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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. Our guest today is Bob Cohn, a former Georgia political reporter and a very successful business tycoon. Bob, welcome.

BOB COHN: Good to see you again. It's been a long time.

SHORT: It's good to see you Bob; it has. From Brooklyn to Georgia.

COHN: Okay. Both of my parents died before I was eleven-years-old, my mother of throat cancer, my father of a heart attack, and I was raised by an aunt and uncle. And when I graduated from high school, I didn't have the money to go to college so I joined the air force and I was in there for four years. The last place I was stationed was Montgomery, Alabama, at Maxwell Air Force Base. I came out with a G.I. Bill, which enabled me to go to school. The nearest place was Tuscaloosa, so I went up there and began school there. If they had dropped me in Minnesota, I would have been a graduate of the University of Minnesota. So it was strictly by chance.

I was there for four years. I became editor of the *Crimson White*, which was the student newspaper, and had a very successful campus career there. The campus had the vote on who the editor would be so I ran and was successful with that. A great experience; I met my wife there. She was—I'm a Jewish kid from Brooklyn, she's a Southern Baptist from Haysop, Alabama, which is about twenty miles east of Tuscaloosa. That's fifty years ago; we just celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary on June the 5th. Back in those days, the odds of a marriage like that succeeding were not high, but somehow we muddled through it and got to fifty years. We have three children, all of whom live in Atlanta. All of whom are successful in not only business but also have raised five grandchildren—they are raising five grandchildren, and all those kids are very bright and are doing well.

SHORT: So you're interest in journalism goes back to the University of Alabama.

COHN: Actually, it precedes that. The uncle that raised me was a sports writer for the *New York Journal American*, a newspaper which is now defunct. So all of my life, growing up, I wanted to be a newspaperman. That's where it went back to and that's where it stemmed from.

SHORT: Do you remember your first job as a reporter?

COHN: Yeah, yeah. It was with the *Montgomery Advertiser*. I had worked when I was at Maxwell at night for the *Advertiser* on the sports desk. And when I got out of the service, they needed—well this is after college so I was familiar with the people there and knew [indiscernible] by name. When I got out of college, I went down there and I went to work as the police reporter for the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Once again, I was a Jewish kid assigned to the police department in Montgomery in the middle of the whole civil rights thing. I never dreamed I'd get through that period of my life in one piece. But as it turned out, I was such an underdog from a policeman's point of view that they adopted me, and they gave me a break on every story that came down the road. There again I was successful.

From there, the city editor of the Montgomery paper was offered the managing editor's job in Augusta and he brought me with him to Augusta as the city editor of the *Augusta Chronicle*. I can easily go on after that and tell you that I worked there. I worked in Augusta for two years and when the Atlanta bureau job for the Morris papers, which was Savannah, Athens, and Augusta, became vacant, I immediately knocked on Billy's door and asked if I can have it because I was dying to get out of Augusta. Oddly enough, I had a neighbor whose name was Jim Furman and while I was trying my best to get out of Augusta, he came to me one day and said, "I'm moving from here to Boone, North Carolina." I said, "You've got to be kidding me. I'm trying to get to a bigger city." Well, to make a long story short, Jim has been a lifelong friend. He owns six pharmacies up there and a 100 Wendy's around North Carolina; he's become fabulously rich, so his move to Boone was pretty smart after all. I didn't have that kind of good fortune.

But in coming to Atlanta, prior to that, during the two years I was the city editor of the Augusta paper, I came to the first two legislative sessions and covered them for the Augusta delegation, which, back in those days—I don't know about the legislator today because I haven't followed it, I'm not around here—but a wild men back in those days. Guys that drank heavy, gambled, and did other kinds of things we won't talk about. They're very colorful people. Nothing like Bobby Pafford, who would cry and they would keep him in a chamber, locking the house doors, Bobby roaring. All these unbelievable characters and there were some from Augusta as well. Jim Hull, Bill Fleming, but they're another story and they're a good story about, which I wish I can tell you later, about the passage of the Mixed Drinks Bill.

So I would room with them at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel. And Hull was a gambler who couldn't—he was always gambling. He'd set up a glass in the room there, and putt a golf ball into the glass, and bet. He'd go down to get his car in the garage and he'd start pitching quarters to the wall with the garage attendants. There was no stopping him. He actually stopped himself a number of years later, tripped over a log in his backyard with a shotgun in hand, blew himself up. Dramatic ending. His daughter is a federal judge, Frankie Hull, was her name and a wonderful person. Fleming also became a judge but in Augusta.

So it was a good time. J.B. Fuqua was in the senate with Gene Holley. Holley later went on to become an oil magnet in the far Middle East, but he developed a problem there where the oil mixed with some sediment and it had to be removed before it was usable. And he would have

had to build a multi-million dollar plant just to do that and he went broke, unfortunately. Holley was a great friend of mine. When we went into business, he said he would pick up the cost of the rent for as long as we needed it, which was a very gracious thing. So at that point in time when we no longer needed it, I went to Augusta and I bought him a gold Rolex watch, had it inscribed on the back what a wonderful friend he had been. Many years later, I went into that jewelry store for another reason and here the jeweler told me that Holley had hocked the watch with him, and that was a heartbreaking kind of a thing because he really was a good guy. Of course, Bob Fuqua and his immense success. I didn't, as far as covering him politically—the funniest experience I ever had with Fuqua was when we went out of business. I figured I'd call on all the people that I knew and see if they would help me. I went into Fuqua's office and, by this time, he was super rich, and I waited for him to come out of his office. He came out, shook my hand, and he said, "Bob, what can you do for me?" And I thought for a minute, what can I do for you? I have no idea. You're rolling in money. I want you to—it was a twist on the thing. He never did anything for me but I thought he—I don't know if he did that with everybody or just with me. "What can you do for me?" And I'm looking around, "No, not much."

SHORT: Let's talk about some of the people and issues that you covered at the State Capitol. When you got there, I think you told me, Carl Sanders was governor.

COHN: Right.

SHORT: And you covered his administration.

COHN: Right.

SHORT: He was from Augusta.

