers, lawyers, politicians, and judges basically--you know, to her making a lot of money or anything of that nature just has no importance whatsoever; it's what did you do that was good for somebody. She was perfectly willing to get in the traces beside him and to pull to get him elected because he was going to do something for somebody, and he was going to make her proud.

The poor thing, I remember her trying to take care of me and my two sisters while simultaneously trying to take care of him, take care of sore feet, take care of, you know, motel food, when we were running and going from place to place to place and I truthfully don't know how she did it. I mean, we were nine, seven, and five and when [he ran for] lieutenant governor, you know, we could've been five, three, and one. It was still our same crew, probably if we were one, we'd got dropped off at my grandmama's house, the one year old did, but the rest of them would get dressed up in little--I had two or three sports coats. I can remember a little white sports coat, a little striped tie and whatnot, and a blazer and my little shined up shoes I'd put on. I could remember sitting on chairs on podiums when my legs were not long enough for my feet to hit the floor.

Anyway, your question about their marriage is they were very fortunate to find each other 'cause I really think they were perfect, the perfect fit, the perfect match for each other.

Henderson: Let me ask you to describe how the governor's mansion was--how was it growing up in the governor's mansion?

Vandiver: For me, I liked it, I thought it was a great old house. I liked the troopers; those troopers were my buds. I mean, I'd go hang out down there at their little trooper station and they'd have their magazines laying around, you know, *Stag*, [laughter], *True Detective*, and stuff like that, stories about policeman busting in and saving people at the last minute, and then the next thing would be some girlie picture, you know, in there. I'd sit down there with them. I spent most of the day--I had a go-cart there.

I would get Daddy to move the car so I could drive the go-cart underneath the portecochere and come around and then I'd head down the hill, do this long skid, almost slam into

the rocks, and then come back up, and the troopers were the ones that helped me keep that thing going. They knew something about small engines and clutches and stuff like that and they were my buddies. They were there all of the time. It was kind of like a permanent person down there, and I would go down and play with them.

You know, people say that [the mansion] was a cold, old, mold-ridden--looked like a prison--but I thought it was a neat house. It had interesting rooms; it had little back stairways, places to hide; it had a big balcony out front. And Ansley Park is a neat place, you know, it's an older part of Atlanta. It's not West Paces Ferry; it's a different spot. It's from a time gone by. I had some good friends in that neighborhood. We played football out on the square, you know. I played all of the [unintelligible] stuff. I had some good buddies during that time.

I mean, I was probably not real kind to my sisters, and I'm sure they told you many tales of my torturing them and all of this kind of stuff, and to a large extent that's true. I mean, I'm not here to deny any of it. I'm not sure why, but I don't think I--I wasn't malicious with them. I loved them both and we kind of, you know, we were kind of all thrown in this same thing together. We were good little campaigners and. . . .

We had a great time. We got to go out and see my sister's house here. We had a great time. We played Zorro. I was Zorro. I would give my sisters daily tests to determine which one was going to be my sidekick, the guy that can't talk, you know, I can't remember his name and which one was going to Sergeant Garcia. We had a good time at the mansion. David Walker was there, sweet David Walker; I hope somebody said something about him.

David was--we had prisoners come out and help at the mansion. David had killed his wife with a butcher knife when he found her with another woman--I mean another man. The

reason that he got sent up for murder was that he had had to walk for a mile and a half back to the guy's house that he was working for at the time to get the knife and then walk another mile and a half back to kill his wife. So, of course, it was premeditated. If he'd just grabbed the knife and run in and killed them all, he probably had been all right, but David was just a wonderful person.

He taught me how to play golf, how to swing a golf club, taught me many, many good lessons in life and eventually moved over here to Lavonia with us, became president of the PTA [Parent Teachers Association]--didn't have any children, he was the president of the PTA over here and was head of all the civic organizations and everything else and he was a wonderful person.

Fanny Smith was there at the time. You know, Fanny, she didn't take any nonsense off of any of us. Fanny had been with us since we were on Dellwood Road, and that's when Daddy was an adjutant general before he was lieutenant governor. Then while we were over on The Prado she was there. Fanny kind of ran things. It was kind of like a corporal, captain, colonel type of situation as far as the discipline's concerned. The corporal was down there making sure the captain doesn't find out anything bad going to happen; the captain's trying to make sure the colonel doesn't find out; and Fanny was on that front line down there, you know.

Henderson: Was the fact that your father was governor prevent the Vandivers from having a normal family life?

Vandiver: It was normal for us. I mean, it's the same way as it always had been. You know, as far as--Mama made real sure--she took us to school, she picked me up from football practice and she would do those things that mothers did. There wasn't any going with the troopers or

getting picked up by troopers or whatever the case might be. There was grocery shopping and everything else. She ran the governor's mansion like it was just a large house with extra responsibilities. She had Fanny to help with us; she had David to help with the cooking, but that was it. I could remember nights when there were hundreds of people coming through there, and that staff didn't increase much more than Fanny and David and her. I mean, of course, it wasn't normal to have Christmas parties with hundreds of orphans and have Christmas parties for members of the press. . . .

