

Betty Vandiver interviewed by Bob Short

2008 October 3

Lavonia, Ga.

Reflections on Georgia Politics

ROGP-051

Original: video, 98 minutes

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Betty Vandiver**

Date of Transcription: June 23, 2009

BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia. This is a special program in our salute to Georgia's first ladies, and our guest today is Mrs. Betty Vandiver, wife of former Governor Ernest Vandiver. Welcome.

BETTY VANDIVER: Welcome to y'all. I'm glad to have you in Lavonia.

SHORT: You have had a very interesting and exciting political and personal life, and we are anxious to hear about it. So let's begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your early life and growing up in the Russell family.

VANDIVER: Goodness, you got more time than I have. Anyway, Bob, I appreciate y'all being here, and I think this is a great idea actually, to have the first ladies and the history that they bring to it, because we've had some real interesting ladies. We've had people that are -- have got -- we -- so diverse that you cannot believe it, really. But now, back to the Russells, that's -- of course, to me, it was a great experience. I look back on it and I think how fortunate I've been, because I grew up in a political family. It was -- and I always swore I would never marry a lawyer and I would never marry a politician, because it was a different kind of life and I just thought, well, I'm not going to do that. But anyway, that's another story. But I was born in -- actually born in Decatur at Emory University, and I -- we lived in Atlanta for several months before Daddy went back to Winder to practice law. And he was studying law, which is interesting, under his father. He was his clerk and a student, and back then if you did that and you took the bar exam and passed it, you were a lawyer. So Daddy passed the bar, and my brother, Bob, and I were the children at the time, and we moved to Winder, and we lived in the weaning cottage, which by itself is an interesting story. It was a house next to Grandmother and Granddaddy's -- Papa's. And anybody who didn't have a place to live, or anybody who wanted to get started in Winder could live in the weaning cottage. So we lived in the weaning cottage until, well, Richard was born, and I guess it was about 1932 or 3 -- we built our house on the

other side of Papa and Grandmamma. So therefore, I was fortunate in being able to run in and out and see my grandmother and grandfather. Also, my mother's mother and father lived in Winder, and so I could visit with them. So it was wonderful, I had four grandparents and -- because we were all -- you know how grandchildren are. They're special, well, so you just kind of had this great love, and Daddy was busy and Mamma was busy, but you always had your grandmamas. So that was a good feeling, and I had 36 first cousins. And every summer they all came to visit Grandmamma. And so I got to know my cousins up to a point, then I got too old to play with the babies, but the first 13 were pretty special. That's about where we stopped, and we laugh about it all the time, because lucky or unlucky, there were 13 of us until the babies started coming. And you have to understand, Mamma and -- Grandmamma and Papa had 13 children. So at the time that I was, like, 15, my younger aunts and uncles were at an age that I could almost -- I could almost duel with them, because I was 15 and they would be like 21. And so, I mean it was close enough so your aunts and uncles were more -- just like your friends. Anyway, we played all summer, and then I would always be hurt because I couldn't spend the night with Grandmamma, because I lived next door, but they were here for two weeks and so I -- but they spent the night. But anyway, growing up in Winder was just great. My school experiences. I still have dear, dear friends that I went through school with. I go back to reunions. Winder was a great place to grow up. It was one of those, if you do it, you're going to get caught, so you knew you didn't do -- everybody was watching out for everybody else, and my Mamma was looking after my friends, and their mamas were looking after me. So it was a great place to grow. And -- now let me see. That's really that.

Now, can you think -- well, I guess you want me to get into politics. At the time I was growing up, Uncle Dick became Governor, and then I got to go visit Grandmamma in the summers because she was living in the mansion.

SHORT: She was the first lady.

VANDIVER: She was the first lady, and -- alright, here I go with another side story. You'll have to get me back on track. But at the family reunion this year -- we always have an auction and people bring things that belong to them that they would give up for other people -- anyway, it's a good way to keep the cemetery going -- but anyway, they had Grandmother's cookbook, and it's Ms. Ina Dillard Russell, 205 The Prado, which was when she was in the mansion. And so I just -- we just had a -- well, we'd have a silent auction, so I just flat closed them all out so I could get the cookbook that Grandmother used when she was in the mansion. And I'm sure she was a lovely hostess. I don't remember much except playing at the mansion. She took one room and put in double decker cots so the grandchildren could come and they could be there all the time, and see, that was Grandmamma, so it's just a -- I have so many good memories of the mansion and playing around the round thing. And don't remember much about Uncle Dick, of course, but I remember they dedicated the Ina Dillard Russell Library at GSCW, which was GENI and is now Georgia College in Milledgeville.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I remember the ice was on the driveway, and I can remember looking out the back of the car and seeing men holding the car back so it wouldn't slide down the hill there at the mansion, and that's just one of those memories, you know, that sticks out with you. So, don't remember the dedication, but I remember those men holding the car back. And then, let's see, from Uncle Dick going -- oh, I remember the night he was elected, and I was just a little girl. I have a picture of me with my bangs and all that kind of stuff, with Papa in the middle of town. They put a platform under the one red light, and had a huge celebration when he was elected Senator. Now, see, I can remember that, but that's all I remember, is just a crowd of people and I'm hanging onto Papa in that picture, so I probably was a little bit scared. But anyway, after that, I just finished high school and I went to school -- my daddy believed in girls going to a girl school for two years, so I went to Sullins in Bristol, VA, and loved every minute of it. I loved that -- it was during the war, and I think now it's because it was just -- the girls were so close because everybody had somebody they -- in service.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Either daddy or brother or sweetheart or something. And it was just a closeness there that I had never had with that many people before. But it was a great experience, and I still keep up with five or six of them. We get together -- or try to -- we're getting thinner. Our group's are getting probably fatter, but thinner. We don't have as many people anymore, but we

get together, and so that's another segment that I really enjoyed. Sullins, it's there -- it's not there anymore. They made lots of different things out of the building, but the school is not there.

SHORT: Then you transferred to the University of Georgia.

VANDIVER: I transferred in 1945.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: I finished Georgia in '47.

SHORT: How did you meet S. Ernest Pinkney Vandiver?

VANDIVER: Oh, throw that Pinkney in there, he would shake. *Laughter* That was always something we -- S.E.P.V. is what it turned out, and I was S.E.R.V., see? So we always -- *Laughter* yes, that was one of my jokes too. But, well, actually I'm glad you asked me that, because when I was a senior in high school, Ernie came to Winder to practice law, waiting to be -- he had -- he was going in the service, but he had, like, four months before he was going to go, so he came to Winder to just kind of intern with Joe Quillian, who was a lawyer there in town. And I eyed him and he eyed me, but he said, "The judge would have shot me if I'd asked you for a date." That's his excuse for not asking. But anyway, he would come to the basketball games,

and I was a cheerleader, and so we -- and he would -- I don't know. We knew each other, but we didn't know each other, you know.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But that was our first encounter. And then he went off to the service, and I went off to Sullins, and then I came back and went to Georgia. And the -- oh, Bob, you will remember this. The summer we had the 16 people running for governor? Okay. Well, that was the first date I ever had with Ernie, and he was such a staunch Talmadge man.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Well, of course, you remember that in '36, Uncle Dick and Talmadge had run against each other, so therefore I had this little feeling about the Talmadges, and he had this little feeling about the Russells. So -- but that night, the 16 people running -- I had decided I was going to be for Hoke O'Kelly, because I could stay out of it that way, *Laughter* and he was the Bluebird man, remember him?

SHORT: Yes, yes.

VANDIVER: Well, okay, the Bluebird man, I decided, well, rather than get into this discussion

of 16 people -- and plus, they were all pretty good people, if you think about it. Can you imagine that many people now running for Governor?

SHORT: Uh-uh. Uh-uh.