COHN: Right.

SHORT: What sort of relations did you have with Governor Sanders?

COHN: Fair, really. He played more to the Atlanta papers, Reg Murphy, Charlie Pugh. I was sort of an asterisk over here somewhere and understandably, understandably. Sanders, and all the guys around him really, they had big egos. Competent people but they thought well of them themselves, overly so, and Sanders led the pack in that regard. He's the only guy I've ever met in my life that in his law office had a bust of himself, which spoke to what kind of a person he was; he thought well of himself. And he did some good things, no question about it. He and Larry Lloyd, Doug Barnard, John Harper, his press secretary, all of those people had an attitude. When you came in, you were like a good old country boy. You never struck me as somebody with an attitude, but all those people had attitudes. And I'll never forget I almost got into a fistfight with Doug Barnard, who was his executive secretary, because I knew that a press release was coming out—I don't remember what the subject was—Barnard dismissed it, nothing like that was happening, about an hour later it happened. And I went into his office and I pushed him. He didn't do anything; he didn't come back at me. But Sanders—they called him "Cufflinks Carl." He was a wealthy guy, he belonged to the Augusta National, he came to office having had already a very successful law practice in Augusta. He had that air about him of

wealth, confidence, and I'd like to refer here if I can to a couple of notes which I made here. But I thought he was somewhat self-indulgent, had a cottage at Sea Island, it was upper crust stuff and I was of course not upper crust stuff. Far from it. I don't remember how much I was making at that point in time but it certainly didn't entitle me to a cottage at Sea Island; never has, it's a fact. Only Reg Murphy has a place down there and "Herky" Harris, I don't know if you remember that.

Sanders, of course, designed and built the Governor's Mansion only to see somebody as opposite as he be the first occupant in Lester Maddox. It was built in a stately manner; had it been designed for Maddox, it probably would have been a lot different than it was. I'm sure they were distraught over that. Very snappily dressed. He was a health enthusiast in college. He used to run around Ansley Park when the mansion was in Ansley Park, and he wore a warm-up suit but everybody in the capital referred to it as "Carl's Bunny suit;" to me he'd look like a bunny with a light blue and they made fun of him. But he was one of the first guys that was actually taking good care of himself. And I guess it's paid off, he must be eighty-five, eighty-six years old now. Carl's second campaign for governor, the thing I remember most about it, was we were down in south Georgia, I think it was Brunswick, and he had a private plane. And we got up in the air and that plane—I have traveled all over the world many times, never been in turbulence like that plane was in. It was a small two-engine plane and we got bounced—I thought this is the end of the world for me. How we got out of that thing alive, I'll never know. It was really quite an experience and really the only thing I remember from his campaign was getting—he was in the plane, I was in the plane, there was a pilot, and man, that thing was tumbling all over the place.

(BREAK)

SHORT: I don't know how much cover you did of the civil rights movement but if you have any memories of covering that, like to talk about that.

COHN: Yeah, I didn't cover a lot of the civil rights movement out of Augusta; I did some of that. And of course, in Montgomery, I was right in the middle of it during the height of the movement and of the turmoil that surrounded it. I was in a church with Martin Luther King when just guarded with federal agents. It was a frightening time really getting involved in the coverage of the civil rights movement in Montgomery. I was at the bus station in Montgomery when the Freedom Writers came through and John Lewis came off the bus and got his head smashed in. I actually saw that. Interestingly, the head of the State Highway Patrol, who was a very straight and narrow guy, jumped on the guy that was beating Lewis and stopped him. But prior to that, that evening that they were supposed to come in—they didn't come in that evening, but we're all at the bus station expecting that they would be there. And when they didn't show up—it was nothing but Ku Klux Klan guys waiting for the bus to come in—and when they didn't show up I decided to go home. And I lived only a few blocks from there up Court Street. So I got in my car and drove out of the driveway and all of a sudden, another car pulls up behind me and follows me. And I turn left, the other car turns left; another left, other car turns left. Boom, into my backyard, I jump out of my car, I run upstairs, and I call the police. Nothing happened but the next morning another guy, the police reporter for the afternoon paper, said, "Where were you going in such a hurry last night, Bob? I followed you 'til you got home." But it was tense; tense times where you suspected danger lurked around every corner. Again, a Jewish reporter.

I remember, Sea Island has got some problems now, but when they had the Southern Governors' Conference down on Sea Island when Sanders was governor, there were two guys that the Cloister would not house, two reporters, Herb Kaplow and me, because we were Jewish. We had to stay over at the King and Prince Hotel. But in terms of anti-Semitism and feeling it throughout my career, I really haven't felt much of that. Chick-fil-A was a client of mine for twenty-eight years. I never felt that I had suffered because of it; I felt okay about it. I went to—what's the name of the town? Thompson, Georgia, and there's little towns down there where the Klan held rallies and things like that and I went to those, I covered them. I have a picture of me interviewing Bobby Shelton who was the Grand Dragon of the Klan; should have brought it. But I didn't have that much involvement in covering the civil rights movement, just a few things that I've talked to you about. Now, as far as—you said the legislator got its first black person in '63. This is before reapportionment?

SHORT: After reapportionment.

COHN: After reapportionment. Now, I'm telling you that reapportionment didn't take place 'til '64.

SHORT: Okay. Well—

COHN: Here it is.

SHORT: Okay, well after reapportionment the Georgia House was integrated with several well-known blacks from Atlanta. Let's about that for a minute, if you will. There was Julian Bond.

COHN: Right.

SHORT: There was Grace Hamilton and others who played prominent roles in legislature after that, but what I'm interested in talking about is the reaction by the legislature to the integration of its ranks back in those days.

COHN: I don't recall general reaction except what is related to Julian Bond. He was the firebrand. He was more opposite of the general population of the house than any of those other people. Those other people were sort of quiet but he wasn't. Unbelievably articulate guy who I thought a lot of. In fact, I did a very interesting story for *Atlanta Magazine*. I got Roy Harris who was then the president of the White Citizens Council to sit down with Julian Bond, and I taped the discussion like you and I are doing right now. And that played in *Atlanta Magazine*; it was really a terrific thing.

