

**Forrest Burson interviewed by Bob Short
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Reflections on Georgia Politics
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Forrest Burson**

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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 and Young Harris College. There's a well-known book entitled, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*. Bill Burson's name is not in it; it should be. He could have written it in first person because he lived it. His career in Georgia politics spanned more than a half century. He had a voice in almost every major decision made by Georgia's political leaders for decades. Unfortunately, the late Bill Burson cannot be with us, so we have asked his son Forrest to help us remember this remarkable man. Welcome, Forrest.

FORREST BURSON: Thank you, Bob. Glad to be here.

SHORT: Georgia Governor Zell Miller once described your father as one of the architects of the Georgia we know today. A Georgia no longer shackled by segregation,

malnutrition, and poverty. Let's begin our look at his life by talking about the Burson family and what you know about your father's early life.

BURSON: Alright, I would like to first say that I feel somewhat at a disadvantage in this interview because I spent two years gathering Dad's scrapbooks and documents and correspondence, and what I could find of historical impact about him, and donating it to the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia because they were interested in that period of Georgia history and wanted to create a display. So they have many of those important documents on file for any future researchers that have interest in this period. I was born June 5, 1952. I'm 58 years old and I watched Dad as he progressed through his political career. But there was a period of time that Dad had before I was born that I've tried to collect a good bit of information about. He was a child prodigy and a very unique individual, even starting from a young age. Scholastically and intellectually, he was superb.

He was born into a mill town and into a low-income family. And he suffered all the issues that low-income families of the time had, particularly after World War II, during and after World War II. He did not have much of a childhood. He didn't get the chance to play and interact socially like many children later did as America became more affluent. Dad entered the workforce at age 12 and 13. He delivered dairy; he delivered newspapers. He did odd jobs for whatever he could scratch up. He worked very hard with his father and his grandfather. He learned, I think at that time, that he had much rather work with his head than his hands. Because he spent a lot of time doing very hard scratch work for small amounts of money to help his family out.

Dad, as a consequence, became a realist at a very early age and looked at the life through non-rosy glasses, so to speak. He was not a naïve individual. And he learned the value of hard work and he learned the value of scholastic achievement. And he looked at the world around him and decided he wanted to make it a better place. So he moved to do that. And through collaboration with his mother, my grandmother Mildred Pitts Burson, he was able to achieve these kinds of things. He was a child prodigy in school. He had a record of extreme scholastic achievement. He graduated from Robert E. Lee High School as class valedictorian. And I believe he was age 14, at that time, when he did that. So his intellectual and scholastic abilities were far above average. He became interested in journalism and the newspaper business and worked very closely with the *Thomaston Times*. Started out as delivering newspapers with them and then moved into their print office as an errand boy and then on up to, I believe, being a columnist and maybe even writing some editorials. My understanding from people that I know in Thomaston, Georgia, where I spent a good deal of time visiting with my grandparents, is that he was considered a child prodigy in the county at large and contributed very much to the community, even at an early point.

He went from Robert E. Lee and his graduation there to the University of Georgia and decided he wanted to become a journalist, so he went to the school of journalism there. And my understanding, although I don't know in great depth and detail to be able to relate it back here, is that his career as a journalist was exemplary while he was at the University of Georgia and that he developed quite a reputation there as a young up-and-comer. I don't know how much fun he had when he was at the University of Georgia. His mother had told him to beware of distractions and not get involved with women in the party crowd. So he spent much of his time studying and working, working very diligently and hard to create a reputation that he could capitalize on later for a career. And this is to me, just as a personal note, one of the sad sides of Bill Burson is that

he never did really learn how to have fun. He was a hard pushing, ambitious, Type A personality from the time that he became a teenager as long as I knew him. I saw him struggle to relax, year after year after year. And it never seemed that he could do that.

I know that it took him two and a half years to finish Georgia's four-year journalism program and he did it with the best scholastic achievement in school. He was able to graduate at 19, Phi Beta Kappa magna cum laude. And I would like to read a description that he had left during his college years of himself, which I think is kind of telling. He said, "As to my intellectual pursuits, it's difficult for me to make any concrete statements. My primary interest in this realm is my studies, journalism, and history. My reading is necessary desultory and spotted because of my work and, when I do read, it is by subject matter rather than by author. I lay claim to no favorite writer for I read anything from the Greek classic to modern novels. If I were called upon to cite my favorite contemporary journalist, I would say Westbrook Pegler, for although I seldom agree with his opinions, I am fascinated with the preciseness of his composition and grammar. Athletic activities for me have been limited, again by work, but swimming and riding are my favorites when I have the opportunity to indulge. Football gets my vote as the best of the spectator sports." And I know from watching him many times that he was a big fan of University of Georgia football and of the Falcons. He was also interested in music and, I might add, he was an expert piano player and could read music. "But I'm ashamed of my scanty knowledge of it." Well his opinion of scanty and mine are two different things. But those observations were from a 19-year-old college student. I have always been amazed by his insight into himself and into others. He wasn't able to always act on those insights, but he had them.

SHORT: Forrest, in addition to his achievements as a student in the school of journalism, he also held full-time jobs there. Let's talk about that. He began his work career at the University as assistant to a fellow named Jimmy Jones who was head of public relations for the University. Mr. Jones moved on up to another job and your Dad became director of public relations for the University of Georgia at a very early age.

BURSON: That's my understanding.

SHORT: And then from there, he became, he climbed even further up the ladder and became head of the Georgia News Bureau, which channeled all the news that emanated there at the University of Georgia. Just wanted to throw that to add to the fact that he also had a tremendous work career at the University of Georgia while he was being an excellent student.

BURSON: Yeah, Dad had a multi-faceted approach to his career and that always included work and study. I never remember a time, even when he held his various offices, when he was not consumed in his personal time with reading or reviewing either documents or legislation or various kinds of literature. He did love his novels, but he read probably more serious material than anybody that I have any familiarity with.

SHORT: Following his graduation, he was offered a full-time job at the University but decided to become a correspondent with the UPI. Do you remember that?

BURSON: Actually, that was a little bit before my birth, but my understanding of those times is that he became a correspondent with United Press and this was about the time – I'm

looking at my notes here that I pulled together last night – when he met Mom. And that was approximately 1950, or so, because he had been working in Atlanta and he was working for UP then. And he met my mother, she was working for the Baptist Radio Mission, and he met her through a friend of Mom's at the Baptist Student Center on Peachtree Road. And they double dated and went bowling. Mom said she was a terrible bowler and Dad wasn't much better but it was something to do. And they went out to dinner on the next date in a rented automobile because neither one of them had a car. And that was back during the time, I believe, when Atlanta had trolleys and had cables strung all over the place and was getting ready to transition to a bus system.