VANDIVER: Anyway, I think it was 16, wasn't it? I think it was 16, because it was Hope Willis, and Hoke O'Kelly, and Fred Hand, and all those old people that --

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: -- People that -- really anyway, too many people. But I decided I was going to be for Hoke O'Kelly, because that was just simple. And so we fought that night. He tried to convince me that I should be for Talmadge, and I -- back then, I would not have ever been for Talmadge, because it was -- that was an ugly name in my family. So anyway, that was our first date, and then we didn't see each other again for -- I guess it was about a year and a half, I guess. Then he came back to Winder to practice law when he got out of the service. Then he was Mayor over here for a year, and then he moved to Winder, because he had to take the bar. He never got to take the bar before he left for service. So, he moved to Winder, and the rest is history. I think -- I do think it's funny, because he called me. Daddy and I were sitting in front of the bank building and he came out, and I didn't know he was in town. And I kind of nodded because he kind of nodded, and Daddy said, "Who is that?" And I said, "Oh, that's the new

young lawyer in town.” And Daddy said, “Well, he’s a nice-looking fellow.” And I said, “Yeah.” And about two days later, Ernie called and asked me to go out to supper with him. Well, my brothers gave me the hardest time. Nobody had ever invited me to go out for supper in Winder, Georgia, because we only had one little restaurant, and it wasn’t -- I mean, it was nice, but we didn’t go because Mamma -- we cooked and ate at home. So anyway, when he asked me out for supper, the boys just gave me a hard time. But anyway, we went and we had fun, and I said I never told my grandchildren this, but I have, of course. But it was -- it could -- it must have been love at first sight, because -- I don’t advise this for anybody but me. But we had our first date on May the 1st. I got my ring on June the 8th, and we married on September the 3rd -- there in that little thing of time. And it worked. I mean, it was just fine. It was wonderful. I don’t regret a day of our life together. And I miss him terribly, of course. And, but anyway, we got married, and we were practicing law -- he was practicing law in Winder, and I thought we was going to be there the rest of our lives. I really did.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And the -- I guess it was -- I don’t even know. We married in September, and I guess it was about December that Herman Talmadge called him and asked him to manage his campaign for Governor.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And, well, I guess that would be the '48 campaign.

SHORT: '48, 1948, Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: '48 campaign. And so, we moved to Atlanta and we rented this little house out on Piedmont Avenue which was just almost a dull street back then, and we rented this house, and we lived there all summer. And I will say, I was pregnant and I had said, "I am not going to have my baby in Henry Grady Hotel lobby, I'll just tell you." So, that's why we rented the house, because I really didn't want to be down there with all the things that were going on.

BOB SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: And so we stayed there, and our lease was up on August the 31st, and Chip was born the 1st of September. Went to the hospital that night. And, by George, I just -- I didn't have that baby in the lobby. I went down a lot, but I didn't -- I just didn't want to live down there that summer.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But anyway, Chip was born, and now it's the joke in the family. Gosh, I don't

know. Anyway, it used to be that Chip would have his birthday on September the 1st and we would have our anniversary on the third. So he grew up thinking his birthday was two days before Mamma and Daddy got married. That was just -- and so we laugh about that now.

Laughter

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: Is that he was born two days before Mamma and Daddy married, but it was not. It was a whole year around there, but anyway, that's one of our family jokes that we love. So then, after that we moved to Atlanta and we lived out in Colonial Homes Apartments, and made a lot of good friends there, because we all had babies and we would stroll together and we'd play together and they would play out in the playground. And so you made a lot of good friends, and of course, so many of the young married people -- the couples -- were people that Ernie or I had gone to Georgia with, so it was just kind of like a -- you know, a homecoming, because you were with friends that you'd been with.

SHORT: At that point, as I recall, Governor Talmadge had asked Governor Vandiver if he would like a position in his administration, and he chose Adjutant General.

VANDIVER: He chose Adjutant General, and you know, when you look back on it, it was a good thing, I think. They built 26 armories during Ernie's term, and I -- well, anything Ernie

did, he just did so well. I mean, he did completely, and it was things like -- well, I'll get to the trade schools, because that's one of my favorite things, but he did. He did a good job. He got to be -- I wish I had one of my little folders in front of me, but he was President of the National Guard Association. At that time, we were talking about civil defense terrible, you know, that duck and cover? He was head of the Civil Defense and was the National Chairman of the Civil Defense. So as I said, anything he did, he did just completely. You know, he did everything that was supposed to be done, and did it well. But anyway, he was civil defense. He was Adjutant General, and he was that for six years, because you remember, Herman was reelected for the fourth term -- four-year term. And so we were in Atlanta for six years, bought our first little house, had another -- had two more children, and -- Beth and Jane. And we loved that life, because we were real fortunate in that Herman and Betty would take the Adjutant General to all the Governor's conferences. So we had some wonderful trips, and I -- we were young enough to enjoy them, and I just felt like I was -- it was great, because you did get to go to all these wonderful places for the Governor's conferences. And then in '53, we -- or he -- was -- we were running for Lieutenant Governor.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And that was another experience, because there's something about going into every county in Georgia, making that your aim. And Ernie did that. He said we were going to hit every county in Georgia. Well -- oh, gosh. The memories I have about that trip. There's no

air conditioning. Fuzzy hair. And it was so hot you could not stand it. So we got so we traveled at night, because it was just so hot in the daytime. So we'd travel at night and get up the next morning where you were supposed to be, rather than come flying in there, you know, in the -- running late. So it worked out fine. It was, like I say, no air conditioning. I can remember very well the first air conditioning -- first air conditioned car we had, and it was one that was a military car. And they had -- out at the shop -- they had improvised an air conditioning unit. And I didn't ride in that car much, but when I did, it was making ice up there where the air came out, and the ice was being made. Now, that makes me feel old. I hadn't thought about that in a hundred years either, but I do remember that, and I -- it was better than no air conditioning, I will put it that way.

SHORT: At the completion of Governor Talmadge's second term, Governor Vandiver had a decision to make about running for higher office.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: And as I recall, Governor Talmadge was a great friend of his and a great supporter of his, and he suggested that he run for Lieutenant Governor rather than Governor.

VANDIVER: I think that's probably right, Bob. I don't know. You know, Ernie was a -- I'm sure he probably got some advice from different people, and I think that Herman would have had

a big influence on what he did. And of course, Lieutenant Governors, there hadn't been but one other, or maybe two other, I believe. Melvin Thompson--

SHORT: Melvin Thompson.

VANDIVER: He was Lieutenant Governor, and then--

SHORT: Marvin Griffin.

VANDIVER: Marvin Griffin and then Ernie. So see, I mean, it was practically a new office--

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: --at that time, because -- and then of course, they had had all that mess--

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: --with Thompson.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And so, I mean, it wasn't like a pretty -- it wasn't something that -- I don't think everybody knew about Lieutenant Governors back -- well, of course, it -- well, there hadn't been any until -- but anyway, that's -- I'm sure he got advice. But we -- and mine too, come to think of it. But anyway, it just worked out nicely.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: It was a good stepping stone. And he had the National Guard behind him solid.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: That was the year he had been elected one of the five young Georgians -- what is it -- by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And he had made so many good friends.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And he had a good background to run for something.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And of course, he ran -- we ran hard. We ran hard.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Everybody did. I remember Billy Bower and John Greer.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: I believe those--

SHORT: Those were the main opponents. Right.

VANDIVER: Those were the main -- Uh-huh.

SHORT: Well, Governor Vandiver swept that election very easy.

VANDIVER: Yes, that was -- that was the beginning, and gosh, that was wonderful, because it was a hundred -- no, I don't know how many he did in that, but I know it was such an

overwhelming victory. I know in the Governor's race, he carried all the counties but three.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And we always could count on who they -- who would -- we counted on them. In fact, let me just throw in something. I ran into -- I've been trying to clean out closets and give stuff to the Richard Russell Library, because Ernie's papers are there.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I have just been finding things over the house that are just -- really all over, but I found a speech -- you remember Shel Hartley?

SHORT: Very well.

VANDIVER: Okay. Shel used to send us everything out of the Tifton paper.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And everything that he could get his hands on, he would send us a copy of it. And I ran into a letter the other day from Frank Branch to Ernie, and he had made a speech on

the floor of the House to say that Tift County was one of the three counties that did not go for Ernie. And he had never known the difference, that Ernie had been just as fair to him as he was to any county. And I just thought, doesn't that -- you know, that really says something, because so many Governors do take out after you or don't give you that road you want, or whatever there. But he made a speech on the floor saying that Ernie had never shown any favoritism.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I just thought that was -- and I just ran into that. I'm trying to fill up a box and I might send it back with y'all today, because I just -- Jane said, "Mamma, just do it and I'll take it."

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But that's -- anyway, I got off the track, but I did think that meant a lot to me for Frank to realize that Ernie did not ever show -- he didn't show any difference from a county that was carried and a county that wasn't.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And of course, we had Tift, Worth, and -- what's Bainbridge? I've forgotten.

SHORT: Decatur.

VANDIVER: Decatur. Decatur, Worth and Tift -- are the three counties we didn't carry.