I had a good relationship with Julian Bond and I think most reporters did. Matter of fact, he was in the hospital for an unmentionable thing and I went to his hospital room to visit him. There was a guy that I thought had an immense amount of talent politically but he never did anything with it; it never went anywhere. And I remember—some things I shouldn't say here—but he used to brag about women he slept with and how many. I won't go into it. I saw him at the Atlanta airport one time and he said, "Have you ever slept with twins?" I said, "No, I haven't." I don't know if the women took it out of him or what took it out of him but something denied him by his own doing I thought. But I liked him. Going to the convention in '68, that was a

tough time for both Maddox and Bond. They tried to work out a compromise. It didn't sit well with Maddox and he bolted the convention with me on the front page of the *New York Daily News*. Want me to show you that?

SHORT: That was a very uncontrollable convention.

COHN: It was insane, yeah, really insane. Our hotel was filled with stink bombs in the air conditioning system. Steve Ball and I were there and we roomed together. And were so joyous by the time that thing was over, instead of flying back we said let's take a train and just relax, which is what we do. We took a train, I don't know how long it took, but it was a much more relaxing—just to try to decompress from the experience in Chicago. It's a crazy time, crazy really.

SHORT: I'm sure that—

COHN: The one thing that, before coming here I did, I went on the web and did some research and some research on Lester Maddox. Not a word anywhere about the fact, in any history, that he actually ran for the Democratic presidential nomination. And it's strange that that's the case because he was accorded the rights of every other candidate that was running for president. Wherever he went, secret service went with him. When he traveled, there was a helicopter above to make sure nothing happened to his car. And that struck me as unbelievable, being there and seeing Lester Maddox getting that kind of attention. But he got it all. And I'll never forget the one thing I remember from that is him going to the Michigan delegation and standing up there and saying, "Boys, we've got them on the run," which I thought was very funny. Lester was positive I guess. I've been surprised that there is not a glimmer of that in any history and it should be noted because it was interesting; he was a sideshow to what was really going on, but it was a pretty good show.

Steve and I wrote, probably one of the best things I've been involved in writing, we wrote two very long pieces on Lester's experiences as a presidential candidate for *Atlanta Magazine*. I tried to track them down this week to see if I wouldn't recall some of the very funny stuff in there. It was hilarious; the whole episode was funny. You mentioned some other things and I don't remember what.

SHORT: Let me ask if you recall what happened after that Democratic convention. That year was the bolting of several constitutional officers who switched parties.

COHN: Yeah.

SHORT: Around the capitol, they were known as the clique. Do you remember that?

COHN: I remember specifically Jimmy Bentley was a good friend of mine and I didn't think much of the idea. Obviously, those guys were forerunners of what's happeners, which is very unfortunate that I don't have a vote here. In fact, Atlanta is like an island in the middle of sea of—I don't even know what you'd call it, not good stuff. I get calls on the telephone wanting me to vote for this guy, that guy; I said, "You know, I really don't have a vote. There's nobody I can vote for because they're going to lose for sure. It's not even close." So that switch

was Jack Ray, Jimmy Bentley, I don't remember who the other guys were, which I thought was odd really at the time. Bentley came out of a political past where segregation was very much a part of his make-up. But even so, I didn't expect that he would do that but he did. He made a lot of money and then I think he lost it in real estate.

SHORT: Then he ran for governor as a Republican;

COHN: Yeah

SHORT: Was defeated by Hal Suit.

COHN: Right, Hal Suit. When I mention Hal Suit, I can only remember one thing about him. In my time in Atlanta, the absolute best reporter, the best that I've ever seen here in this city, was Aubrey Morris at WSB Radio. This guy was a dynamo. And I'll never forget him walking into—Hal Suit was at six o'clock news was on the air and Aubrey walked in and threw a microphone in front of him and said, "Are you running for governor?" which took Suit; shocked him by complete surprise. But that was—Aubrey was just a phenomenal guy that had no barriers stop him. He went right in there, even in his own company, and did that. So I always had a great deal of respect for him.

The other guys that were around at that time, you know Reg, you know his history and what he—he made a lot of money. And Charlie Pugh, I don't know whatever happened to him. He must have died. I never heard much about him.

SHORT: Charlie did some history work over at the University of Georgia.

COHN: Did he?

SHORT: Research and in fact, he has some timelines on the computer that are very helpful for people who like to look back on past.

COHN: Good. Then Steve and there was another guy, Burrell Sellers, who worked for the Savannah papers during the session. Burrell was the most prolific writer I've ever met. He'd file ten stories a day, I don't know what he's writing about, but he filed a lot of stories. I wasn't that prolific. I didn't see that much in a lot of the stuff that he wrote but the Savannah papers loved it and that was good.

SHORT: You had your wire service reporters.

COHN: Yeah. Ted Simons. Remember Ted?

SHORT: Oh, yeah. Pete Haines.

COHN: Yeah, Pete. Well of course, he had a get in with Sanders, Pete Haines, very close to Sanders. I best remember Ted Simons. There was a girl I think working in the Speaker's office—this shouldn't go into history but I don't give a damn—that worked in the Speaker's office, had the best looking legs that you've ever seen. And Simons said, "That girl's legs are so great she could walk you off." And he referred to her as "Legs". I had a secretary when I first

went into business who could type ninety-six words a minute; that was her nickname, ninety-six. But Pete had a wonderful rapport, was considered very accurate; he was a very good reporter. I don't remember who else. Remer Tyson may have been around there or came later. Celestine Sibley, who everybody loved, which is odd for a reporter to have that kind of—that people had that kind of feeling about her. It's a good thing; she was really a special person. In the pressroom itself, I remember during Lester's administration, that Lester would come out in the morning, and say something crazy, and then top it in the afternoon. You never had to worry about covering both the a.m. and the p.m. papers. After a while, we got bored with it. We knew he was coming; we could count on that for a story. So Steve Ball and I erected a dartboard in the pressroom. And we played darts about five hours a day and became so proficient at it we started hitting bars and playing for money. We really did very well. It was shortly after that that I realized my life has got to be something bigger than this, shooting darts, and that's when I decided to go into business with Steve, who I reluctantly dragged along with me. He ran into some problems a few years later. He was married and had a couple of kids. But the family went down to Panama City on vacation and he met this very voluptuous girl on the beach, who was the weather girl for the local station down there in Panama City. And when I say voluptuous, I mean this broad was something else. She landed up with him; he landed up with her. She turned him onto drugs and he went straight down the tubes. He recovered from that, and has been married for maybe seventeen years now and lives in Fort Deposit, Alabama. I called him last night, asked him if he remembered any good Lester Maddox stories, said, "Nah." What he does now is—he was an outstanding reporter, great reporter also. He now delivers flowers for his wife's flower shop. Too bad.