But they dated a short while before Dad was drafted and Dad tried to work out a deal because of – he was not – he was 5'7" and not of the most robust build. And he had a congenital hernia, which, as a matter of fact, I inherited from him and had to have corrected too. And so he put forth the proposition that he felt he could better serve his country as a war correspondent than as a fighting man, although he did end up being a fighting man before the whole thing was over. And they accepted that and he went to Korea as a war correspondent where he was cited for bravery under fire. And like I said, I don't know much about his life, so I've found your narrative about that extremely fascinating. And that's something I'm going to keep and treasure and share with my sisters. Because that's part of Dad's life that he just – for whatever reason, as with so many veterans – did not want to talk about.

SHORT: He didn't talk to you about his time in Korea?

BURSON: No, he mentioned how great a country Japan was, how much he enjoyed Tokyo, and it wasn't until just before he died that he even told me of any of his escapades as a war correspondent. He told me about being on a plane and seeing another one shot down while in flight. He told me about confronting a North Korean and having to pull his side arm and point the .45 at the man, and that he was scared and the North Korean was scared, and they were both rescued by a GI who took them both prisoner. And he told me about the motor pool incident with the Jeep. I got the impression that Dad was his usual iconic self and that, while he did an excellent job of reporting the facts that went on, those facts weren't always in accordance with how the military brass wanted things presented and got him into trouble. And that was kind of a theme that followed with Dad I think his whole career; in that he had a love-hate relationship with authority and that he wanted to be an authority figure, but he disliked the authority that he had to submit to. So all of his life he followed his own muse, and his own muse and his own ethics, and internal moral compass frequently brought him into conflict with various people that he worked for.

SHORT: You mentioned the Jeep story.

BURSON: Yeah. My understanding was that because of the number of stories that he had written and aggravated military brass, a number of them became rather disenchanted with Wild Bill and decided that they were going to make his life a little bit miserable by seeing that he had a difficult time in getting to places on the front where he could get the scoop from the G.I.s as to what was going on. Dad always had an affinity for the common man, and so he was real close to the G.I.s, but real leery of the officer corps. Dad had a friend who worked in the motor pool and there was a Jeep that was in for service in the motor pool that was issued to a very

obnoxious martinet of a lieutenant that they both despised, and they kind of colluded for the Jeep to go missing. Yet, it subsequently turned up repainted and renumbered and Dad drove it the rest of his time in Korea when it was running. It was not in the best of shape. He did what he had to do to get the story.

SHORT: He was a remarkable correspondent and I know that it was once written that in every English speaking newspaper in the world, there was a story written by Bill Burson. And I've looked that up and that's the truth, it is. He pleased not only the soldiers, but also the newspapers.

BURSON: Another thing I noticed, Bob, in reading your narrative that I found very interesting and telling about Dad for his personality, was there were two incidences where you wrote of him relating to local authorities about how he integrated, and how the United States could integrate into their culture and him establishing relationships with local officials. And Dad always was one to become involved in the community. And when I saw that, I said, "You know he did that all his life." All his life when he was involved in politics, and when he was trying to set up his platforms for running for office, or when he was trying to direct the political careers of others as a public relations person or campaign manager, he always went to the local churches and to the local community organizations to find out how people felt about things. And I think that Dad, from a very early point of view, because of his going into the work force so early and coming from such a low-income family in a mill town and watching the class struggles that went on in those places, his views became more populist. You know, people wanted to classify Dad as a liberal, but I thought Dad was more of a populist and a centrist who just had a strong sense of moral obligation about feeding and clothing the hungry and educating the ignorant. And that a lot of that followed through all of his life, from his associations as a child through his time as a war correspondent. When I noticed those two incidents in your narrative, I said, "Yeah, that fits."

SHORT: So he comes back from Korea; he marries your mother; you're born.

BURSON: Yeah, I was conceived two months after they got married. They had a honeymoon – I believe it was in Bermuda and came back and my birth luckily helped Dad with his draft issues. And he was able to come back to the states, be a father, and rekindle his career, which at that time was with United Press in Jackson, Mississippi. That was where I was born and I believe we lived there about six months before we moved back to Atlanta and he had moved to another job with United Press back in Atlanta.

SHORT: Covering the Capitol.

BURSON: Covering the Capitol.

SHORT: And that's when he met Senator Talmadge.

BURSON: That's correct. That's when he met Senator Talmadge and, let's see, that may have also been, that's also I think when he met Jimmy Bentley.

SHORT: Jimmy.

BURSON: Who had been elected comptroller general and had promised Dad a job back in Atlanta and that fell through. And United Press picked him up and he came back to Atlanta anyway. And he met Talmadge while he was covering the Capitol there.

SHORT: Do you remember that story about Senator Talmadge and Walter Brooks? I'm sure you've heard of Walter Brooks.

BURSON: Oh, I know B. Brooks. Yes, I do.

SHORT: I want to talk about him in just a minute, but the story was that Talmadge called Brooks, who was his press secretary, into his office and says, "Who is that fellow asking all those penetrating questions?" And Brooks says, "Well, that's Bill Burson, United Press." He said, "Hire him. He's smarter than we are."

BURSON: Yeah, I've heard that exact same story. So I believe that to be true. And B. Brooks was a very influential man in Dad's career and I remember him well. He was very nice to me as a young child. Dad loved him very much. Let's see, at that time, Mom was working as church secretary in Thomaston First Baptist Church. She had moved in with my Dad's mother, so we were living down in Thomaston and Dad was commuting to Atlanta to work. And then we moved into the Darlington Apartments, which at that time I think was the largest high rise apartment in the Atlanta area and it's when they had the population sign for Atlanta out there on Peachtree that monitored the population of Atlanta, which I think at the time that we moved there had either just barely or not quite hit a million.

And so I remember that time very well. I remember Dad watching baseball on the little black and white TV that we had there. We had an efficiency apartment there, and Dad was gone a lot working, covering the Capitol. And it was also the time when Piedmont hospital was being built because I remember Mom taking me for walks in that area and they were constructing Piedmont hospital over there near the Darlington. I think the Darlington is still there, it may be condos now. Anyway, I'm not sure about the transition of Dad to Talmadge and how they ended up in Washington. Do you have any observations on that? But all I remember is I was very young when we moved to Washington D.C. and Mom and Dad bought a house on Hayfield Place in Alexandria, Virginia, which is where I then went to kindergarten and elementary school. And my sister Leigh was born.