SHORT: Well, and you had opposition from a citizen there, and Bainbridge--

VANDIVER: Well, that's right. We did. He was completely -- but anyway, that's another -- we could go off on that. That's another story.

SHORT: Yes. So he gets elected Governor and you move into the mansion.

VANDIVER: Yes.

SHORT: I imagine it was difficult to make that move.

VANDIVER: Well, I don't know. You -- well, it was, because the children were in school.

Well, see, my baby was starting kindergarten. She started kindergarten at Spring Street, and the other children were in the third and fifth grade, and -- but that's funny. I found kind of a little diary I kept about the first two weeks, and I didn't do it after that. I couldn't do that and write a diary too, but anyway, I was talking about how Jane went into kindergarten, and I talked about

how Beth named Miss -- oh gosh, I remembered it the other day. Anyway, I had the teachers listed and all that kind of stuff, and it really -- I don't know why, but I just think -- I think we were just meant to be there. I really do. I just think I -- it wasn't that hard. We took a cat and two dogs and left, and the children -- and this book I was writing, is -- we stayed at the Henry Grady for three days so we could get the children in school before Ernie was even sworn in. We had to get the children in school, so we lived at the Henry Grady and took the children to school every morning, and at that time my Daddy was ill too. And so, I mean, it's -- just the whole thing was a funny time. Oh, in the meantime -- no, that's the Senate race. We'll get to that. But anyway, no, it really wasn't, and the children just adapted so well, and it was a whole different time, Bob. It's not like it is now.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: You lived out there and you didn't -- it was just like home. But we worked it, having it as home.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: We -- I took the children to school everyday. I was in a carpool. I bought the groceries. I helped cook, because we didn't have it. We didn't have a staff. We had a cook that would come out every -- they'd bring him, because he was in jail. And of course, he ended up

being one of our best friends, David Walker. I have to -- he's so dear. He loved us and we loved him, and he was paroled while we were up there. And so he just stayed. He moved in the garage and stayed with us, and then when we came home, David came home. And he came to Lavonia, he got to know everybody, he was -- and he got elected President of the PTA and he didn't even have a wife and children. He just -- but over -- where he was living, that's what you do. You just elect the finest man you can get to be the President of the PTA. So David was President of the PTA, and of course, we were so proud of him. But anyway, that's another story too. But anyway, it was a different time completely, and that's something that, in thinking, you know, you would get around to asking me this, so I'm just going to throw it out. When you're with the other Governor's wives and they had lived in the mansion -- the mansion now -- and they talk about all the dignitaries that visited and so forth, and what they served, and what they had to do - - we had supper at home every night -- almost, unless Ernie had to go make a speech or I was somewhere. We had supper together as a family. And because -- it's dawned on me in the last two or three years -- is the reason that we didn't have all of that, is because Ernie had the first trade mission, and he went over and broke the ground to have dignitaries coming and the ambassadors and the Presidents of big companies over there and that kind of thing, because -- and I think it's because Ernie did it, but I know anybody that had started trade missions and so forth, it would have done the same thing to Georgia, because we've got such good ports and so forth. But I think it's that first trade mission--

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: --That got -- that put Georgia on the map. Now, we had lots of company. I remember Bob Kennedy -- Bobby Kennedy came by one night and Bobby Baker. Do you remember Bobby Baker?

SHORT: Bobby Baker.

VANDIVER: Well, Bobby Baker and Lyndon -- President Johnson came by. We had people that we knew, so we were entertaining, but we weren't -- it's not like it is, and of course now, they've got that staff that they can throw dinner for a thousand, and you know, it's alright.

SHORT: And they have the room and the space.

VANDIVER: They have the rooms, and you know, when we used to have the legislative dinners, it was -- move all the furniture upstairs, bring in all the tables and the chairs, and you had to divide it up into two nights because there were so many of them, and you would have the legislative dinners, we called them. So we entertained, but it wasn't like it is now, that there's something going on every night. I had luncheon -- I could go speak at a luncheon for cerebral palsy or Red Cross or something, and then still be home and go by and pick up my children. I mean, that was what -- we tried so hard to have a normal home life.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I think we did pretty good. I've got three of the -- I love -- I've got the best children in the world.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Let's talk for a minute about the administration. A very, very tough time for any Governor. And that Governor happened to be Ernest Vandiver. All the decisions regarding the change in America at that time fell right during his term in office. How did that affect him?

VANDIVER: Well, as I've said, he is -- and I know I'm prejudiced, but -- oh, I'm sorry I hit this thing. I hate that thing. I'm prejudiced, but I really believe Ernie was the man at the time. I do believe that Ernie -- I think it's almost providential that he is -- was governor, because we -- Georgia didn't have any of that -- I mean, didn't have all that discussion standing in the door and just defying the federal Governor. He -- he just always did what he thought was absolutely right and honest, and if anybody else had been there, there might have been more hedging. In fact, this is interesting. They just got through dedicating a dormitory to Ernie over at the University. They did that last Friday, and it was such a great day. In fact, Adams, bless his heart, he just read the book -- well, he had read the book before, he said, but he just reread two chapters that proved to him what a great man Ernie was, and one was the way he handled that situation. I remember one thing -- gosh, I guess -- but one time they were going to be marching through Georgia and Ernie sent the patrol to South Carolina line and said, "Escort them right through," if

they -- because they were on their way to Alabama, but, anyway, he just knew what to do at the right time. I've just always feel like he was supposed to be there. He had a lot of sleepless nights. We did -- he thought about it so much because it was coming, and everybody had been saying for twenty years it was coming, and of course, it hit under Ernie's administration.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: So, of course, it's -- and he knew that was -- he said it was suicide as far as his political future.

SHORT: Now, we're talking now -- just for the benefit of our listeners, about school integration in Georgia, and particularly at the University, where we had -- he had to make a decision whether or not to keep the university open, or close it, as he was required to do by the state laws.

VANDIVER: And federal.

SHORT: And federal laws, yes.

VANDIVER: Well, at that time, but then the federal law had changed.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And said that our laws were outlawed, and they had gone into every court, all the way up to Supreme Court to -- remember Eugene Cook? I hadn't thought about him in --

SHORT: Gene Cook? Yes.

VANDIVER: But he was the--

SHORT: Attorney General.

VANDIVER: Attorney General at that time. And he -- and of course it was a losing battle. You knew it, but it just -- everybody had just kind of kept putting it off. Everybody went as far as they could go, and then they would get knocked down and so they'd get up some more walls, and that would get knocked down. And I remember the night that Ernie -- it was the first night session that Georgia had ever had, and back then television was pretty new, but he wanted to go out to the people of Georgia. So, his legislative session that night was on television and it was the first night session, and he asked the House and the Senate to repeal all--

SHORT: Seventy-seven.

VANDIVER: All of them. And that's how many--

SHORT: Seventy-seven statutes.

VANDIVER: I didn't realize it was -- I mean, I didn't -- I don't know that I've ever heard that number, but he asked them. And I have to back up just a minute now and say that this is in great opposition, and -- because he had had 50 of the leaders out to the mansion on Sunday beforehand, and went around the room and asked each one what should he do, because the Civic Committee had come back and they were not unanimous, but they did think that we had to do something to preserve the schools, but it was certainly not unanimous, and they had gone into all ten districts of Georgia and asked the people, and they had had open forums. They had people come in and they -- for or against, whatever. But Mr. John Sibley, I got to tell you, that man, he knew what he was doing, he was a Georgian that everybody knew that -- they respected him. But back to the Sunday meeting. There were 50 of them out on the porch, and Ernie asked them what they thought they should do. And all but two said close the schools. And Carl Sanders and Frank Twitty. You remember Frank?

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: Anyway, Frank and Carl --

SHORT: He was the Governor's floor leader in the House.

VANDIVER: Yes he was. But some of his other leaders were there also, saying close the schools. I mean, it was a terrible -- nobody can believe that now because everything has happened so well, and everything -- you know, everybody gets -- it doesn't even come up. But it was a time of great turmoil back then, but anyway, just the two of them said we've got to save education in Georgia. And Ernie just deliberated and thought and prayed, and he did what was right, just like I knew he would. But I didn't know what -- but anyway, I was proud of him.

SHORT: He's been called the most courageous Governor in modern Georgia history.

VANDIVER: Well, see, I'm for that. I think he was. I also think he made so many good changes in the government. You know, that was truth and honesty. It was one of his best -- is to get it down so that the state couldn't trade with any of the Representatives and that kind of business.