SHORT: What do you remember about the Maddox-Callaway race for governor?

COHN: I remember Bo Callaway particularly because he had eyebrows like a Lhasa Apso; you could hardly see the guy, these giant bushy, bushy eyebrows. But I also remember Callaway, if there was a receiving lines, he would be shaking hands with you but looking at the next person. So he didn't really understand the warmth of personal communication and I really think that hurt him, that's what really hurt him. As far as the race or details of the race, I really don't remember a hell of a lot about it.

SHORT: It went to the legislature.

COHN: Yeah, I remember that, absolutely. Of course, it was a shocking thing for everybody that Lester emerged from all of that as the governor. But given what happened with Callaway failing to get a majority of the vote and the legislature voting on it, obviously it was virtually all Democratic and they gave it to Lester. The Republicans really sort of screwed themselves in the Democratic primary; they didn't have a primary. So they went into the Democratic primary and voted for Lester Maddox believing he would be the guy that Callaway would beat easily. And then there was a run-off and they did the same thing. So it landed up, sort of backfiring on them. Callaway was a nice guy, capable individual that served secretary of the army and I'm sure in some other distinguished jobs. There too was a guy from big money. And in contrast to Lester Maddox, who was a man of the people sort of speak, as opposed to Callaway, who was a man of the money. As exemplified by Callaway Gardens and the history of textiles mills and all that.

SHORT: Were you around when Carl Sanders and Jimmy Carter had their very famous race for governor?

COHN: Yeah, that was the race in which I had the trouble in the airplane.

SHORT: Oh, it was.

COHN: Yeah.

SHORT: You knew Carter?

COHN: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you a story about him. I went down to visit him, do a story down at his farm, and the nats were so unbearable coming up my nose, my eyes, and my ears. I said, "I don't know how the hell anybody can live with this." And I guess, if you could live with this, you could do anything because I couldn't live with it for sure. Interestingly, Jimmy Carter, in my book, turned out to be a bad guy. He was signing, autographing books in Ansley, over in Ansley Square. And my little grandson was maybe three years old. And we were there at the cafeteria and walked past the bookstore, saw him in there, and went in there with my little grandson to introduce him to the former President of the United States. And Jimmy said to me, "I'll never forget those horrendous stories you used to write about me." And I looked at him and I said, "What are you talking about? I don't know what you're talking about." I said, "The newspaper editorially was dramatically opposed to you, but I never wrote any bad stories about you." He said, "I'll never forget it." I said, "I'll tell you what, we handled, my company handled the opening of your presidential library. The executive director there ordered about three years' worth of embossed stationary and other fancy frills. You fired him and refused to pay us about \$150,000. We can settle this if you just stroke a check now." And I said, "I don't even hold that against you." One of those things that happened in business.

But Carter was, I don't know, like I said, we covered his campaign. He had one of the guys who was involved financially in his campaign was Jim Cushman who was developing Colony Square, P Street and 14th Street. So when we went out calling on the Fuquas and the other people in the world, I went to Cushman because I knew he had given money to Carter, had this project. And he was our second client. Our first was George L. Smith, who hired Steve and I to create the first public information office for the House of Representatives, and then we did the same thing with the senate. And for several years, we staffed it during the legislature. And then Cushman hired us, gave us free office space, paid us some money. The first thing he asked us to do, Steve and I, was to create a slideshow for his complex there. Steve and I looked at each other—what do we know about doing a slideshow. So there was a guy with Amber Grant, Weyman, who had worked for Bentley's campaign with that school bus, I don't know if you remember that commercial. Let's get this guy Weyman in here and see if he could help us. We worked for three days and three nights and finally put it together. Brought it up to show it to Cushman and again this is the first real client. Showed it to Cushman, the lights came on, and I looked at him and said, "Well, What did you think?" And he said, "Sheep dip." And I looked at Steve and I said, "What does he mean?" I guess that was the polite way of saying something else, so that was my first PR experience. And with a lot of clients, it never got better than that.

SHORT: You made a very famous photograph while you were covering the State Capitol.

COHN: Yeah, brought it with me. Denmark Groover. Denny, for years afterward, he used to say, “You know, Bob, you showed my ass to the world.” This picture ran on the front page of every major newspaper in this country. Ran in *Newsweek*, I have a copy of that here. But what happened here was I always carried a camera with me in the event that I was in a situation based really upon my experience in the civil rights era that if anything happened that I happened to see that I could shoot it. Well, there were a load of photographers in the house at this point of time, but for some reason I was the only guy that saw Denny run out the back door, and jump over the rail and tear the clock. I was the only one who got this picture. And it’s an iconic picture for Georgia politics. It was entered in a Pulitzer competition and, unfortunately, came in second to the Ruby Oswald picture. So I got bumped by Ruby Oswald.

But what used to happen in this thing here, George T. Smith was the Speaker at the time. They couldn’t make a decision on how to reapportion. And he stopped the clock at ten minutes to twelve because they had to adjourn sine die at midnight, and so he ordered the clock stopped and they continued to debate for several hours. Usually on the last day of the session, the legislators—I don’t know about today—but back then, drank a lot. So there was a heavy dose of alcohol floating through the place. And I guess Denny had a drink or two, I don’t know, but I saw him bolt after the vote in which his guy lost out in the reapportionment. And so I saw him bolt and then I figured where the hell he going? I looked up at the balcony and there he was coming. I had my camera and boom, got him. Denny, I liked him. He was a nice guy. His political views were very different from mine; I think he later recanted as he was dying about some of his years. But I didn’t know he was a fighter pilot hero in World War II; I didn’t know that until I read about him at some point in time. Distinguished guy.