SHORT: Senator Talmadge had a break of two years between his term as governor and before he became a United States Senator.

BURSON: Was his term as governor, was that the term when we had the two-governor controversy?

SHORT: That was before his term.

BURSON: Ok, that was before that term. OK.

SHORT: But he had that two-year lapse and Bill worked as assistant to the attorney general of Georgia, Mr. Gene Cook, helping him with his administrative duties.

BURSON: I recall that name.

SHORT: And then Bill went to Washington when Senator Talmadge was elected to a term in the United States Senate. And maybe you can pick it up from there. He left here, and y'all went to Washington, and he worked for Talmadge.

BURSON: Right, we lived in three different houses while we lived in Alexandria, Virginia. The first one was fairly small and modest. I remember Dad having a '57 Chevrolet that was black that he hated because black cars got so dirty so fast and he had to wash it all the time. I also remember it not having any seat belts and Dad taking me downtown to see a movie and saying, "Sit back, sit back," and I didn't sit back and got smacked against the dashboard when he hit the breaks in D.C. traffic. There's a lot of little childhood anecdotes like that. The main thing in regards to Dad during those times is I remember Dad being very, very pressured. And not seeing a lot of him. The Washington atmosphere back then -- when we first moved there, was the pre-Camelot era and then it became the Kennedy era, which evolved, or rather devolved, into the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Dad being very upset about things and thinking, I think his term was, "We're about to get nuked into cosmic jelly." And he loaded the whole family up in the Chevy Bel Air station wagon and drove us up into the Smoky Mountains for that week while Kennedy and Castro and Khrushchev were having their balls to the walls showdown. And we got caught in some kind of a flood up there; the car almost got washed away. We probably were in more danger up there than we would have been if we stayed in Washington.

Dad enjoyed that work, but it was very stressful for him and it took a great toll on him and on the family. I remember he and Mom having a lot of arguments back then. I don't think that things were particularly happy for Mom. She was away from her home in Georgia and Mom was kind of a country girl. It's interesting; Mom and Dad were both the first college-educated children on either side of their family. And with it came a lot of new exploration of the world and growth and maturity on their part, which I think in any marriage would produce some stress. And that plus the fact that Dad was working all the time in a very cosmopolitan atmosphere during the time when there's a great deal of free-wheeling morality up there in Washington; it just created a lot of issues for Mom and Dad that I picked up on as a kid. I'm not so sure that my sisters did, they were very young. Both my sisters were born while we were in Alexandria, Virginia, and a brother who was born premature who died within 24 hours after birth. And all of that, particularly that death of my brother, impacted Mom and Dad and their marriage and their happiness together very drastically. And Dad got an ulcer, a bleeding ulcer, which hospitalized him. And after that, he decided that he could not take the stress in Washington D.C. and that he wanted to relocate.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question. Was Senator Talmadge ever your babysitter?

BURSON: Well, actually Betty Talmadge was my babysitter and, yes, on a number of occasions. Gosh, I'd say maybe even more than 10 occasions, I recall going over to the Talmadges' house in Washington and staying there during the day. And I have very vivid

memory of watching Johnny Weissmuller on black and white Tarzan movies on television while sitting back in their back room there at that house. And so I knew both the Talmadges. They were both super people to me and Betty Talmadge to this day I have very fond memories of. She was very nice to me.

SHORT: Well, I didn't mean to interrupt.

BURSON: No, that's quite alright.

SHORT: We were coming back to Georgia. It was 1962.

BURSON: Yep, that would have been about right. And as I recall, Senator Talmadge was not happy with Dad for resigning that job. I think they were able to patch things up, but Talmadge kind of felt abandoned by Dad and felt at a loss of his talents. And Dad had mixed emotions about maybe having alienated a very powerful man. And he was not sure what he wanted to do, but he did have connections back through Jimmy Bentley and the political Democrat Party back in Atlanta. I'm trying to think, did he come back to Atlanta to work for Carl Sanders?

SHORT: He came back first with Bentley.

BURSON: With Bentley, and then moved to Carl Sanders.

SHORT: Then moved to Governor Sanders, yes.

BURSON: As a speechwriter and kind of general campaign, political adviser.

SHORT: Right, yes.

BURSON: And we moved in with my grandmother again in Thomaston, Georgia. My granddad had passed probably a year or two before, I think in 1960. He'd had a massive heart attack. And that had affected Dad very much. And I was also very close to my grandfather; I remember that being a very sad time. But we moved in with my grandmother. It was about two years after my grandfather's death and Dad bought a little white Fiat, one of the Italian cars that had just been started importing into the United States, that he used to commute to Atlanta. And I remember that thing broke down all the time and left him stranded all over the place.

SHORT: There's a story there.

BURSON: Is there?

SHORT: I bought that car from him and drove it, drove both he and I to work in it for a year or two. And then I gave it to Zell Miller, who was attending the University of Georgia and didn't have a vehicle.

BURSON: Really, that car lasted that long?

SHORT: It lasted a long time and the best thing about it was that I would fill it up on Fridays – 90 cents it cost to drive to work for a week. That's pretty good, Forrest.

BURSON: Yeah.

SHORT: Those jobs -- and I've held them -- those jobs with the governors, they'll burn you out.

BURSON: Yeah.

SHORT: And I think Bill sort of got burned out, but he then took another job that was very important to the state, which he did very well, and that was director of probation.

BURSON: Yes, and I do know a little bit about that. Could I take a break at this point?

SHORT: Sure.

[BREAK]

BURSON: Okay, basically, where we were was with Dad starting with Carl Sanders.

SHORT: Yeah, probation.

BURSON: Ok, but before we got into that, Bob, I wanted to make just an observation about the times, something that I remember as a child that I think impacts on the time that all of this occurred, and Dad too. I haven't mentioned my mother's family, but my mom grew up on a farm in Washington County, near Warthen, Georgia, which is near Sandersville and kind of between Sandersville and Sparta. And her family were farmers and her father became involved in other things later. Her mother and father kind of had a split after Mom became an adult and he was living elsewhere. But we used to do a great deal of traveling to visit both of our grandparents. Mom and Dad felt it was very important for us kids to have contact and a relationship with our families and it was something of great value to all of us.