SHORT: Well, there had been corruption in the previous administration.

VANDIVER: Well, we certainly thought so. I'm sure they didn't think so, but we thought so.

SHORT: Well, there were several convictions and--

VANDIVER: Uh-huh, yes.

SHORT: So he had that to contend with, and--

VANDIVER: Well, and of course, he had a hard -- they were so against him when he ran for Governor -- that faction -- that it's a wonder he did as well as he did, except that the state -- the people in the state, they got, you know, they got good sense.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: Smart Georgians.

SHORT: Smart Georgians. I want to go back for a minute, if you will, to 1958, when Governor Vandiver campaigned for Senator Russell for President.

VANDIVER: Isn't that funny? I'm -- see, we'd just gotten through with this convention, and -- both conventions -- and I sat and watched in just awe, because there's no comparison from the way we did it, and the way it's done now.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But back then, that was one of the most fun -- and I was trying to tell my children that this is not the way it usually is, that the way it is, is that you go out there and you don't know who's going to be the one that gets the most votes, because you don't know until you count them on the floor.

SHORT: Right.

VANDIVER: And it was a whole new world. Ernie did. He took an absence -- a leave of absence, and he went out west in Arizona -- I believe it was Arizona -- I got to stop. That goes -- I got to go to the church for just a minute.

SHORT: Okay. That's fine. That's good.

VANDIVER: During the campaign --

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: -- Of Uncle Dick when Ernie took --

SHORT: What year was that? I think I might have--

VANDIVER: '52.

SHORT: Yeah, okay, you're right.

VANDIVER: I was pregnant with Jane. We were just talking about Jane, and the Arizona committee came every morning to find out what Ernie wanted them to do. And back then, of course, you were going to have the demonstration. You were trying to see if you could talk other people into being for your candidate. And I'm sure Uncle Dick knew he could not ever be President, I mean because it's just -- his stand on certain things and so forth. He could not. And then he had several people say if you were from anywhere except Georgia--

SHORT: Yeah.

VANDIVER: -- or the South --

SHORT: Harry Truman said that.

VANDIVER: Yes. Said he would be if he was anywhere, and of course, that was an exciting time, and the Arizona committee would come to the room every morning to find out what Ernie wanted them to do, because they had -- really, he had gotten them. They were all pledged to Uncle Dick. I think they stayed with him. I think some of them stayed with him. I ought to look

that up sometime, because I'm sure I've got that somewhere, but I think a few of those Arizona boys just could not leave Ernie. I mean it was just one of those things.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But -- and how impressed I was with that. And but that was the most exciting time, and I remember we all had our hats and our flags and our whistles and so forth, and when Georgia nominated -- I don't even remember who nominated him, but anyway, who -- when his name came up, well, you were supposed to put on the biggest show you could put on.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And gosh, our cousins had come from all over everywhere to help Uncle Dick and we all had our noisemakers and our hats and our flags, and we marched around the Chicago -- was it the livestock arena or whatever, where they had the convention?

SHORT: I don't remember that.

VANDIVER: That year, I think it was -- that is the livestock area, because we ate supper there at the wonderful restaurant every night. And gosh, that steak was good. *Laughter* But anyway, that was quite a time, and Uncle Dick, of course, we were all so proud of him. And he

had worked hard too, you know, he really had, but you know, we knew that it wasn't going to happen.

SHORT: You had a special relationship with him, didn't you?

VANDIVER: I did. Well, see, there again--

SHORT: What did he call you?

VANDIVER: Lady Betty.

SHORT: Lady Betty, yes.

VANDIVER: But see, he would come home and I'm living next door, so I was the one he saw. Now, every niece thinks they were his favorite, because he treated all of us so regally and so great, but everybody thinks that they were his favorite, but I know I was. I wasn't. I really wasn't, but I just know we did have a very special relationship.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about your duties, I'll call them, as first lady. You did some wonderful things, particularly in the area of mental health.

VANDIVER: Well, that probably is one of the most rewarding things I've ever done, because you could see it happening just every time I went down there, and gosh, I got so I was going down once every two weeks--

SHORT: Up to the mental hospital in Milledgeville.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh, in Milledgeville.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And -- because I got so close to so many of those people, and some of the patients -- I was it. And all of a sudden, they felt like they had a friend, and they really had not felt like they had friends. And anyway, that's the most rewarding thing I think I've ever done, and it worked out and it ended up taking the whole state of Georgia to complete -- what we've tried to do there.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Bob, when we got there, they -- it was awful. I can still see the smells *Laughter* -- smell the smells and see those poor patients sitting on the floor holding little dolls and patting and--

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Just the smell, the -- everything was just -- it was just a mess. Just a horrible mess. And of course, you have to say that for 12,000 people, and they had something like 20 doctors, and very few nurses, then those poor people -- the people that did it, they were doing the best they could.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But you just couldn't take care of 12,000 people.

SHORT: Right.

VANDIVER: I mean, that's more than Lavonia. Lavonia -- six times more than Lavonia has, and they were all in these houses. They had patients cooking for patients. The flies -- gosh, I remember the flies. It just was the worst situation I had ever seen, and I remember, Ernie and I, it was just something we couldn't believe, and I remember one thing Celestine said when I went behind the door and cried together, because you could not look at this without -- it just was -- nobody can understand it. So, you know that we just knew we had to do something, and the time was right, there again. The time was right because the doctors that were there, as we said, were

good. They were doing all that they could, but they couldn't do it. They didn't have the right supervision. Nobody knew exactly where to go. They were just doing what they could where they were. And so Ernie got Dr. MacKinnon. I think he was from Kansas out there with Miniature Clinic or something like that, and Dr. MacKinnon came. No, maybe he was in New York -- it doesn't matter. He came and took over the administration of the hospital, and then, at the right time, there again, Cuba was having a worse situation. And doctors were leaving Cuba, mad, just get out. And they'd leave everything they had at home and get out if they could. And so they came to -- they wanted work, of course, and so I guess at one time we had 20 or 25 Cuban doctors that were well-trained in psychiatric care, because they had to -- they were leaving Cuba and so they heard about us and so they came to Georgia. And I guess a lot of them are still down there. I don't know. Gosh, no, they've probably all died by now, *Laughter* but I forget how long it's been. But anyway, at one time there were a lot of them, and then they decided to make the smaller regional hospitals rather than one central.

BOB SHORT: Uh-huh.

BETTY VANDIVER: And so, now, they're all over Georgia, and that's probably better. But at the time, it just wasn't feasible. But I think that those doctors down there figured that was the best thing -- was to get them closer to home, so maybe family would come see them and they wouldn't be so alone. So anyway, we did that, but then -- I'll get back to Mr. John Sibley again. He and I were chairmen of raising a million dollars. It sounds easy, but it wasn't, because back

then -- we're talking about 45 years ago. But every little church had envelopes, and we had building -- had blocks, bricks, and of course this was all ad group, but it worked. Everybody was going to build a brick for Milledgeville. Buy a brick, buy a brick, and everybody did, and we raised a million dollars, and it's the most beautiful -- we -- the people of Georgia, Mr. Sibley and I just worked and you would know the advertising agency. I'm not sure that I can get all that name together, but they -- Hess. You know that woman that was so good? Anyway, the people of Georgia and the big industries got into it and the big -- I remember the other night I ran into a picture of Little Joe. Was that the Cartwright boy?

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Little Joe Cartwright. He came to Albany, and Jim Grey, who owned the TV station, put on a telethon. And I went down, and Little Joe and I ran into that -- see, I'm trying to get everything up where -- I'm finding things I had forgotten about completely, but Little Joe and I had -- we were together at the telethon in ALB or WALB, I think it is. And JBG, whatever, anyway, it was an all-night telethon. It went on and on and raised thousands of dollars. I mean, it took things like that and that's what I would do if somebody wanted to have a fundraising. I know I did not ever make speech -- talks until that came up, and then I started making talks just asking for money, is what it was, for the chapel. And it's a beautiful, beautiful chapel, and still there and being used, because those people didn't know the difference between a church and a basketball game, because they didn't have a church. They had religious services in the

basketball court. And so they didn't really know the difference between a church or a basketball game, a lot of them. And of course, they were so pitiful. And so when they had that church, when they had a church, they came to that surroundings, not a basketball court.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: So anyway, it was a great experience, yes. And the people of Georgia were so great, because they helped every way they could. And we started the chaplaincy program. Then every chaplain -- then, I guess they still do -- have to have a quota or a semester, whatever, at Milledgeville, so that pastors can recognize people in their church who might need--

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: -- Some psychiatric care or some help in that line. So I mean, it was a rippling effect really, because it got preachers involved all over Georgia who could recognize people who needed help.