SHORT: The Black Sheep’s Quadrant.

COHN: Yeah, that surprised me. He didn’t look like a fighter pilot, a little too stocky. I didn’t know he could fit into a cockpit. So that was an interesting evening to say the least. That was fun to watch.

SHORT: Why did you leave your job as a reporter?

COHN: Well, as I said, we were sort of bored with Maddox. I wasn’t making very much money, you know how reporters were paid in those days, probably still are today for all I know. And I had a growing family; I had a wife and three kids. I was working for the *Mars* newspapers but I was also stringing for *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*, just trying to make a decent living. I’d work sixteen-hour days and I just got tired of it. I said, “I’ll tell you what, I’ll go to George Goodwin,” who had the Bell and Stan, the biggest public relations firm in Atlanta. Goodwin didn’t want to hire me. So I decided I’ll go try it on my own, figuring that if I failed I could always go back to being a newspaper reporter. But as it turned out, even at the very outset, we were very successful.

We hit a bump in 1974 that was a real estate recession. Cushman lost everything he had in it, but he was an honorable guy, and he wanted to somehow compensate me. He owed us about \$150,000. He had a big ranch down in south Georgia—hopefully the name of the town will come to me—it was called Millarden Ranch and he had thousands of Black Angus cattle on that

ranch with a magnificent southern mansion. And he said to me, “Bob, I can’t pay you the money, but I’m going to give you 100 Black Angus cows for \$1,500 a piece.” So here I am again, a Jewish kid from Brooklyn with a herd, which was okay except for the fact that shortly thereafter meat prices plummeted and feed prices went up. All of a sudden, I’m feeding these damn things. So I said to him, “We got to get rid of the cows man, I can’t take it.” So we had an auction and I took them in at \$1,500, they were auctioning them off for about \$600 apiece, which is okay except for the fact that Cushman was so desperate. He kept the money from the auction and I had to sue him for cattle wresting.

In business, collecting receivables is a very distasteful thing. And the best story I remember about that is down in Tampa there was a guy who used to be a policeman, his name was Captain Smith, but he retired from the police force. He was developing things for the police, clubs, handcuffs, whatever. And he came over with an idea called the killer keychain, Captain Smith’s Killer Keychain. And he hired us to promote it. What it did was if somebody attacked you, you’d take your keychain, and push up against the person, an electric shock into them, and throw them back about ten feet. His receivables built and billed; he wasn’t paying the bills. The problem was nobody wanted to go down there and try to collect. Those were fun days.

SHORT: Cohn and Wolfe.

COHN: Yeah, Norman Wolfe was the editor of the *Orlando Sentinel Star*. He went through a divorce in Orlando. And he was a very proper guy and was very embarrassed by it so he moved to Atlanta and I met him. And at that time at Colony Square there was an ice rink in the middle of Colony Square, and he and I met in a little fast food restaurant that was next to the ice rink. Must be 45 degrees in the restaurant, we were shaking. We talked about it, and I landed up giving him a third of the business. And I felt he had administered a large staff of people, those were skills I didn’t have. And in fact, whenever I speak to a journalism class or public relations class, not that often these days, I always tell them you have to get over to business school because sure enough after four or five years of this you’re going to be handling people and developing budgets. You need to get into business school for some of this stuff. So I had none of that background and Norman did, so we were a great combination together because of our different skills. Mine was creative and selling and his was managing the business.

Norman, much older than I and not in great health today, but we had an unbelievable run. I sold the business and when we sold it, we had twenty-four offices around the world. The company I sold it to WPP out of London, Cohn and Wolfe, the company I founded, now has sixty-three offices around the world. It’s amazing really.

SHORT: Are you still involved?

COHN: No, no. I ended in 1998 after the Atlanta Games. We had tremendous amount of Olympic—I was something of an Olympic expert having worked for Coke on the Olympics from 1979 on. We made a lot of money in ’96, ’97, and then decided it was time for me to go.

SHORT: What makes a good PR guy?

COHN: Well, there are different kinds of people in the public relations business. I was there to make money and to have fun. I wasn’t there to solve the world’s problems. Then there were

guys in that business who were there to solve the world's problems or corporate problems, crisis communications, all that kind of stuff. I didn't really have any interest in that. My interest was in taking on things that you could have fun with, that were lighter than that. Now we've gotten involved in some heavy stuff, like—what was Ernie Vandiver, what was the guy's name? Who was close to Ernie Vandiver, a legislator?

SHORT: Peyton Hawes

COHN: Peyton Hawes, yeah. Peyton Hawes hired us when Carter was President to fight for the funding for the Russell Dam. Steve and I came up with a campaign, which we played against Congress. Carter had killed every major water project in the country as a way of reducing the budget including the Russell dam. So we went to Washington and we developed a campaign, both ran it in the *Washington Post*, and we had come up the idea of delivering special stuff to the congressmen that was very unique. In the *Washington Post*, the ads that we wrote said, "Give a Dam! Vote wet." It was good stuff. Then what we did was we had that same line on—we got big sheets of steel, not something you could, big sheets of steel, and we had those things delivered to every congressman's office. You couldn't throw it in the trashcan; you had to get rid of it some other way. But it stuck with them. We had a box of rocks from the river and we put them in a box, a black box, and what we said is the only thing that's down there that we're going to wash over these rocks, there's no animals down there endangered by this effort. And sure enough, they voted for it. They overrode Carter and voted for it. So that was a very big thing.