But I remember during those travels when we would stop to get gas or whatever, that you would go to a rest area or to go to the bathroom, and there would be men, women, colored. And this, I think, was vestiges of the old South that still remained and it had a very strong grip on Georgia politics and Georgia culture and the way things actually operated in the South. And actually, to be quite truthful, in the country as a whole. The South got most of the bad publicity about it, but I'm not going to get on that stump. But anyway, I remember thinking and asking my Dad, "Why do we have three sets of restrooms for men, women, and colored?" And he said, "Because the Civil War is still going on, even though it's been over for 100 years. And this is something that I have to deal with and you have to deal with as men who are going to make a difference in this world. And this is wrong, it shouldn't be like this; it's shameful; it's disgusting; it makes no sense intellectually and it makes no sense in the human heart." And I remember him saying those words to me about that. But that was just one incident at the time that I clearly remember.

And of course, during my lifetime, those things went away, but when I was still very young, they were still here in Georgia. And over a very short period of time in my life, 10 to 15

years, those things went away. The transition from the old to the new symbolically, if not totally. But a cultural revolution was going on in Georgia and Dad was a part of that. That's one of the things I'm the most proud of him, and of you, and other people of your generation who worked so hard to make these changes in Georgia to bring it into the new South.

SHORT: It all began, don't you think, Forrest, with the Sanders administration.

BURSON: I do, and that's why I wanted to make that observation at this time, because Dad was very pleased about going to work for Carl Sanders because Carl Sanders was considered to be a progressive governor. And he wanted to make a lot of changes in a lot of the issues, which affected poverty, and ignorance, and racism in Georgia; and Dad was kind of a firebrand and lightning rod for those kind of ideas. And so I think Sanders tempered some of Dad's tendency to be edgy with these things, and Dad gave Sanders a lot of ideas about how to present them in ways that they might could be accepted by the legislature and the county commissioners and things of that nature. But I remember Dad being very happy during the time that he worked with Carl Sanders.

We came to Thomaston, Georgia—I was in the middle of my fifth grade year and went from the Alexandria, Virginia school system, which was one of the best in the nation at that time, to the Upson county school system, which wasn't bad, but with a Southern culture. I'd gone from kindergarten halfway through fifth grade in a very cosmopolitan atmosphere. All of a sudden to come into a Southern town and—practically, I had been taught up there that the North won the Civil War. And then I came back to the South and was taught, “Well, no, actually they didn't.” Anyway, the culture shock for me was pretty profound. But we moved from Thomaston, Georgia to some apartments on Buford Highway in DeKalb County and I believe it was 1961 or '62. And, I remember during those times, Dad feeling very challenged and very uplifted by some of the things that he was able to do politically and working with Carl Sanders. Apparently, they had a very good relationship.

SHORT: They did. So then he goes to the probation department.

BURSON: Yeah, I think that was right about the time that JFK was assassinated. And he went to the probation office and that was his first experience really as managing a bureaucracy. And so he did not come into that position with hidebound, bureaucratic ideas about how things should operate. So, in his usual iconoclastic way, he shook things up there and completely reorganized that department, and established a reputation for himself as an up-and-coming government official with progressive ideas. And this is where I'm beginning to get a little bit fuzzy about the transition between his director of probation to the time that he became assistant regional director of the post office to the time that he became director of the Department of Family and Children Services. And I'm not quite sure where the assistant regional director position fits in. I think it's between the two.

SHORT: Right. In 1967, following his election, Lester Maddox appointed Bill as director of the Department of Family and Children Services. And I always believed, Forrest, that those two individuals had several things in common. Not racial views, but the fact that both of

them came from mill villages, both of them had big hearts, both of them wanted to look after the poorer guys and the people that couldn't take care of themselves. And putting Bill Burson in that position not only gave Bill a chance to do the things that he wanted to do, but it gave Maddox confidence in the fact that he had a person who could do them.

BURSON: Yeah. And I will comment on that in a minute, but I wanted to mention the time when he was assistant regional director at the post office. That was the time when zip codes were being put in place. And Dad was a part of implementing zip codes throughout Georgia. Dad did not hate that job, but he was not challenged by it. And I remember him saying to Mom that he was bored. But when he started working with Maddox, I remember because I was beginning to get old enough to have some ideas and to ask Dad some questions about things at that time too. And so I had seen all of the things on the news about Lester Maddox with the axe handle at the Pickrick restaurant, which you later documented in your book, which was excellent.

SHORT: Thank you.

BURSON: And I asked Dad, I said, "This man seems crazy, Dad. He hates people. He's like J.B. Stoner." Which we had had the displeasure of meeting at a time or two. And Dad said, "No, he's not like J.B. Stoner." He says, "I don't agree with him on his approach to all things and maybe he shouldn't have done that at the Pickrick, but he's a business man and he cares about the small guy." And he said, "I think I could work with him." And apparently—and I don't know quite how they got together and how they established their relationship — but Dad, my understanding is, wrote Lester Maddox's inauguration address, which the national press was so appalled about Lester Maddox being governor and of course his bad publicity in the media at the Pickrick with the axe handles that they were talking about Georgia regressing back a whole century. Then Dad wrote this inauguration speech which was, for Lester Maddox anyway, a completely progressive speech, which got him a turn-about almost in the national press as to how he was perceived. And that Maddox was so pleased about the reaction to that speech that he started talking to him about positions in his administration and somehow that involved to him being appointed to be the director of Family and Children Services when Mrs. Bruce Schaefer resigned as director.

SHORT: The speech was where they met.

BURSON: Was it?

SHORT: Yes, Judge Brooks and I and Bill, took it upon ourselves to produce an inaugural address because obviously Maddox probably would not have had one because he never spoke from a prepared text. He just wandered around talking. So we worked on that speech, for I guess, it must have been three or four weeks. The three of us took it into Maddox and let him review it. And he was astonished by it. He loved it. And so that's where they met. Brooks and I insisted that Maddox find a place for Bill Burson in his administration because he needed him somewhere. He needed his ideas; he needed his thoughts; he needed his intellect. So the first move was to make him director of the department of industry and trade.

BURSON: Oh, yeah.

SHORT: Which didn't work.

BURSON: Right, I remember that.

SHORT: It didn't work, but luckily the job came open at Family and Children Services and he was a perfect person for that job at that time.

BURSON: Weren't there some difficulties in getting his confirmation with the legislature because of perception of him as a liberal?

SHORT: Well, there was a difficulty in getting him approved, but it was because of the fear of the county welfare boards that he would move in there and do things they did not want to do.

BURSON: Well, he integrated the county welfare boards.

SHORT: He did. That's why they feared him. He'd already made it clear that that was what he was going to do.

BURSON: Okay, so that was after his appointment, then. The confirmation came later after his appointment.