SHORT: You're also responsible for the Mayor's parade in Milledgeville.

VANDIVER: Yes, *Laughter* in fact, you know, that's the funniest thing. Last week I had an interview with this girl -- you may know her -- but Lynn came over, and this is never -- this is the

50th year -- I must not have turned it off, please excuse me. Oh, I don't have to do anything now. Yes, it is, and we -- that's something that is just amazing. Shows you what good people Georgians are, is what it really proves, because that was the first year after we went down there, they -- we had the mayors would -- wait a minute, I'm -- anyway, gosh, Betty, you are -- we went down there and asked -- well, the mayors did it, they started it, but I think we probably helped them because Elmer George -- you remember Elmer?

SHORT: Oh, yes.

VANDIVER: He was the GMA man and he decided that was a good idea, we'll get the cities involved, and so he got out all those press releases, got the Mayors all excited. And all the Mayors tried to outdo the others in seeing how many gifts they could get. And actually the people who had jean factories -- the blue jean factories in their town, they got -- everybody had to give blue jeans and everybody gave sweaters and blankets and throw rugs, the carpet people -- you know, and then the little towns, they were wrapping gifts. And I tell you, I saw a picture the other day -- it's somewhere around here, because I borrowed it and showed it to Lynn -- of us sitting in all those gifts. And it was just a mound of gifts, and they didn't ever get all the boxes unloaded for the celebration because there were so many. People came -- trucks came with loaded -- now they ask you to take it to the units, you know, that are closest to you and that kind of stuff, and the Mayors still do that.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But isn't that wonderful that that's -- you know, that was the first year we did that. And those people were so happy. They were like little children to get a gift. Gosh.

SHORT: Getting back for a minute to the integration situation in Georgia, I want to read you a quote and I want you to respond to it for me.

VANDIVER: Okay.

SHORT: It came from the -- Governor Vandiver's biography regarding school integration. And the quote is, "He also turned to his wife, who he admitted to have great influence on him as he struggled with his decision." And that's the end of the quote. What advice did you give him?

VANDIVER: You know what? I don't really remember advice. He and I just talked about everything, and I think we both -- I wanted him to do the right thing, because I'm so proud -- I was so proud of everything he'd done. Still am. And I just -- I think we both knew, because he had told me, "It's coming." We had talked about that, we knew that. We knew -- but you know -- well, there again, we old people -- all of us old folks grew up differently. It was a way of life we didn't even think about. We played with them all -- played with the -- I don't know. Now, they've changed the name, so to find a name, but we played with little colored children, is what I

played with.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: I didn't call them anything but little colored children, and they were my best friends because we lived out in the country. And as a matter of fact, I was a member of the black and white football team, and the other team were the white boys. And I played -- I was the white of the black. Anyway, I mean, we grew up together, we played together every afternoon after school. Never occurred to me that there was anything different. But -- and Ernie was more so than that, because he worked with them. His father was a believer in working, and he picked cotton and he had an acre that he had to take care of by himself. I mean, he knew -- we both just grew up with them, so it wasn't anything to us until it got to be made an issue, and Ernie always felt like, leave it alone, it will happen sooner or later by itself, without all that dissention. I don't know that we -- I advised him. We talked about it. He knew how I felt, I guess, which might have -- might have something to do with how he felt, and he knew I felt. No, but I think deep in my heart, I knew what Ernie was going to do, because we had talked enough. We discussed it. I think deep in my heart I knew what he would do. But I don't know that I ever advised him do or don't do. I just think we had talked about it so much that I felt like he was -- I knew he was going to do what was right. But I wasn't sure, you know, that's a hard decision. I mean, when you start talking about closing schools and children in the streets and that kind of stuff, and I don't think I -- I don't know that I would call it advice. I would say that we certainly counseled

and we discussed.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But I wouldn't call what I said advice so much as just that closeness we had. We just discussed everything. So I don't know. I don't think it was advice.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: He was his own man. As one of my children said at that dedication the other day, "Mamma," oh I won't say it right, but she said something to the effect of that, "Mamma was the only person Daddy would listen to," *Laughter* and that's about it. He was his own man, and she said that Mamma was the only person he listened to. So maybe that -- he didn't listen, we just talked.

SHORT: Uh-huh. After his term ended, of course he couldn't succeed himself.

VANDIVER: Couldn't.

SHORT: That's right.

VANDIVER: See, nobody knows that now. They always wonder -- wonder why he didn't run again, or well, did he get beaten? And I don't want anybody to think Ernie ever was beaten.

SHORT: Yeah.

VANDIVER: Except once. But he could not run again, and that's important that that -- I believe George Busbee did that, didn't he? Uh-huh.

SHORT: George Busbee changed the Constitution.

VANDIVER: George Busbee fixed it so -- I mean, during his term it became--

SHORT: Right. Right. What did he do between that point and when he ran for Governor again in 1966?

VANDIVER: He practiced law in Atlanta, and he went in on Monday and came home on Tuesday and went back on Thursday and came back on Friday. And so we -- there again, we were not -- it wasn't a long-term thing or something. He came home and did with the children, planned it around their games too.

SHORT: Uh-huh. And then in 1966, he announced he would run for Governor.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh. And you know, I know he would have gotten elected, because of just the things people have said since then.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I just know he would have, but it's funny, we went to -- tell you everything.

Laughter I told you I would. But we went to a powder puff game over at the grammar school, over at the high school. And one of our girls was playing football, and I don't know whether y'all know about a powder puff game or not, but the girls were playing the girls. And we went to that game and had a good time, and on the way, we had to kind of come up a hill at the stadium. And when we got to the top, Ernie said, "I'm having trouble." And he had -- now, we have to remember, he had had a heart attack in 1960 while he was Governor. And so we knew he had that possibility, and he had been having some angina, but only when it was a strenuous something he was doing, and -- you know, I don't know what. I can't remember. But we would have to take his nitro from time to time, and that night he took his nitro and it didn't stop. And so we came home and it kept up, and so I called family. Back then we didn't have 911. You called your funeral home person who had the ambulance and Freddie came and we went to Athens. And there he was having -- he was having -- I don't know that he was having a heart attack, but he was having such angina that I guess he was -- I don't know -- you know, don't even want to think about things like that. And so, after he got -- they sent us home two days later

and they said he was fine and so forth. But he kept having that nag. So we went back to Dr. Carter Smith in Atlanta, who is supposed to be the best, and had a real good exam, and Dr. Smith said, "Well, if you want to see your children grow up, I believe I would not try the race." And of course it broke our hearts because there were so many things Ernie wanted to finish, and so many things he wanted to do. But that's a pretty good indication you better get out, if somebody tells you it might kill you.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And it was going to be strenuous, you know, it would -- they're always strenuous. You don't get enough sleep. You get on, they say, the ham and pea circuit, and it is the truth. You eat English peas and ham, and it's really good, but that's what you -- you don't eat right, you don't sleep right, you stay up. Just running is not that easy. And so he made that choice that he just couldn't do it, and I will say this, because I think this is an interesting story. Ernie sent back every check that had been sent to him. I've got the book upstairs, and that's another thing that Jane said, "Well, Mamma, give it to the library." Well, I don't know whether they want all that kind of stuff or not, but it's the checkbook where he was writing, you know, just sending back at least part -- of course, he had some expenses, and so he had -- he had it all figured out that -- pro rata -- pro rata -- he could -- he sent everybody's money back that he could.

SHORT: After he left the race, did he take any part in it?

VANDIVER: Now that's a hard question. He did. I remember several of the candidates right now. Bob, you're going to have to -- is that the first year?

SHORT: That was--

VANDIVER: Tell me who ran in '66?

SHORT: Ellis Arnall.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: James Gray.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Lester Maddox.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Jimmy Carter.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Garland Byrd.

VANDIVER: Gosh, I'd forgotten about all that.

BOB SHORT: And of course, Bo Callaway ran.

VANDIVER: A lot of them jumped in after Ernie got out.

SHORT: That's right.

VANDIVER: Because they thought -- I think they all really thought Ernie would win.

SHORT: Yeah.

