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Peter Klingman: Hi. Welcome to the University of South Florida Library's Oral History Program. I'm Peter Klingman, and my guest today is Fred Karl. Mr. Karl, as I think many of us probably know, has had a long and legendary career in the State of Florida, and his credentials and public service life has been absolutely remarkable, both in the state and in the county. And it is our pleasure to have this opportunity to interview you today, Fred.

Fred Karl: Thanks, Peter. It's nice to be with you.

PK: You are a walking legend of public service, and I can't think of a better way to describe it. Is it in your genes? How did it all start?

FK: Well, who knows how it all starts, where the original interest comes from, except that I can tell you that both my mother and father thought of government service and public service as something very honorable and very desirable to do. We had, in our family, a first cousin¹ who was, at the time I was young, was mayor of Detroit and then governor of Michigan, and eventually was the governor-general of the Philippine Islands and eventually attorney general of the United States, and ended up on the United States Supreme Court. He was something of an inspiration.

So, it's a combination of those things. My father, at one time, was a local public official in Michigan in a little community that we lived in, and I guess I just picked it up from childhood. But I've always been interested in it. Always gotten great satisfaction out of it, and I guess I'd have to say I was bitten by the snake at an early age and never got cured.

PK: You talk about your father, but I think it's important for our listeners and viewers to know something about your mother, too, and her work.

FK: She was a very outstanding person. She was from quite a cultured family. Her father was a banker, and was well known in the community where they lived in Michigan. She studied music at the Boston

¹Frank Murphy (1890-1949).

Conservatory. But during the [Great]Depression, things went badly for my family and she went to work. So, she started teaching in what was then called the Opportunity School, which was like a small vocational program under the county government and eventually became director of vocational education in Volusia County. And she was very supportive of the community college program. And when the—her vocational school grew into a major institution there in the county, it then was eventually rolled into one of the community colleges and today is the site of the Daytona Beach Community College.

PK: And where I first worked, and my first office was in the Mary Karl School of Applied Science Building. So, I think I knew your mom in another sense.

How did you all get to Florida from Michigan?

FK: My grandfather on my mother's side was the banker. And he had bought a lot of land in the Daytona Beach area about the time of World War I. They came down to Daytona Beach to develop the land, and he'd come in the winters. And so, my mother detested the cold weather so badly that she'd spend part of each winter that she could get away. My father, as I may have mentioned to you, was the owner of a telephone company in three counties up there. He had to go out in the cold of winter and put up the lines and things like that. So she'd escaped from that cold, and, in the year 1924, she stayed over a little longer than usual. So I was technically a Florida Cracker.

I was born in Daytona Beach in May of 1924. Shortly after that, he sold the company, the telephone company, to one of the big chains and moved to Florida to make his living and make his fortune in real estate, and of course, promptly lost all the proceeds of the telephone company and things were tough for a while. But we lived in Daytona Beach from then on. So, from about 1930 on, I've been a Florida resident full time.

PK: Did your father invest in the land boom of Florida in that period, in the twenties [1920s]?

FK: Yes. He invested in land and in apartment buildings and rental properties and things like that. And, of course, it all went just down the tube when the whole thing came apart. My grandfather, by the way, was smarter than that. He invested, but very conservatively. He owed no money at the time the thing collapsed, so he ended up with the title to an awful lot of property, which eventually regained some of its value. But, his two boys lost fortunes, and my father lost a lot. And, as you know, many people did in Florida. It was a disastrous period of time.

PK: What do you remember about growing up in the Depression, even though you were very, very young?

FK: I was old enough to know that about everybody went to school with holes in their socks, and that twenty-five cents for lunch to be split between myself and my sister was not very much money, and things like that. And I got my first job when I was about ten, nine or ten.

PK: What did you do?

FK: I was a curb hop at a drugstore next to a theater. I would sit out on the box in front of the drugstore and wait on people in their cars. And [I] worked there seven days a week for \$1.50 a week.

PK: Wow.

FK: About eight or nine cents an hour, something like that. I delivered papers. And so, I felt the Depression because there was simply no money in our family. We were cultured, but very poor, and it was a hard way to go for a family like that. But we survived.

PK: My father used to say that he never lost his Depression mentality. That experience was so heavy that he just forever worried about losing whatever he had gained, and so on. Did that ever affect you or your family that way?

FK: Yes, it does that to you. My father became very depressed after all the disasters, and never fully regained his old stamina physically or emotionally. But me, it made me very fiscally conservative. That is, very careful and cautious about investments, but it also—it did not instill in me the notion that I needed to have more than it was necessary to get by, because I never really longed for the riches or big estate or anything like that. So, it affected me in many ways. In my public life I can look back and tell you that it makes me empathetic for those who don't have enough, and it makes me, you might say, something of a liberal in government, because I'm always looking out for the underdog and people that have a hard time surviving. It probably caused me to spoil my children, but it did give me a fiscal conservative air that has been very helpful running governmental entities, things like that, which we probably will talk about later on.