SHORT: Yes.

BURSON: He was appointed and then on the job for a while, enough to begin to make people edgy, and then had the confirmation.

SHORT: That's right.

BURSON: I remember our whole family going down to the Capitol for his swearing in. Governor Maddox was very gracious to us, very charming to my mother; I remember that.

SHORT: War on hunger.

BURSON: Yes, and I remember a great deal about the war on hunger because I was old enough to start accompanying my Dad on his trips around Georgia. And this is something he did not have to do, but he started taking me with him to his speeches. And Dad was a great orator. I just am still in awe to this day of his ability to speak publicly. In my own career in Family and Children's Services, I enjoyed speaking publicly too, but never approached his level of skill; his ability to use disparate influences like humor and the Bible and everything to historically and contemporary ideas. To put a speech together to impact an audience of people who may not have even had a high school education sometimes and bring them to a point of view was amazing.

And it was a wonderful education for me to travel around the state. I think I was in probably every whistle stop with him around Georgia. And later, when he got me working on

his campaign for state treasurer, it served me in good stead because I had overcome a lot of my shyness by having to meet all of these people and having Dad try to explain to me their role in things. But Dad had always made it very clear in the family that poverty, and racism, and malnutrition, and lack of education, illiteracy, were the things that he felt was holding back the South from being the great economic and social and cultural engine that it could be. And when he became director of Family and Children Services, the concept of food stamps was just beginning to come up nationally. And I remember my mother decided that she was going to start doing volunteer work for DeKalb County Family and Children Services. So I went with my mother and we worked during the transition from the old surplus commodities program to when food stamps actually went in in DeKalb County as volunteers. So I went from taking out cheese and peanut butter to families to going out as a volunteer, a general services type person, with Mom later on. And this is how I got oriented towards my career in government social work later.

But Dad had grown up knowing hunger. Because at times during his early childhood, income was low and they didn't always have a generous table either. And he felt more fortunate than a lot of the other people in Thomaston Mills that he knew who had even less than the Burson's did that were friends of his and the family. And Dad had seen how the economic caste system worked and how it didn't work, and who got left out and who benefited from it. And he had very egalitarian and populist ideas about how the United States could afford, and should afford, and had a moral obligation to house, clothe, and feed all its citizens and help them get a leg up to get a larger part of the economic pie. So that they could better their lives and their children could be better educated and have a better quality of life too. These were things that I remember him talking about over the dinner table and I remember eavesdropping on his telephone conversations with folks like you. And I also luckily had the opportunity to sit in on various times when my family visited with your family. I remember a number occasions about that. And I remember listening to the discussions of you and Dad about politics and the state of things in the South and how things could be better.

So Dad decided that he really wanted to be a big part of this war on hunger. And that food stamps and the computerization of that program and the pushing of this program through public education and outreach into the 159 counties in Georgia through their county commissions and departments of Family and Children Services was a big key towards moving Georgia into a better position economically where it could better look after all its citizens. And that that impacted not only poor whites, but poor blacks and everybody equally. So Dad pushed hard with the food stamp programs and he began to integrate the county boards of Family and Children Services. And this caused a lot of consternation in some of the counties across Georgia, and they transmitted their consternation to their county commissioners, who began to put pressure on in the legislature. And this resulted in some friction about Dad being confirmed.

But I also remember very vividly—and I wish I knew all the details of who this involved, I think Tom Mann of Gray, Georgia might of been one of the people—but some of Dad's officials went down to, I believe—and if I have the wrong county please forgive me, I don't want to disparage any counties—but I believe it was Glascock County. And the sheriff there was saying that there would be no food stamps or surplus commodities in his county because, "If you kept niggers fed, they wouldn't work." Excuse the use of that word. I know it's politically incorrect, but for this instance, I think it emphasizes the times. And when Dad had some of his staff down there promoting that, some of those folks got locked up, I understand, in the Glascock county jail for being down there promoting that the hungry be fed. Was Tom Mann one of those folks? Yeah. Who were the others? There were three of them that got locked up.

SHORT: John Haynes.

BURSON: My uncle John Haynes. So Tom and John Haynes, was there another one?

SHORT: I can't remember the other.

BURSON: So anyway, three of Dad's staff got locked up down in Glascock county. And I believe the story, as I understand it, is Dad had to go to Governor Maddox and he had to send the state troopers down there to get them out.

SHORT: But you know one interesting thing was that Governor Maddox stood behind your Dad during all of this.

BURSON: Which would have been a contradiction to people who thought that Governor Maddox was such a racist? But I think Governor Maddox was a pragmatist and a businessman and he understood that if all of your citizens aren't productive and can't be a part of the business world, and contributing to the tax base, Georgia's not going to be able to achieve its full potential. So I never talked to Governor Maddox about his views on race. I never had that kind of access to him, so I'm making assumptions here from what I've seen. But whatever his views about race were, he never failed except to play some politics when the legislature was in session about the confirmation. I think that was Baldy's great editorial cartoon of Lester Maddox riding his bicycle backwards over Dad's back during the confirmation hearings. And I think that was one of the cartoons I may have donated to the Richard B. Russell Library; I donated a number of Baldy cartoons about Dad to them. But the Atlanta Journal and Constitution took on Dad as a cause during that time and used him as a lightning brand for their editorials about how things needed to change in the South, about people being fed, clothed, and educated.

SHORT: Too many counties.

BURSON: 159 counties. That goes back to the old county-unit system and it has been a plague in Georgia politics to this day. But it's probably not going to change.

SHORT: So after he was successful with his war on hunger, he decided to seek public office.

BURSON: Yes.

SHORT: 1970.

BURSON: Right. He decided to run for state treasurer. And we did not have a lot of money. We were a very much of a middle-income family. I think I had just started high school about this time and maybe a year or two into it, maybe 9th grade or so, and it was back before I entered my rebellious stage. So anyway, the whole family loaded into the 1969 Ford Country Squire Station Wagon with a 394 barrel and headed out on Georgia highways with magnetic signs on the sides of the car and Burson bucks to pass out.

SHORT: Tell us about Burson bucks.

BURSON: Dad had a picture of a dollar bill, not quite legal tender size, with his picture on the front of it with his famous horn-rimmed glasses and his campaign platforms on the back. One of his campaign platforms came back to haunt him later, and that was that he would invest an equal proportion of the state's tax revenues with the small banks in savings and loans as well as with the big boys like National Bank of Georgia and others that shall remain nameless.

SHORT: The big boys didn't like that.