VANDIVER: It says so in the papers and from what I--

SHORT: Yeah. Well, he was -- he was by far the favorite, no question.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh. But you know, I remember Jimmy Carter coming here. Somebody -- we had a man here in town who was really for Jimmy, and he flew Jimmy up here, and I remember sitting in the breakfast -- we had lunch, and I remember Lester coming, and of course, Jimmy -- well see, a lot of those people were Ernie's -- he couldn't have taken sides because there were too many of them that had been too important to him. Jimmy Gray was Chairman of the Democratic Convention -- he was Chairman, wasn't he?

SHORT: Chairman of the Democratic Party, yes.

VANDIVER: Yes, uh-huh. He was chairman, and then all those people -- Garland Byrd had been the Lieutenant Governor when Ernie was Governor. I mean, it just was -- I'm sure he didn't take part, except these people who came and asked advice or wanted to ask him for his vote and that kind of stuff. But I don't believe he endorsed anybody. I bet he didn't.

SHORT: So he withdrew from the race and what happened then?

VANDIVER: It was a hard time for him. He really -- I mean, it was a disappointing thing, and I guess any man who got the sentences that you're not able to do what you want to do. I've never thought about it this way, but if you get a sentence of you can't do what you really want to do or feel like you should do, then I guess that does hurt you. But he went through a time of, I guess, feeling like he wasn't as strong or as -- gosh, I don't know. I've never thought about this. But

he did, he had a hard time after that. It didn't last long. It was just disappointment that he couldn't do what he wanted to do. And I'd never thought about it.

SHORT: There's one question that I really want to ask you, and I'm not sure you'll want to answer, but there was a great feeling that when Uncle Dick died, that Governor Vandiver should be appointed to the Senate.

VANDIVER: Oh, I will not -- oh boy, turn me loose on that. No, I never -- you know, there was an understanding between Governor Carter and Ernie. And I don't have the words, but I have the fishing trip that it happened, and because -- I'm bitter about that, and Ernie was bitter too, because Uncle Dick -- I think Uncle Dick really wanted Ernie to succeed him, and he knew he was not long. I mean, he knew he was a sick man, and Bob, that week was something that was a blur. My Jane was Miss Junior Miss from Franklin County, one of the 12 or whatever of the finals. Uncle Dick had died. Of course, we thought -- I mean, we expected it, and we were in the motel because Jane was -- had to go and perform for Miss Junior Miss, and the funeral was going to be -- and that week is something that you just can't believe, but it seems like that's the way it goes. But anyway, I was very disappointed for Ernie, because -- and this is in that book, anybody that's read the book, I'm repeating. But when he was a little boy -- I mean, well, not a little boy, 15 or 16, his daddy got him to sit down and make a list of things he thought he might like to accomplish someday. And so, Ernie at -- I guess sure he was 15 or 16, he put down that he wanted to graduate from Lavonia High School, he wanted to go to the University of Georgia,

he wanted to be a member of the honor societies, and he wanted to be a leader. He had put that. And he wanted to be President of his fraternity. He wanted to be the Governor of Georgia, and he wanted to be a Senator of the United States. And this was a young man who had just -- his daddy had probably trained him that's the way -- you know, I don't know. But anyway, he wanted to be Senator, and he thought he would be, and I think Uncle Dick thought he would be. But then when it came out that he wasn't, of course, that was a big disappointment, and it happened in the middle of all this other stuff with Jane going -- all this stuff. And it was -- it just compounded and it was a bitter pill to swallow, that's all.

SHORT: But you say there was an agreement?

VANDIVER: I say there was an agreement. I know there's a difference of who said what, when, why. But Ernie thought there was an agreement, because of just -- I don't know that there was -- I know it was nothing written down. I don't know whether it was -- Ernie would -- is not the type of person to take -- just to make up something like that. So, he either heard what he thought he heard, or he didn't hear what he thought he heard.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And that's what it gets down to, because he came home from that fishing trip with the understanding that if and when and so forth the Senator, that he would be--

SHORT: Appointed.

VANDIVER: And now see, Ernie would have known how to hedge around that question. And you said, I may not want to answer it. I'm a person of many words, and sometimes I say too much, but that was Ernie's understanding when he came back from the fishing trip, and as I say, I just -- that's all I needed, you know, to think that that's what happened.

SHORT: Uh-huh. But he later ran for the Senate.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: He got in the race, and did well, but didn't win.

VANDIVER: Yes. Didn't win. No, but you know, that was funny, because we did it again. He -- as we laugh and said from '72 on, well, we ran an old-fashioned race in a time you don't run old-fashioned races. Because you could have stayed in Atlanta and talked on television every night of the week, and you would have hit more people than you would going to every county. We went to every county in 1972, just like we did in 1954, '58. And we met a lot of good people and we saw a lot of the same people we saw before. But it just wasn't the same as running against television. And Sam Nunn, we were always together, you know, at rallies and so forth,

and so, Ernie and Sam, we really got to be good friends, and it was a matter of running against Gambrell, actually, both of them. And it was, if you win, I'll -- if it's a runoff and you're in it, I'll be for you.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And so Sam and Ernie kind of agreed that whichever won, one would help the other one.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And I think it was 1 and 1-1/2 percent difference or something between Sam and Ernie.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But Ernie was glad to help -- to do for him what he could.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But it was, there again, you just -- it really was -- I think it was worse than getting

out of the '66 race, just because it was something he wanted to do.

SHORT: Well, that was the end of his political career, but not the end of his life.

VANDIVER: Oh, no.

SHORT: So what happened then?

VANDIVER: Well, you know, I've always said the Lord works in funny ways, and I'm kind of Presbyterian when it comes down to that -- that it's the best thing that ever happened to us. I don't think Ernie could have gone to Washington and lived through the Nixon thing, because he never could believe that a president of the United States would do something like that. He really didn't, and by -- I had a couple -- I had a child or two that just believed every word of what they were saying about him. From the very beginning they thought he had done wrong. Well, Ernie would not -- would never -- he just could not believe that a President of the United States would lie to the people and would do something dishonest. That just wasn't his nature. I mean, it -- and he could not believe it, and I don't know -- the child that was so adamant, she never -- that child never said, "I told you so." But it was a thing around here for a while, that when he said he was a crook, or it came out he was -- or he said he wasn't one, but I remember that he must have known he was not telling the truth. Anyway, he just couldn't believe that a -- and I think being up there in the middle of that, I'm really not sure he could have stood it.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: I think it would have crushed him, and he might have had a heart attack, and then, you know, that would -- *Laughter* I'd have blamed Nixon, so it's just as well that he didn't go. Like I always said, I just thought it was the best thing in the world that he didn't win.

SHORT: So he came back to Lavonia.

VANDIVER: Uh-huh.

SHORT: And I guess, practiced law?

VANDIVER: No, well, he didn't really. His daddy had had quite a bit of land and a business and so forth, so Ernie kind of took over that. Then he became the -- he and this other man bought the bank business that -- Mr. Walter sold it -- was selling it, and he and this other man bought it, and then he was Chairman of the board, and he was real active in banking for several years -- many years. And then -- and he was President of Georgia National -- Georgia Independent Banks for two years, I guess, however long that term was. And so then, he -- let me see. Well, he mainly took care of the farm and business, and then the bank, and then, well, we kind of retired and we started going fun places and Ernie's always has been a kind of a trader and

a swapper, and he'd swap one place for another, you know, and do all this messing around. And we had a lot of fun. We played a lot of golf. We -- and our children were all either in college or out of college, so Chip was in Alaska for ten years practicing law.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And so we had several trips to Alaska, great trips. And we just kind of kept on the move, doing what we wanted to.

SHORT: What's your handicap?

VANDIVER: *Laughter* You wouldn't ask that. It's been a long time since I played golf, but - well, I won't tell you that. I will tell you one time Ernie, I think he got down to about a 20 or 21. *Laughter* We don't have good handicaps. We just played a lot. I was not a good golf widow, and around here, there were very few people who could take off at 1 o'clock in the afternoon and go play golf. And we played -- he played some in Atlanta and trained Chip at the Ansley Golf Club. They'd go over there in the afternoon and play nine holes and -- and we bowled a lot. You know, we did things that people do that are not Governors when we were up there. But we had -- we've had a good life.

SHORT: Has Chip ever considered public office?

VANDIVER: Not at all. And Beth, my middle child, she won't -- she doesn't even like to get in a room more than four or five people. So it really didn't hit her, but it hit Jane. She's got it all. I mean, she's all political, and --

SHORT: She's been in the House of Representatives.

VANDIVER: Yeah, yeah, and represented --

SHORT: Chairman of the Democratic Party.