We handled the extensive of Georgia 400, the opposition to it; we handled that. We handled the opposition to the fourth runway at Delta at the airport. We handled the expansion of the interstate system. In terms of handling, we handled the public relations to soften opposition to these things. So we did a lot of that kind of work later on. Earlier on in 1974, we handled six political campaigns and afterward vowed to never do that again. I took one guy down to the *Atlantic Constitution*, got their endorsement. Three days later, he decided to drop out of the race. I felt like an idiot. So there were five left and they all won, every one of them won; only two paid. I said to Steve, "No more of this." I have to tell you one guy, Ford Sphinx, was one of the guys that didn't pay. So we held a fundraiser for him and I got Chip Carter to come down to speak at the fundraiser and raised quite a bit of money. Ford kept it all. We were hoping that would result in us getting paid. Bad business.

SHORT: Didn't you once have an ostrich race at—?

COHN: No.

SHORT: You didn't?

COHN: No, that was Bob Hope.

SHORT: Oh, Bob Hope.

COHN: At the Braves.

SHORT: Well he was once associated with you.

COHN: Yeah, he worked with us. He has his own firm now, very successful, and a very talented guy. Yeah, we hired him from the Braves. We had some really top-notch people. Lee Walburn worked for us. I could name a lot of people that you would know that worked for us over the years; in fact, I think we created an industry. People would leave with some accounts and go somewhere else.

SHORT: It said that you added glitz to public relations in Atlanta.

COHN: Glitz? Yeah that's probably true. I don't know if you'd call it glitz. Depends on how you define glitz. We did a lot of things that have never been done before to promote clients. George Goodwin would describe them as glitz. Both he and I were pitching KLM, the Royal Dutch airlines, and he told the guy that was handling the pitch that if you hired them all they're going to do is plant tulips up and down Peachtree Street and the guy said, "That's just what we're looking for." It was those kinds of things that—but a lot of it was serious but then again I can tell you all kinds of crazy things we did. When I say crazy, effective crazy things we did. Maybe the best example of that is, like I said, we handled—I pressed Coca-Cola in 1979 that they weren't doing anything with their Olympic sponsorship. So I wrote a program, had twenty-three elements in it, to put into place at Lake Placid. I went into the old Coke boardroom, panel walls, pictures of all the guys up there. I've never been in a presentation thing like that. Long tables like this, Roberto goes why don't we sit on the one end, and I was standing at the other end. It was warm in that room and of course, I was nervous as hell so I began to sweat. And I went on about the twenty-three different things and I didn't see him make—his face never moved the whole time and I said, not only am I going down the tubes here, I'm thinking to myself, but all these guys in this room who brought me here are going with me. And when it was over, he said, "Mr. Cohn that's a treasure trove of ideas." But he said he had to pass it before Paul Austin, who was then the chairman of the company. One of the ideas we had was as each team arrived at Lake Placid, let's say from Finland, that we would get a sheep dog, a Saint Bernard, and put a can of Coke around its neck in Finnish, take a picture and send it back to Finland to the media. And Austin wrote in a column of that particular thing, "Don't use puppies, puppies piss on people." So we did the other twenty-two things.

SHORT: You mentioned the Mixed Drink Bill that made Atlanta a convention center.

COHN: Yeah.

SHORT: Tell us about that.

COHN: Well, the Marriott hotel was building the first new hotel in god knows how long in Atlanta and J.W. Marriott went to Sanders and said, "We have to sell mixed drinks to this place. You got to help us get it done." And a coalition of house members, all of whom I knew well, Jim Hull, Bill Fleming, Charlie Jones from Hinesville, Harry Dicus from Columbus, they were the guys who plotted how to make this happen. If you recall, the only way it could happen was to handle it as local legislation for Fulton County only and the Speaker could just gavel it

through in the afternoon when they handled local legislation. But there was one guy from northeast Georgia, and I cannot remember his name unfortunately—

SHORT: Howard Tamplin.

COHN: Was a confirmed dry.

SHORT: Howard Tamplin from Madison, Georgia.

COHN: Yeah. Sat in the house; wouldn't move while local legislation was being passed. So Hull said to me, "Bob are you covering this guy?" I said, "Yeah, he's in our territory, Augusta." He said, "Why don't you take him out in the hall and interview him?" Which I did, and they gaveled it through. That was the only time I ever participated in anything like that, but that's really what happened; that's how that bill passed. Just an interesting—of course, he went nuts. But it stood.

SHORT: You've had a very successful PR business and you've sold out to some firm, but I understand after that that you also formed a new company here in Atlanta. Is that still—

COHN: Biggest mistake of my life.

SHORT: Was it?

COHN: Yeah, I got into business with two people. Unfortunately, one of them was fiscally irresponsible, and the other one went on a two and half year alcohol binge. And from the very outset of the business, shortly after it began, I realized I had to get out of here. The thing that was hanging over my head was I was a co-signer of a note. And they not only co-signed on that note, the other two, but they took an additional \$500,000 loan, which I was not a party to, thank god. I would of never signed it. In any event, it wasn't until last year that my suit against the company was settled where I paid my third of the first loan.

But four years before that I was gone; I just didn't want any part of it. It was a woman who had fanciful notions about how to finance things and she was stupid. She was very creative but not very smart. Jekyll Island ran up about a \$250,000 tab on her, and they fired that guy down on Jekyll Island, and the next guy wouldn't pay it. I assumed all along that she was telling the truth, that she could back it up, that had the emails and letters and contract. She didn't have anything. I had to walk away from that, just a very unpleasant experience.

A guy who had been with me for many years, who I had a lot of respect for and wanted to go into business with, he hit the alcohol trail. He would come in around ten go to Bones at noon and either not come back or come back about three and there was no work he could do. It was a sad, sad situation. Same thing with Steve. It was sad that he got into drugs, very troubling, but that's was the way it was. I haven't been a part of that in a long time.

SHORT: Didn't you one time be very active in real estate?

COHN: What do you mean active in real estate?

SHORT: I thought you at one time owned the Sears building in Chicago.

COHN: No.

SHORT: That's not you?