Well, I've been here for an hour and a half. I need to quit anyway. I'm not doing a very good job, but we had a very normal--I think we had a normal childhood, family life. We got to eat supper together pretty often. We did fun things on the weekends. We went to ballgames; it was fun. I think Mama made it as normal as possible. I think Daddy tried too, but Daddy was busy trying to do his job, but we had a pretty normal family life.

Henderson: You mentioned earlier that a government official would come over and meet with your father at night, and you would slip in and you would listen in on the conversation. Who were some of those people that would come by?

Vandiver: Oh, it was everybody. It was everybody and anybody that had anything to do with the governor's office. All the people that, probably 90 percent of the people that you've interviewed would come by, and some that I never knew what their name was. I mean, it may be that way now. My only experience about what happens at the governor's mansion is what I experienced at the time. But at that time, people would stop by to talk with the governor. They'd sit there, and they'd have a drink, and they'd talk and they'd . . . .

It's wonderful to watch this little--it's almost like a dance, this pirouette that people do in situations like that. It's the "Hey, how you doing," the genial chitchat back and forth trying to see how things are and gradually working into the why we're really here. And how quickly you got to the why we're really here depended on the severity of the problem and I would just sit and watch that. I can remember lots of folks. A lot of them are not necessarily high-flown officials. To me, they were just the same guys that kept coming over every night and holding my supper up. We tried to eat together and that means if these guys were coming over, then we didn't eat 'til like--it's just kind of like today, we had to go ahead and eat before we started this. Some of them were just, "Get away kid. You bother me." All of them would invariably be nice to me. You know, nobody would not be nice, lest they fall in disfavor with the governor, but some of them generally were friends and some of them were: "Here take this piece of candy and go somewhere else." I quickly learned to separate the wheat from the chaff there, and I knew which ones were my buddies and which ones weren't.

Henderson: What did the Vandiver family do for rest and relaxation?

Vandiver: Like I say, my dad and I went and played golf and hunted. We went up to Lake Lanier to go to the lake. We had a boat up there. We'd go skiing. [We'd] go visit my grandparents on Sundays, go to Winder [and] visit with my grandmama and the Bob Russells, and that pretty much was the same, you know, throughout my whole life, that was kind of what we did. There was that period of time where we went to the lake fairly often, maybe a couple of weekends a month, stayed up there on the Chibeja, which is a boat named for Chip, Beth and Jane.

My parents came in when they got the boat, they said, "We've got a Chibeja." They didn't tell us it was a boat, they just said, "We just bought a Chibeja today." You know it was, "What is a Chibeja? What is a Chibeja?" And they said, "You don't know what"--I mean they went on for five or six hours, you know, and you got kids that are eleven, nine, and seven, insatiably curious anyway. We never could figure out what a Chibeja was.

Henderson: From your perspective of seeing your father in politics all these many years, what is it that you like most about politics and least about politics?

Vandiver: I think what I like most about politics is the opportunity to unselfishly serve other people and to truly improve by your actions the condition of your fellow man. What I like least about it is the hypocrisy involved with it, the people that are your friends when you have something that you can do for them and are not your friends when you're past that. I mean, you're lucky if a man's got ten or fifteen real friends in the course of a whole lifetime, but the problem with politics is that for someone who is not very, very careful you can all of a sudden think that you're the most popular guy around. Everybody loves me.

I used to watch Christmases at the mansion, they'd come in with trucks full of Christmas presents from all over the state. It'd take three guys fifteen minutes to carry them in to where we had our Christmas tree and I thought, this is great--I mean, the Christmas tree is seven feet up. It was coming out like this. Christmas morning it took four and a half, five hours to get through all of that stuff. I thought my dad has got so many friends; this is a wonderful situation. He's the most wonderful guy and then I remember after--it pretty much stayed that way through '66, when he was expected to run again. It didn't really slack off much over here in Lavonia, it was kind of the--I've something I'm trying to say but I can't--it was expected that he would be

governor again. In 1967 it was maybe half; in 1968 there was nothing. No trucks came; you know, it got reduced back down to that same fifteen good friends that you're lucky to have in your lifetime.

I think as a child, that affected me a lot. I couldn't figure it out. It didn't seem to make sense 'cause I felt like these people were--I thought they were his friends. It came to me and it was a shock to me that they weren't his friends, that they were doing this because they were expecting something in return or they thought that he could do something for them or this was like an investment in something that they wanted. I mean, I think that's what bothers me the most about politics is--I mean, you've got to want to do it yourself, and you've got to be smart enough to understand the difference between, you know, all of these people that are telling you how great you are, the ones that want things in return, [and] the ones that are true friends. It takes a very good judge of character to be able to go through the various gradations there. Anyway, those are the things that bothered me the most.

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