VANDIVER: Yes.

SHORT: Very active politically.

VANDIVER: Oh boy, she is active. You know, I think she does more than -- I think she goes and -- she goes to Atlanta every other day from Athens.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: So she's full-time and she goes -- she calls me when she gets in the car. That's

when I talk to her, and she calls, and the other night she was leaving Rome at 9 o'clock coming back to Athens. Well, you know, that doesn't suit mammas very well for her to be out on the road at night like that, but she's -- doesn't bother her.

SHORT: Well, you've had a very wonderful political life.

VANDIVER: I really have, and gosh, you've brought up so many good memories, I'm trying to -- you've sent me off on a couple of trails I haven't been on in a long time. But lately it's been interesting, because -- like with the dormitory -- it's brought back a lot of memories, and then the GMA having an anniversary that they want to celebrate a little bit, it's brought back some great times. Because I really did -- because, you know, you have to think about when Ernie was AG -- we talked about this -- but we got to go to all those lovely places, and then it just kind of continued, and then we just kind of ebbed down, but it was a wonderful life. I feel like there's so much I need to tell you, because I don't want anybody to forget what kind of Governor and what kind of man Ernie was. I really -- I'll do anything to carry that on, and I feel like I missed something, Bob. I feel like there's something I need to tell you that I -- because I can't -- I don't know. I just feel like there's so much that needs to be said. Because do you know -- can I just mention a few things that I think he did that never gets down into footnote? But you know, he really took care of the roads of Georgia, because that's what he really got in, was when Marvin Griffin had that -- the road fight, we call it. We've got that bill framed, who voted for what. He did -- oh, we were going to talk about the -- there were two industrial technical schools. They

called them industrial back then, but they had two technical schools in Georgia. He added 24. There are now 26 technical schools all over Georgia in different places so people can go and be used and get that education and get to work. His jail -- his prison reform was something that -- I remember Bob Balcombe, but they really reformed -- they did so much with the prison system, and of course, his truth and honesty in government is one of the biggest things. That was when he went in to get rid of that, and he had good people. He said he was the kind of hands-off people. If you appoint good people, people you trust and you know will do a good job, then you just kind of leave them alone. Because you don't meddle if they're doing a good job. If you don't, you get rid of them. That was his theory. He had some of the finest men in Georgia in his administration, and you think about them and you look at that list, and it really is a Who's Who of honest, good, efficient government. They didn't blow -- toot their own horn all the time. They just did the job, and you look about -- Bill Bowdoin, he took over the finances, and just got it all taken care of. Dixon Oxford was the revenue man, and he really straightened that out, now, I mean, he -- was he a Senator then?

SHORT: He had been.

VANDIVER: Later? Or had been?

SHORT: Had been.

VANDIVER: Anyway, he did -- Mr. Jim Gillis, boy, straight as an arrow, and get out of his way if you didn't like which way he was going. But -- and he just -- there's so many people. I was thinking about the Industry and Trade. You remember Jack Minter?

SHORT: Very well.

VANDIVER: Well, Jack was the first Industry and Trade, and then Abit Massey who now has just gone on, and his good friend, Bob Norman was Chairman of the--

SHORT: Ports Authority.

VANDIVER: -- Ports Authority. And what progress was made in that Ports Authority. And then the trade mission started bringing -- helping the ports, and now, my gosh, I think it's Brunswick. They bring in something like -- how many thousand cars do they bring in -- and when I get the Anchor Age, because they keep Ernie on the list, and I read all these things. But the Ports Authority is just something you can't believe -- the change, and that's a funny story. Somebody sent a picture of the Ports Authority being something, and I'm standing there and the people -- they said that the people couldn't believe Bob and Ernie were so young, that they couldn't believe that I had on high heels and a hat, and there I was with a dress on, of course, and high heels and a hat. When you wore high heels and a hat all the time. *Laughter* Look at

those heels. And we just had such good times, and I'm trying to think, because he did so much for so many different things that you just don't know, and a lot of that is that good leadership. If you get people who can do good and who know what to do, and do it right, then you don't have to worry about it. You know it's going to get done. The State Patrol, Billy Trotter, he was so good in his job, and he knew how to handle it, and the education, gosh, the -- or a lot of those education leaders that were so good. And then I think about all these different people that we knew and how fortunate we were. And just -- it's just been a good time.

SHORT: He was also a good steward of state finances.

VANDIVER: Oh. He was.

SHORT: I'm sure he was that same way with--

VANDIVER: Well, no, he -- no, that's the difference, see? Well, he was with all of us as far as wastefulness, but the children, they just-- he was a good daddy. He -- they will tell you he was strict and he was firm, and if he said no, he meant no. Now, Mamma might flex a little bit, but if Daddy said no, then it might as well go no further, because it was -- *Laughter* we were careful what we asked him. Oh, but he was a good daddy, and a real perfect husband, really. He was always conscientious to take care of all of us, and we came first. And we knew that, and well, he came off first with us, so I mean, it didn't -- Daddy was boss.

SHORT: Do you know -- you remember Bill Shipp?

VANDIVER: Oh, gosh, yes.

SHORT: Bill Shipp who had very few kind things to say--

VANDIVER: About many people. *Laughter*

SHORT: Well, he called Ernie Vandiver the best governor of modern Georgia, and I think that's true.

VANDIVER: I think. Thank you. Have you seen his new picture?

SHORT: No.

VANDIVER: His new picture on his article?

SHORT: Oh, of Bill Ship?

VANDIVER: Yes.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: He's got a new picture.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: I've been meaning to get in touch with him about that. Because, well, you know, that's something too. Let me tell you -- I don't know whether y'all want all this mess or not, but the reason we got to be -- well, not the reason surely. But Ernie had good press, and of course, at first it was that's what was good.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: But he had good press, but we had a relationship with the press that I don't believe anybody else ever had, and it would be a good idea, except now it's all changed. But back then, they were -- the Journal and the Constitution were pretty much in competition all the time. Well, we had a bird supper. We had -- every year we had a bird supper, and we had it once at the Piedmont and several times at the Henry Grady and places, but we would have the press, and we would have the birds and the wild rice and that kind of stuff, but we got to be such good friends, and I mean friends, pals, with all those boys. And now so many of them have gone

on and making such big names of themselves. But they were young -- I think about Reg Murphy, all that crowd, they were young fledglings *Laughter* -- really young reporters, and we all got to -- you could ask any of them. We had more fun at the bird suppers, and all that competition was forgotten, and I know Celestine used to write articles about it every year -- every time we would have one. And of course, we kept it up when we got in the mansion, and they were -- that was one of those things that we did that we just thoroughly enjoyed, because it got to know them as people, and they got to know Ernie as a person, rather than somebody that they -- you know, Ernie even turned one room of the capitol over when TV got to be such a big deal. But you'll remember how they all used to have to walk around with their tripods and the cameras. And let me tell you, Craig, that tripod looked like a steel crane compared to that thing you have there with those big, heavy, wooden things, and they were heavy. And all this equipment was carried like this, and they just would come in there for the press conference on every Tuesday, I think it was. Ernie finally found a room in the capitol that had not been used, and set it up for the TV boys, *Laughter* because the press people could get the news back to the office before they could get their cameras all put into boxes and gone. So Ernie found a room for them in the capitol, and then after that it was the press room and you just -- they could set their cameras up and leave them if they had that many. But back then they didn't really have that many, if you think about it. I remember Chip used to sit and watch the test pattern, you know, from 4:30, because that's when TV came on. And I see Craig over there, boy, he just doesn't remember that. *Laughter* No, you didn't sit in front of a test pattern and get it just right at 4:30 so Howdy Doody would come on. Anyway, that's back -- I remember the first TV

Ernie walked in with, and it was the ugliest piece of furniture I had ever -- it was bent over like this. You couldn't surround it. You couldn't do anything with it. It was just there. And I'm not the biggest TV fan yet. I just got Jeopardy and a couple that I really like, and not much more. But it's been a great life. Golly, Pete, I have really felt like I have been really blessed, because Ernie's family was always so good to me and for me, and my family loved Ernie -- just -- and it was a big one -- when we had the reunion, see? We still have it every year. We meet over in Winder, and we've gotten -- my sister and I have a lasagna supper every Thursday night for the out-of-towners, and it's gotten to be over a hundred people. And then we -- Friday night we do barbecue -- hot dogs and hamburgers -- and on Saturday we do a memorial service up on the hill. Have you been at the cemetery?

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Isn't it beautiful?