COHN: I owned part of a big tower in Houston, but it was sort of a tax dodge. And of course, I had a small, maybe \$250,000 worth of it, and it was multimillions. And what happened was investment firms got people to put up the money because there were terrific tax benefits to it. That was the only reason I ever got into that, I never made any money doing that. No, real estate is something I—I've done well with the homes I've been in. Sold our Buckhead home for a huge profit, two years before the market crashed, thank god. And moved out to Cobb County where taxes are almost nonexistent; it's a good thing. So, no, no real estate.

SHORT: No real estate. Getting back to your company Cohn & Wolfe, you were very active in that for how many years before you sold?

COHN: Twenty-eight years.

SHORT: Twenty-eight years. You had some very responsible clients.

COHN: Oh yeah, we had big clients all over the world.

SHORT: Who were some of them?

COHN: Well, Coke of course. Chick-fil-A, AT&T, Bosche and Lomb, Kodak, on and on and on.

SHORT: And you did public relations and not advertising.

COHN: Right, right. Strictly public relations.

SHORT: Tell us—give us an example of what you would do say for AT&T.

COHN: Well, let me talk to you about it. Well, AT&T we had handled for a long time and when the Olympics came to Atlanta, were coming to Atlanta, I was part of what they called a dream team, AT&T, with a guy from their advertising agency, from their promotional agency, from their direct mail agency, and their interactive group. There were five of us. And I negotiated with A.D. Frasier to sponsor the Centennial Olympic Park, and we put this \$6 million edifice out there called AT&T's Global Olympic Village, where we entertained about 15,000-20,000 people every night off of the stage. The PR piece of it, which was great, was that NBC was the television network so in the first floor of the Global Olympic Village, we made studios available to every NBC affiliate that was coming to the Olympics. So every night they would be broadcasting from the AT&T Global Olympic Village, unbelievable coverage. That was the PR side of it.

There were other public relations benefits to it. Visibility, which was terrific, great

entertainment, Ray Charles, big name entertainment; it was quite a project. So that was part of a team effort to come up with that concept. In terms of something that I did by myself, which I was very proud of, there was a lot of stuff that I did that I can look back and say that was pretty good stuff. At Calgary Olympics in 1988, I sat at a table, a conference room table, with people on my staff and I said, “What is it that you can’t do at the Olympics Games?” The conclusion was you can’t commercialize the opening ceremonies. So I said, “Let’s do that. Let’s figure out how to do that.” And had never been done before. As it turned out the Calgary Organizing Committee was short on cash so they were looking for help. And I went to them with the idea, went to Coke first with the idea of forming a world chorus where coke bottlers around the world would hold contests for singers who would then become a part of the Coca-Cola World Chorus in the opening ceremonies of the Calgary Games. And we made that happen. And the coverage of that— Jim McKay did five minutes during the opening ceremony on the whole Coca-Cola thing, what they had done, we got David Foster to write the music for it. It was just an unbelievable breakthrough in terms of looking at a situation from how difficult could it be.

SHORT: Was that the famous Coke Chorus that sang—

COHN: No, this was a whole new ballgame. A lot of the stuff we did for Coke in the Olympics was breakthrough, not done before, and they continue to do most of it right now.

SHORT: You were actively involved in the planning for the Olympics in Atlanta weren’t you?

COHN: Yeah, I was the governor’s appointee to the Metropolitan Olympic Games Organizing Committee, not organizing committee, Metropolitan Olympic Games Authority, which I served on for eight years with the mayor, top officials. George Barry was on it. Our job was to make certain that the city, county, and state were not encumbered by any debt. So we had to approve every contract over \$100,000. And that’s what we did over an eight-year period. A lot of politics involved in it. And not only Maynard but also his, the guy that followed him in, what’s his name?

SHORT: Campbell.

COHN: Bill Campbell, forgive me. Joe—keep forgetting these things—he was the head of Natural Resources.

SHORT: Tanner.

COHN: Joe Tanner and I—one of the final pieces that we had to approve was the construction of a facility at Lake Lanier for the rowing venue. And as it turned out, Billy Payne’s people had hired a company out of Dallas to do it because they were renowned for having—that was a specialty of theirs. Well, Campbell objected to it; wanted minority participated. And both Tanner and I stood up in opposition and he called us racists. And I said, “No, these are the only guys who know how to do that. Who else are you going to put into this thing?” And he made a lot of noise, made the headlines of the newspapers, and in the next day, he quietly recanted. It was all a sham, a show, a joke. So we had to handle issues like that and we at that conjunction I think they would set a goal of 30% minority participation and we’re at about 43% over the whole

project. So we were way beyond where we were expected to be and he should not have objected to doing the right thing here. But that's politics.

SHORT: That's politics and you know a lot about that.

COHN: Yeah. See, I've been to so many Olympic Games and worked for so many Olympic sponsors that Zell felt like I could make a contribution there. He appointed me then reappointed me. It was a very interesting thing; it also got me unbelievable access, tickets, the whole nine. Something about pay off down the end of the road for the service put in.

SHORT: On scale of one to ten, how would you rate the Atlanta Olympics compared to others you attended?

COHN: I don't know. Beijing was just unbelievable. I don't know if you saw the opening ceremonies there, but they spent over \$300 million on it. I think we spent ten or twenty here. It was just staggering. Sydney was better than Atlanta. But I think Atlanta did a decent job. I think the thing that—there were two things, two issues, that sort of fouled things up. One were all the street vendors, which made a pretty honky-tonk feel to the thing. Then the other was Billy, a very astute guy, he used all the money from the sponsors that came in from NBC to build the facilities, no state Marriott, none of them was involved. And the IOC objected because they didn't get their slice of the pie. And that's one of the reasons, in my opinion, what happened in Atlanta and then following that what happened in Salt Lake City with the bribing—that put the U.S. in a penalty box. We're still not out of it. Chicago bid and should have gotten the games but didn't and I think it's because of what happened in both Atlanta and Salt Lake. But the games as a whole in terms of the athletics of it was great. It was wonderful.

SHORT: And good for the city.

COHN: Oh, yeah, yeah, very good for the city. There's a lot of things that happened here following that, that you could attribute to the games. Of course, Billy came out great. He's now running the Augusta National Golf Club, which is, for a retirement job, about as good as it gets.