BURSON: No, the big boys didn't like that. But they really didn't pay a whole lot of attention to Bill Burson in his little station wagon and with his bunch of toe headed kids running out around the state of Georgia. And I remember getting dropped off at a railroad crossing somewhere down in South Georgia near some convenience store or country western store. I remember it was the middle of July, and Dad dropped me off, and handed me a stack of Burson bucks, and said, "Son, go in there and get those people to vote for me." And he drove off. And there I am in the middle of south Georgia with the cicadas singing in the heat and the heat mirage coming up off the railroad tracks going, "Oh man, what am I going to do?" So I went in there and started introducing myself and giving people Burson bucks.

And low and behold, Dad got elected to be the last state treasurer of Georgia, as it turned out. I'm not so sure it would have been the last state treasurer, and I'm going to give some of my personal opinions here and they may not be those that are accepted by a majority of people, but I'm going to give them anyway. When Dad became state treasurer, he started implementing his platform and that is where things began to cause sparks for him politically in Georgia. Because when he started implementing administratively the part about investing that portion of state's proportional share of state tax revenues with small banks in savings and loans, the big banks got upset about this. And my understanding—and this is where family legend could be wrong, I don't think it is but it could be—is that they sent their representatives. One of whom was a particularly large profile individual in the banking community who shall remain nameless for the sake of this, to Jimmy Carter and said, "You've got to get your boy under control. He can't do this." And my understanding is that Governor Carter called Dad in on the carpet and said, "Bill, this isn't going to fly. You can't do this. This is the way we've always operated in Georgia and these people are very influential and powerful and we need to continue to operate this way." And Dad's response was, "But I told the people of Georgia I was going to do it and they elected me to do it." And Jimmy Carter says, "Well, I'm telling you you're not going to do it." And Dad said, "Well, I'm going to do it," and then proceeded to continue to do it.

Next legislative session, funny thing, the state treasurer's office was reorganized out of existence, which left Dad without a job. And this could also be—I don't know how much of this is family legend and how much is fact—but my understanding of what happened is that Dad then found jobs for his staff in other areas of the state where he could, and he blockaded the door to the state treasurer's office and locked it from the inside. And every day he would climb out onto the ledge on the side of the state Capitol—I think it was on the second level—and walk the ledge around to the flower garden next to the steps and jump down into the flower garden and leave while he proceeded to sue the state of Georgia and Jimmy Carter over abolishing a constitutional state office without a referendum. Now, a big problem was we didn't have a lot of money as a

family and, to this day, good legal advice is expensive. And Dad fought Jimmy Carter and his administration all the way up from the lower courts to the higher courts and it got to the Georgia Supreme Court, and my understanding is that Governor Carter had recently appointed some justices to that and, funny thing, they overturned Dad's lawsuit. And Dad, by this time, had exhausted family finances and could not afford to take it to federal court.

So I remember this precipitating a period of great despondency with Dad. And his despondency turned into a bit of alcohol abuse and family things got kind of rough. And I was becoming a rebellious teenager and I remember those being difficult years in which Dad and I became very alienated. But that was a very tough time for Dad because Dad's real ambitions, and I had heard him say this before, was to become a U.S. Senator. And he had seen the state treasurer's office as a stepping-stone towards him being able to do that. And he saw this as a tremendous setback. Now, I thought that this was when he was offered the job with industry and trade. But it was before that?

SHORT: Yeah, that was when Maddox was first elected in 1967.

BURSON: He became a lobbyist for the National Federation of Small Businessmen. That's what it was.

SHORT: There you go.

BURSON: Dad was unemployed for a number of months and a very unpleasant fellow to be around. It's always interesting, family perspectives on an individual and outside perspectives. Everybody that I have ever met that knew Dad that was outside of our family says, "You're so lucky to have Bill Burson as your father. He's the most incredible gentleman and the nicest man I've ever met." If you were his son, who he was saying, "You made a 99 on that test? Why not a 100?" it was a little bit different story.

But, of course during those times -- this was the mid to late '60s -- things were going on tremendously culturally in the United States. My sisters and I were watching TV. We were having the Cultural Revolution. I was interested in rock and roll music. I bought into a lot of the BS propaganda at the time of anti-capitalism, anti-war, and all that. And I started thinking all these wonderful ideas and questioning everything, questioning the church, questioning the establishment. And Dad didn't have the patience for this and was in a bad spot in his career and ego-wise at that time, and so he and I just butted heads during this period of time. Unfortunately, it created a period of alienation between him and me, which lasted into my mid-20s. We were able to resolve it later, thank God, but Dad's emotional state during this period was very rough because he knew his potential. He knew what he had to give, and it didn't seem that anybody wanted it. But after about six months of unemployment, he took this job as a lobbyist for the National Federation of Small Businessmen, which gave him a national perspective on free enterprise in business and capitalism that he found really stimulating and valuable. He flew all over the country. I remember him telling me about that he thought he was going to die one time crossing the Rocky Mountains when the Learjet that he and some of the business travelers were on hit a pressure drop and dropped 6,000 feet in a couple seconds. And they all had no seat belts on and hit the roof of the plane with all their papers and everything, cocktails and whatnot. But he did that job for a while and enjoyed it but it wasn't really where his heart was.

And it's difficult for me to keep the chronology straight during this period of time.

Because during this period of time also, I finished college. I went to Georgia State University and I finished it in three years and got out. But I also was a longhaired motorcycle rider and my Dad didn't want me involved in any political stuff that would reflect poorly on him. And so he and I ended up—I moved out from my parent's home at age 20. And Dad did get me help through the great Gilbert Delaney, who was director of Fulton County DFACS, help me get a job as a caseworker because I had a liberal arts degree and that was what people with a liberal arts degree could do at the time. And I already had an inclination for that kind of work from having been a volunteer with my mother earlier on. So I started working in the food stamp program, food stamp and AFDC programs were kind of melded together, so I started working then as a caseworker. And I was on my own during this period of time. And Dad and I weren't communicating. So I don't have as much personal observations about this period of time because we kind of were not really that close.

SHORT: Where were you in 1972 when he ran for United States Senate?