SHORT: It is.

VANDIVER: Anyway, we have a service up there on Saturday morning and have barbecue and silent auction. I mean, it's the same thing every year, but it's just wonderful. And we have like 200 people on Saturday. And -- did you ever know Uncle Fielding?

SHORT: He was a professor--

VANDIVER: At Georgia?

SHORT: At the college I attended.

VANDIVER: Georgia Southern.

SHORT: Yes, and he was one of my professors.

VANDIVER: He was -- that's his first and only job.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: He went there when he finished.

SHORT: Yes. And I turned out to be a sportswriter for the Atlanta Journal, and I--

VANDIVER: I remember that.

SHORT: --give great credit to him for encouraging me to write.

VANDIVER: Isn't that great? I wish -- I've got a daughter that needs to write. She needs to write, and you know, she doesn't -- anyway, Uncle Fielding was one of our favorites. And Uncle Fielding's family still has a blueberry pancake supper -- a breakfast on Sunday, and that's the last thing, and then everybody departs. But Uncle Fielding -- well, that's another thing. How amazing it is to be surrounded by so many uncles and aunts when you're growing up, and they didn't have children. Because see, I remember when Uncle Bill -- well, I remember when some of them got married and started having children, so that's that difference in the first 13 and the rest of them, because the ones that -- Uncle Jedd and Uncle Alex and Uncle Bob, they were young people. Mamma used to call them the little boys, because they were so young -- so much younger than Daddy was. And I remember -- but to have all those people -- it was -- it had to influence you to have that many people loving you and looking at you. You know, because you're just not supposed to do wrong if everybody's looking.

SHORT: That was a very distinguished family.

VANDIVER: Well, I think so. Thank you. Grandmother and Papa must have done -- have you read that *Roots in Evergreen*? You would love it. I see Craig there. He has. But it really is. It's the book -- my Grandmother Russell wrote letters, and how she had this houseful of children, when the oldest ones started going off, but she wrote letters to all of them, and I don't know how the mail got to be so good back then, but she could -- except it got on the *Silver Comet*, but she

could mail a letter in Winder and it would be in Washington two days later, sometimes one day. But anyway, she -- it's -- then she would tell what the littlest ones were doing, you know, the ones that were still at home, and it must have just been something, and of course, Papa was an individual in himself. Papa Russell was a -- if you -- well, Sally has written a book about him too, but he really was a pretty much amazing man, and he raised all these -- helped Ms. Ina -- and my Mamma and Daddy, of course, don't get me off on them because I just think they were the finest people in the world.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: Because Daddy died so young that -- he was 55, and -- but he was already on the Court of Appeals. There's no telling. You know, you don't know. And then Bobby. We didn't get off on Bobby.

SHORT: Bobby, yes, we need to talk about Bobby.

VANDIVER: Oh, that's my big brother. Yeah, Bobby is -- bless his wife, Betty Ann, is my -- she's the one I call my sister, but she's the one, we had the lasagna supper together. But she was left with five small children, and of course, we all feel like we helped her raise them because we missed Bob. But Bob was 40 when he died.

SHORT: I remember.

VANDIVER: And oh, that was just a --

SHORT: A very, very intelligent man.

VANDIVER: Well, you know, he's another one that there's no telling, because he and Lyndon Johnson were really -- Lyndon -- President Johnson would have Betty Ann and the children up there at the White House because he loved Bob so.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: He thought Bob had the sharpest, quickest mind he had ever seen. And he was. He was -- and of course, he was one of Ernie's best advisors. I remember he and Ernie decided, when the Governor asked Ernie what he would like, as you mentioned before.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: I remember he and Bob got out the red book that has the different offices and the different things that you could be or you could ask for, and they were sitting out on Mamma's porch, and he was probably after Ernie's college friends, which he had so many wonderful,

wonderful -- and those were the people that were in the administration that he went to school with and he had seen how they operated. They were all leaders of whatever they were doing. They knew how to do and when to do and so forth. But after those bunch, then I'm sure Bob was his closest friend. He missed Bob so much. Let me show you something, and then I'll quit talking. Oh dear. I mean, I think it's going to do, but I was thinking, in talking about these old friends -- oh, and here's that picture. I knew I had it out for that girl and I'd forgotten it. But there we are with -- sitting there with all the gifts.

SHORT: And all the Christmas presents to the --

VANDIVER: Yes. That was the first year.

SHORT: -- Patients. Yes.

VANDIVER: Yes. Isn't that wonderful?

SHORT: That is. Yes.

VANDIVER: But anyway, this is what I got up to show you, is when we got through in -- well, it was presented in '66, so that must have been when they -- this is all his college friends who paid his entrance fee.

SHORT: Oh, really?

VANDIVER: Every year -- every time he ran for something.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And this was in '66 when he didn't run, and they all signed this. Bob, you see -- you would -- you know all of these people. Jim Owens --

SHORT: Jim Owens.

VANDIVER: Buster Matthews.

SHORT: Oh yes. Yes.

VANDIVER: Louis Sohn. Howell Hollis.

SHORT: Howell Hollis from Columbus.

VANDIVER: Yes, Tom Green from Macon.

SHORT: Tom Green, yes, from Macon.

VANDIVER: Dean Covington, Rome.

SHORT: Rome.

VANDIVER: Robert Troutman.

SHORT: Bobby Troutman.

VANDIVER: Griffin Bell. You know, he's not well.

SHORT: I hear.

VANDIVER: You cut out whatever you want, Craig. He's not well.

SHORT: Governor Sanders told me the other day that he wasn't expected to make it.

VANDIVER: No, but I got a letter from him a couple of days ago and he said, "I'm still losing weight and weak as a kitten, but I'm not hurting." So see, that's a blessing right there.

SHORT: That's a blessing. That's right.

VANDIVER: Bob Norman. Now, do you remember Bob?

SHORT: I remember Bob Norman.

VANDIVER: John Langdale.

SHORT: John.

VANDIVER: Jim Dunlap.

SHORT: Gainesville. Bubba.

VANDIVER: Bill Jenlat -- Bubba.

SHORT: Bubba Dunlap.

VANDIVER: Bubba. You know Bubba's gone. All these people are gone. Bill Jenlat, did you know him? He was not in state government.

SHORT: Yeah, I knew Bill Jenlat.

VANDIVER: And Walter Rylander from Americus, do you know him?

SHORT: Yeah, yes.

VANDIVER: He never was in state government.

SHORT: Well, but I--

VANDIVER: He couldn't leave his Ford business.

SHORT: Yeah, he was a--

VANDIVER: You know, some of them, it really is a sacrifice to work for the government. At least it used to be. Do you know Ernie's salary was \$12,000.00?

SHORT: Uh-huh.

VANDIVER: And now it's up to like, what? 187 or something like that?

SHORT: Yes, 200.

VANDIVER: Harry Baxter, do you remember him? He was a lawyer in Atlanta.

SHORT: Yes, Atlanta.

VANDIVER: Cook Barwick. Bob Jordan.

SHORT: Bob Jordan, that's--

VANDIVER: Never a finer man.

SHORT: Good fellow, yes.

VANDIVER: Bill Trotter and Gordon Jones.

SHORT: Gordon Jones.

VANDIVER: Scoot Scruggs. Now, I know you know Scoot Scruggs.

SHORT: Very well.

VANDIVER: Yes, from Valdosta.

SHORT: Yes.

VANDIVER: And then Bob Heard.

SHORT: Scoot worked up there in the capitol.

VANDIVER: Yes, well, he was there after us. He was a photographer.

SHORT: Yeah.

VANDIVER: For the -- oh, he died -- anyway, and Bob Heard. All these people that were so dear and such good friends. Well, I got off the subject. We were talking about Bob, but these were the ones that were his just dearest friends all the way through school, college, anything he ever wanted to do.

SHORT: They all were fine, fine Georgians.

VANDIVER: They really are. We were very fortunate to have so many good friends. Walter's still there, and some, you know, some -- there are very few of these actually that are still living. Griffin's still living, and he's not very well, but I don't know, I just think I've lived a charmed life. I wouldn't change anything -- if I could just get Ernie back, that would be alright. But that's about it. It's -- I've really had a charmed life all my life. I would consider myself very, very fortunate.

SHORT: Well, we're very fortunate to have had you as our guest, and we appreciate it.

VANDIVER: Well, thank you for coming. I'll talk about Ernie anytime. Come back. Oh gosh.

[END]

**University of Georgia
Betty Vandiver**

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