PK: We sure will. And you went, before World War II, to the University of Florida. What was it like in the 1940s?

FK: Well, it was not co-ed. I remember that very well. It was a relatively small school. I went for the summer of 1942, and there were like 3500 students on campus, which now are 35,000 or 40,000. It was all male students. I took a very intensive summer course. I intended to stay in school instead of going into the service. But by the end of summer, it was apparent they were going to start drafting eighteen-year-olds pretty soon, and I decided it would be better for me to choose the branch of service and the place I wanted to go then just wait to be called. So, I dropped out at the end of September and enlisted in the military in October of 1942.

PK: And you went into combat?

FK: Yes, I did. I was trained in the art of warfare from tanks. I had a five medium tank platoon during the war, after I finished my basic training and officer training courses. Then I was sent over to Europe and I was in Europe eighteen months.

PK: And there is a lot that happened in that time that I'm aware of. And that has had a very profound impact on your life. And I think it would be important if you could share some of that with us.

FK: Well, it did have an important impact on my life, because, first, being away from home for four years. You know, the first time away from home at Christmastime, and all those emotional things. But also, I was commissioned a second lieutenant before I was nineteen years old. I was still eighteen when I finished Officer Candidate School. And so, at the tender age of eighteen—and I shudder when I think about this—I was given control of twenty-five people and five of those medium tanks.

Happily, I didn't go to combat immediately. I had about a year in the States with training that way. But I was still only nineteen, twenty years old. I was leading those troops into combat on the European continent. I had landed at the beaches in Normandy, in France, across the channel from England, and went all the way up through France, and Belgium, Holland, and actually into Germany. And then we went back down to the Battle of the Bulge, and I was wounded there and went back to a hospital in England, was healed, and then came back and got back into combat just at the crossing of the Rhine River and went all the way to Magdeburg on the Elbe River in Germany. That's where we met the Russians, and shortly after that our division was chosen to be the occupation troops of the American Sector in Berlin. So I spent the month of July in 1945 occupying the American Sector of Berlin. But it was an exciting experience.

PK: Well, exciting is one way to describe it, and harrowing may be another. I know that you—

FK: I think I'd like to tell you—as long as this is a record of things that I did—I was very fortunate to have some of my activities recognized. For those who understand the military medals and things, I was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. Purple Heart, of course, is for the wounds, but the other two were earned. At least they said they were earned.

PK: And how did you earn them, because I know that you get recognized for specific issues with the Silver Star.

FK: Most of those things are more complicated than just, you know, a simple answer. The Bronze Star is the lesser of the two, and that resulted from a day's activities when I lost two tanks in combat and kept coming back and finally went back and gathered up some tanks that had not been damaged or destroyed, gathered up some men that had been shot out of other tanks and put together sort of a make-shift group, and went back into combat. They recognized that as some sort of special act.

The Silver Star was during the Battle of the Bulge, shortly before I was wounded. And it resulted from a series of things involving going up to get some wounded people and bringing them back, taking some risks and doing things like that. And then, in the process, I was wounded myself while I was on the ground helping others when I admittedly should have been in my tank. And I must tell you that my commanding officer was not very happy that I took that kind of chance, but it's just my nature and I did it. And he was overridden, I guess, because they recognized it with the Silver Star.

PK: It is a privilege to meet a war hero. After the war, you had some education to make up.

FK: Yes. I seriously considered staying in the service—

PK: Did you?

FK: —because I liked it and [had] done so well. There's some things I did not like about it, but I seriously considered it, and finally decided, based on my lack of education—because I had so little college training before I went in—that I would go back and get my law degree. So, I was released from the Army in June of 1946. I enrolled at Stetson University with the intention of just kind of cooling it there for a little bit and then going back to the University of Florida. But I became involved on the campus, as you do. Then [I] got into a fraternity and things like that, so I just stayed. And within a little

over three years, by December of 1949, I had completed my undergraduate work and gotten my law degree. So I graduated from Stetson Law School, which was then in Deland, Florida, in December of 1949. I was admitted to the bar in early January of 1950, and have been a lawyer ever since.

PK: What form of law were you originally intended to do in terms of your background and training?

FK: Well, in the law at that time, you didn't really specialize in school. You studied the broad general course of study, like contracts and constitutional law and things like that. And I guess it's fair to say that I took the greatest interest in some sort of business subjects, like insurance law and torts—you know, the trial practices and things of that sort. I was on the moot court team for appellate practice. All those are sort of indications of what happened to me in the practice later on.

But, after I was out of school and did a broad general practice of law, I began to gravitate toward what is essentially called administrative law. It involves land use and zoning and regulatory agencies and public service commission and things of that nature. If I had a specialty, it was, sort of, in that field all the time, government-related, of course.

PK: And when did you decide you were going to devote your career to public service?

FK: Well, I was never able to decide to devote my career to it. I started tinkering with politics early on while I was still on the campus at Stetson. I was like a campaign manager for the real politicians. And after I began practicing, within a few years—let's see, I started practicing in 1950, and by fifty-six [1956] I was ready to start in the political office.