BURSON: I was still at home in 1972 when he ran for the U.S. Senate. And I helped prepare campaign materials for that but, because of my long hair and beard, I was not presentable on the campaign trail so I did not go to any speaking engagements, but I stuffed envelopes and did all that kind of stuff. Dad hit the road. He decided that he was going to do his campaign by walking across the state of Georgia from Rabun Gap to Tybee Light. And so he did, he proceeded to do that, which I think would have been a great campaign strategy except for one thing: Cox broadcasting and the big banking industry kind of were communicating about whether or not Dad was a malleable person for being in public office. And Cox broadcasting blackballed Dad on his walk across the state and he did not get the coverage that he should have gotten on that campaign trail. And partially as a result of that, he only finished fifth in a field of 15 towards that office to fill Richard B. Russell's seat. And although Dad emerged from that race extremely physically fit, he didn't have much else to show for it. And realized at that point that his marketability as a political candidate probably was over in Georgia because the economic and media powers that he had made a decision that perhaps he just wasn't malleable enough to be a high-powered politician.

One of Dad's problems was that he was not very ethical relative and in order to be a successful politician, in my view, you have to be able to make decisions that may border on the line of what's ethical and legal and not. Dad never could do those kind of things very well. He was the kind of individual that if he said he was going to do something, he had made a commitment, and, by God, he was going to do it and consequences be damned. That doesn't work real well in political office because you can't say, "I feel this way, I think this way, this is just, this is right. Humanity shouldn't be treated this way, the environment shouldn't be treated this way, and I'm not going to compromise on any of these things," and expect to be successful as a politician. I don't think Dad—he said he could come to grips with those things—I don't think in his heart, and spirit, and character, he ever really could. So when it came down to the brass tacks of negotiating those critical issues that could have made him a higher profile and more powerful politician in Georgia and in the nation, he could not compromise his moral core to do those things.

SHORT: Then along came Zell Miller.

BURSON: Yep. And Zell Miller apparently saw things in Dad that he felt that he could use and he offered him a job and put him to work. And I think for the next 15 years Dad was his office manager, campaign manager, general adviser, speechwriter.

SHORT: Right arm.

BURSON: Axe man.

SHORT: There's a story there. Zell and I are very close friends; we grew up together. And after he was elected lieutenant governor, he called B. Brooks and me and asked us to have lunch with him at the Marriott. So we go down and Zell Miller says, "Now, I've got something I want to run by you. I want to hire this individual in my office, but I will not do it if either of you have any objections." Well, he knew full well that neither one of us would object, so Bill became a part of the Miller team and did a great job for him. There was one interesting aspect of his service there though was in 1980 when Zell Miller ran against Senator Talmadge for his Senate seat. Bill actually worked in that campaign as Miller's political guru. Did he ever talk about that?

BURSON: No, he never really did. And, like I said, we had a number of years 'til I was almost 30 where Dad and I did not communicate a lot. We had had—my exit from the Burson home had been precipitous. And although Dad followed my career and was willing to be helpful as I rose through the ranks in the Family and Children Services bureaucracy and later the DHR bureaucracy, we never were really close during those periods of time. I feel a great loss from that. I wish that—unfortunately I have enough of my Dad in me to where it is very difficult for me to compromise too. Neither one of us wanted to admit that we were wrong in certain aspects of our approach with each other. So until I finally gained enough maturity to say, "It's not important for me to be right, it's more important for me to have a relationship with Dad," we didn't have a lot of communication. So he really did not communicate with me a lot about those years. I feel a great loss for that and blame myself. I wish that I had had a greater level of maturity. Luckily, like I said, by the time I was 30, we had patched all of those things up.

Of course, that was towards the end of his time with Zell Miller. He enjoyed very much those times, but the sad thing about it was that Dad felt that he was a failure. And I argued with him about this many times. I kept saying, "Look what you've achieved. Look what you were a part of. Look how influential you were." "But I never got to be a senator. I never had a shot at being governor. I could have done so much. I could have made such a big difference." I said, "Look at the difference you made." He never understood his contribution to Georgia becoming a different place, indeed to the South becoming a new place. He never understood that or had a lot of insight into it. He loved you, and Zell, and his other friends greatly. He loved the things that y'all were able to do together, but for some reason he could not see the big picture significance of it. And to his last day, he felt like he was just an honorable government servant.

SHORT: We used to call ourselves the back-room boys and he certainly had more to do with progress in Georgia than any other individual that I know because of his intellect and his ability to think and his ideas and approach to life. He retired after Miller left the lieutenant governor's office. What was life like for Bill Burson after retirement?

BURSON: Rough. He thought he wanted to retire. He thought he wanted to be out of it. He unfortunately had some bitterness about things that he struggled to resolve. I just don't think he was a happy man. I think he would have done better to continue on to work. But he did do other things. He worked for—I think it was Georgia Tech he worked for for a while in their information office. And he also, humorously enough, worked for Publix a few blocks from the high-rise Bennington Towers where he and Mom had a luxury high rise. And he would walk over to Publix and he was one of those guys that would cook up the samples and serve samples to people. And every time I went in there, because I went in there a number of times just to say hi, he was always surrounded with these gray-haired ladies who were talking to him in rapt attention. And I would just stand a couple aisles over and just watch him. He always had a knack for talking to everyday people.

And I wish so much that Dad had had the ability to be malleable enough to get his personality and intellect into higher positions of power. But I think Dad's lightning rod contributions to the abilities of others who did have those talents were what made Dad great. He was one of those behind the scenes technicians that worked with the personalities and intellects of people who could wield the power without dealing in such black and white with the moral and integrity type and honor issues that Dad had difficulty with. He could influence those people. He could intellectually persuade them to his point of view. He could use facts and figures and emotion to show somebody a way to do something that they might not think was otherwise achievable, and convince them that it might be a good idea when they hadn't otherwise thought it was. And that, I think, was his overall contribution of taking his great mind and his great spirit and putting it into the public arena indirectly.

SHORT: Before we get into your own political and professional career, is there anything that we've left out that we should say about Bill Burson?

BURSON: I can only say that despite our differences and our time of alienation, which lasted almost a decade, to my regret, I loved him dearly and I miss him greatly. And I would love so much to have his perspective on the world today. I know that he was considered by people in Georgia and the media to be this great “liberal.” But his idea of being a Democrat was very different from the Democratic Party we see today. Like I said before, Dad was more of a populist and a centrist. He was a person for the little man, but he was a person that saw the value of helping the little man step up on the economic and educational ladder and help themselves rather than create dependency.