SHORT: Well, looking back, Bob, is there anything that we missed?

COHN: I tell you that I, probably is, I finished—June and I were married fifty years on June the 5th, my wife and I took on a six-month project. I wrote a book about our family going back as far as I could go. And I, there were about 1700 photographs because I had taken photographs of my own children, of my own children, and my grandchildren, all of it from the day we were married; so I had a lot of that. But I went back and did some research into how her family and my family came to the U.S., how they got here. Her family story was more interesting than mine and I don't know if you want me to tell it quickly, which I can do.

SHORT: Sure.

COHN: Her forbearer came from southwest Germany in 1711 and it took them six weeks to go from southwest Germany to Rotterdam on the Rhine River; some creaky old boat. So it was he

and his wife, and daughter, and son. Well they went from there, took a boat to the U.S. across the Atlantic; the ocean crossing took three months, half the people on the ship died from disease. Luckily, her forbearer, his name was Kornegay, he survived, he and his family survived. They were off course so they landed near Jamestown, Virginia. And before they could land the boat, they were still out in the water, shortly out in the water there, they were raided by pirates who took everything they had, including their clothes. So in the middle of the winter they had to wade to shore naked. The people in Jamestown helped them get to their original destination, which was New Bern, South Carolina. They were there a year. And the people, the Englishmen, were hiring or using Indian women as slaves and the Indians got upset. So they raided their development there and killed everybody, everybody, except the son of John Kornegay. He was a little kid and he managed to get away.

And that's how June came into being. And what you realize when you go through a process like that, what a narrow passage there is for us to be living here alive in America today. It's a fascinating thing, how we slip through. It really is very, very interesting. And I gave a copy of the book to each one of my grandchildren so they'd have what I didn't had; I had no idea where my father was born nor my grandfather. I had none of that because my parents died when I was so young. The message was how lucky we are that these people went through what they went through, and we're here alive. None of us would be alive if it weren't for these people. So I dedicated the book to those people who managed to come out of the Ukraine, England, Germany, and France, and create the possibility of us being alive here today.

SHORT: Looking back Bob, is there anything you would have done differently in your career?

COHN: Oh, yeah. I think the one great regret I have is that at the time we were hired by the Independent Bankers Association to fight the Branch Banking Bill. And it was a big retainer for us and it was legitimate. We weren't representing Michael Thevis or anything; it was a legitimate thing. And we lobbied the house and the senate and we beat it in the senate by one vote. I think as a result of that the Atlanta banks weren't able to grow and the North Carolina banks were able to continue their growth, and ultimately led to them taking over all the banks here. I never even thought about that as a possibility. We were trying to protect the little banker in Eatonton, Georgia. It was a noble client sort of thing; not let the big guys chew him up. But looking back on it, I got to say I'm sorry I did that.

SHORT: Any regrets?

COHN: Regrets? As it relates to business or personally or what?

SHORT: Politically, business, or personal.

COHN: I'd say that my biggest regret is that I wasted a lot of time in my life; wasted time. I was in the Air Force for four years, complete waste of time. It resulted in a positive action, being able to get the G.I. Bill, but we used to sit in Alaska. I was up there for two years in the men's room, in the latrine, because it was the warmest place in the barracks, and played Blackjack for hours on end. It was ridiculous and even now. But once I retired, I find that I'm just killing time. I wish I wasn't, I wish I could be helpful, but I'm not. So there's a lot of wasted time in my life that I wish I could have been more constructive during those periods of times.

SHORT: Well, you've been helpful to us by remembering these great things about your career in Georgia politics and in business, so we want to thank you for that.

COHN: Okay. I regret that the state has become a Republican stronghold with Sonny Perdue.

[BREAK]

COHN: We were at the, I had taken my family up to Williamsburg to the Southern Governors' Conference and my oldest daughter, who was very young then, had to get back to school before I could get a plane to get her back there. So I asked the governor if he would be kind enough to fly her back with him, which he did. And Terri, who is now forty-eight years old, came home and painted a flag, an American flag, and gave it to the governor and it still rests in a case up on the third floor with other memorabilia of his. So that was a really neat little story about—my family was fond of him because of that really.

SHORT: Which governor?

COHN: Yeah, yeah

SHORT: Which Governor?

COHN: Maddox

SHORT: Ah Maddox

COHN: I have a picture of them in that plane. The one thing I didn't go into and I don't know if I need to, but despite his image, Maddox did quite a few good things, things that were not expected. And if you want me to go into some of those, I just have to go through my notes here. Going out of office, he had a favorable poll rating of eighty-four percent. He appointed more African-Americans to state government positions than any governor before him. He appointed the first African-American to head a state department. Named the first black GBI agent. Named the first black trooper, state trooper. Ordered state troopers to desist from using the word nigger and to address African-Americans using mister instead of their first name.

The other good story, which I forgot, was that there was a story that broke that in north Georgia in the middle of winter, prison guards were using prisoners to retrieve ducks from the lake. I hope you remember that. When Maddox was asked about it, he said, "What the state needs is a better class of prisoners." Famous quote of his. It was unimaginable that these people were doing that but that was his response. Like I said, there was a whole slew of things that he did that were very good. A lot of it was lost. I looked last night after seeing the, I think they are on record at the University of Georgia, a lot of the Baldy Maddox cartoons. Very telling in terms of his term in office, but in the end, he did a lot of good stuff.

[BREAK]

SHORT: Tell us all about your experience at the convention. When was that, 68? When you

were up there running “Maddox for President.”

COHN: Well this is the front page of the *New York Daily News*, which shows the Georgia delegation, led by Lester Maddox, walking out of the Democratic Convention after he failed to get an acceptable compromise with the Julian Bond delegation. Maddox is not in the picture, unfortunately, but I am, right in the middle of it. And I always—I’ve kept this thing because of that. It’s not every day that you get to appear on the front page of the *New York Daily News*. Mostly murders and rapes, but this is sort of a murder, in a way. But there’s nowhere in the history books, I said earlier, where there’s any mention of the fact that he ran for the Democratic nomination and I’m here to tell you and show you this to prove that he did.