And I remember he and my uncle Nick Petkas, who married my Dad's sister Gloria, we used to do down there and visit them in Jupiter, Florida sometimes. I spent a lot of summers down there, fishing and surfing and things like that, much to my Dad's dismay. But when they would go down and visit, my uncle Nick, who was a staunch Republican conservative, and my Dad, who was a liberal Democrat or what was considered to be liberal at the time, would have these long-lasting, heated political arguments. And my cousin Steve, whose two years younger than I, would sit in rapt attention and listen to them argue with each other until they got so put out with each other they couldn't even speak. But I got an understanding of Dad's idea of liberalism and what the Democratic Party should be about was one of helping capitalism succeed so that the little man would have access to the bigger economic pie and be able to help him and his family rather than to create dependency on government. And I think that's an important distinction today because unfortunately—and of course this is my own personal opinion—I was

raised to be a yellow dog Democrat, but the Democratic Party that I see today is not the Democratic Party that existed then. And I would love to hear Dad's perspective on this. Because there's been so many changes since he died 13 years ago this November that I would love to hear his perspectives on the world. And I greatly miss him being here.

SHORT: Tell us about your career with the Department of Family and Children Services.

BURSON: I'll be brief about that. It's really of no consequence compared to things Dad accomplished. I think through inspiration from my Dad I did enter a career of government social work and spent my time in the trenches doing AFDC and food stamp casework. But really the bureaucratic stuff really wasn't where my heart was and before I finished my first year as a caseworker at the Fulton county DFCS, I went over to child protective service and started working the streets of the city of Atlanta doing emergency intake on child abuse cases. And became very involved with the juvenile courts and the counseling agencies around, both public and private, and the police department, and rape crisis. Spent a lot of Friday and Saturday nights down at Grady Hospital emergency room with kids who had been physically and sexually abused. Saw and heard things that can change your view on life, I think just like being a participant in a war zone. You don't ever look at the world the same after you've done something like child protective services, particularly in a place like the city of Atlanta. I used to work the midnight to eight o'clock shift out of the emergency shelter, which was down across from the old Plaza drugs at Ponce de Leon and North Highland. And of course I knew all the street people down there and I had my Dad's knack for being able to relate to them.

So I lived in a world back then of hookers, strippers, narcs, detectives, emergency room personnel. It was very exciting, gets in your blood. But it also burns you out and after I did that in 1997, I went to the University of Georgia School of Social Work and got my master's degree. And then worked my way up through the ranks in Family and Children Services. Helped create the 24 hour emergency services—first 24/7 emergency child protective services intake unit in the Southeast. And went from there to being a state office person with the interstate compact on placement of children and then to being deputy director of Hall County Family and Children Services in Gainesville. Then back to Atlanta to become the chief of the adoption unit and computerized that unit and computerized all of the adoption records, which have to be maintained for 100 years after an adoption in Georgia legally. And moved from there to be director of Douglas County DFCS and helped them move to a new office and expand their services. That was when Douglas County was really beginning to boom as an urban county. And we got up to over 100 staff there.

Dad did help me, through Senator Mary Margaret Oliver and Zell Miller and the Lieutenant Governor Pierre Howard, to get on the Senate study committee for foster care and adoptions, which was looking at legislation to reform those laws. And as typical Burson fashion, got on there and ran my mouth a little bit against what things DFCS really wanted me to say, but attracted some positive political attention at higher levels and got a call by Zell Miller saying, "I want you to do something about adoption in Georgia through Tommy Olmstead," then commissioner of DHR. So I went over and talked to Tommy Olmstead and I created the Office of Adoptions under his direction and pulled adoptions out of DFCS at the state level. And we rectified the entire adoption statute and we created an adult adoption reunion registry, the first one in Georgia. And we placed over 5,000 kids for adoption during the few years I was director

of that. And we won two national awards from the feds for adoption excellence in Georgia.

And then a new commissioner came in and they fired me from that job because they wanted to replace me with somebody else. And I sat in exile for six months at a child support office and then got called to be a DFCS regional director, by then DFCS Division Director Juanita Blunt-Clark. And did that for quite a few years. I was regional director of the 10 county metro area here in Atlanta. And then we got a new commissioner who came in and decided that she wanted to get rid of a lot of the old line—it's funny how fast you become old line—old line staff in DFCS and put her own folks in. And I ended up in exile as a training coordinator for the Division of Mental Health, where I finished out my last two years and retired with 34 years of state service three years ago.

SHORT: DFCS has been in the news in recent times. What's that all about?

BURSON: Well, you know to tell you the truth, Bob, I haven't kept up with DFCS. Like Dad was so angry about some of the things that happened to him, I've been very angry with some of the things that happened to me. And I think this happens a lot to public servants. You dedicate a life and a career to public service in your years when you should be the most productive and valued folks around and be consulted as an expert and brought into the planning for the future and leadership transition, planning for people to take your place. To be shunted aside, I kind have studiously avoided DFCS in the news and figured that was their problem. Kind of a childish way of looking at things, but I come by it honestly. So, no, I didn't even know DFCS has been in the news recently.

SHORT: Oh, there's been child abuse cases and that sort of thing that I've read about.

BURSON: There's always child abuse cases in the news about DFCS. I have my own ideas about how DFCS could and should operate, but I've now been out of DFCS for—I've been retired for three years and I was out of DFCS for two years before that, so I don't know how relevant those ideas still are. But I tell you one thing. I think that the Department of Family and Children Services is one of the unrecognized service agencies that is provided by the state of Georgia that does the most good for the least amount of bucks that's around. And those caseworkers get out there and they go into places that the police don't go. And they deal with family situations that the police don't want to deal with. And when you're dealing with psychotic, deranged, drug-addicted—particularly meth now—parents, who would just as soon shoot you as look at you and are possibly armed and you're standing there with your little notebook taking notes and trying to find out how to hook them up with community resources and how to advocate for their abused and neglected children, you're doing a courageous and honorable thing. And my hats are off to those folks that are on the line who do that work every day. They're special people.

SHORT: Well Forrest, this has been a very, very interesting conversation and I'm sure we could go on and on and on about your father. But I want to thank you for the Russell Library at the University of Georgia and Young Harris College for sharing your memories with us today.

BURSON: Well Bob, I am honored to do that and I want to give you my personal thanks and the thanks of my family. My mother said to especially give you her regards, to tell you how

thankful she was. We have appreciated your efforts so much on behalf of Dad and his legacy and his memory. And I think you're a very special individual and am very indebted to you and this process of putting down into a recorded history of the things that Dad was able to accomplish. I often wonder what he would think of us doing this, because he was so modest, he never even wanted a funeral service. And I went against his wishes in organizing the service that we had in which Senator Miller spoke and gave the eulogy. And I know that Dad would have been P.O.'d with me for having done that, but I still think that he probably grudgingly would be happy that someone is at this point recognizing the things that he does.

SHORT: Good.

BURSON: And I appreciate your efforts on that behalf so much.