So, I just had five or six years under my belt, and I ran for the Florida House of Representatives in 1956. There was an open seat in Volusia, and it was a county-wide race. I was the underdog and survived, and got the seat in 1956. Then, I ran unopposed in fifty-eight [1958] and in sixty [1960], and then I had a fierce opponent in sixty-two [1962], and finally gave it up to run for governor in 1964.

PK: Before we get into Hillsborough County and we're here with this background stuff, I think it would be real interesting if you could describe your relationship and how well you knew and how important LeRoy Collins was to you.

FK: When Roy Collins was governor—he started in 1954, history will show, when he ran against Charley Johns for a sort of a bobtail term, or the tail end of the term of the governor who had died in office. And—

PK: Dan McCarty.

FK: Dan McCarty. And in 1956, when I was first a candidate, he was running for re-election because his two-year term was up—McCarty's term—and he was running for his own term at this time. So he was in the same political race, and it was hard to be an ally of LeRoy Collins in certain parts of town and certain parts of Volusia County at that time, because he was more liberal than I, and he was—the racial thing was very hot and heavy. But nevertheless, I was his friend and we were supportive of one another. We could be—we weren't close friends at that time.

But, by August of that year, of 1956, I became well acquainted with him after he and I both survived the Democratic primaries and we were—it was tantamount to election at that time, and the Republicans were nominal in their opposition. And so, we began getting very well acquainted, and by the 1957 session, I was one of his floor leaders. Bob Mann from Tampa and Tommy McDonald, who is now a lawyer here, was working on his staff, and I was one of those in the Florida House of Representatives that supported the governor's programs, and we became quite close over the years. So by 1963, when I was a candidate for governor, he was supportive of my candidacy, and our friendship lasted until he passed away.

PK: He was an influence, and you have commented on that. What about LeRoy Collins' persona or politics or style would you see as influential and lasting?

FK: Well, the thing that always impressed me was his political courage, because he would take a stand, popular or no, and make it stick. He stood up the legislature that was antagonistic and dominated by the smaller counties, and he would openly say—even though he was from Leon County—that the control needed to shift to the more populous areas, and he was always for reapportioning the legislature. He was for integrity in government, and would stop the nonsense that seemed to be coming up and this happens in government sometimes.

He and Ferris Bryant had a show-down over an interposition resolution. Ferris Bryant wanted to interpose states rights and racial things, and I guess his crowning glory was when he took a firm stand in favor of gradual integration, as opposed to total segregation like so many of the other Southern governors were. He was able to lead the state through those very perilous times, and I'm pleased to say I went through them with him and am supportive of him.

We helped to defeat some terrible legislation. Just let me digress a minute and tell you about one of the pieces of legislation that I often cite in this instance. A friend of mine, who was a representative from a small county near Tallahassee, came to me one day, and he said, "I've got a House bill in there that I think you probably want to vote against, knowing how you feel about the blacks." And he gave me the number of it, and I went and took it out. And sure enough, I wanted to be against it, because it made it a felony to participate in or to attend an integrated athletic event—

PK: Oh, my.

FK: —on public property. And by the time I realized it, it had already passed because it was a local bill, and it just passed both houses of the legislature. Governor Collins didn't know about it either. So, I called him and told him about the bill and he vetoed it and it never saw the light of day—but that's the kind of legislation that bounced around the legislature, if you can imagine.

PK: Yeah. It was a different time and day.

FK: It really was.

PK: What prompted you to run for governor?

FK: It was a strange set of circumstances that developed in the legislature. I was very active in the field of education. I was chairman of the House Education Committee, and I was quite familiar with

financing of public education and became close to the teachers organization, which was not a union at that time but was quite a well-organized trade association. And I sponsored their legislation and passed it, and worked closely with the Department of Education, and became pretty well known on a state-wide basis for that work. I received the School Bell Award at the big convention in Miami with ten thousand people there in 1958 or fifty-nine [1959], sometime in that period. And developed a lot of friends and supporters, and I was encouraged to go on with my politics.

But, I'd made a decision when there was no one to step up and run from the group that I found myself participating in. In other words, Doyle Carlton, Junior, ran in that role in 1960. So did the Collins/McCarty group, you know, and Doyle ran and lost to Ferris Bryant. And I was a strong Carlton supporter, and Doyle would not run again. So there was this void, and quite a few people talked to me about running.

And Alan Morris, who eventually became the clerk emeritus, I guess, of the House of Representatives, wrote a statewide article. He was a columnist at that time, and he suggested that I was from that same group and (inaudible) that I probably was going to run, and sure enough, I got the bug. And at the time that I had decided to run it looked very good, and theoretically I had strong support in Volusia County. I had strong support against the minority groups and around the state, and I had teachers in every community that were pledged to help and organized and things like that. So, it was pretty easy to see that I had a good shot at getting into the primary.

But then, as always happens, things happens, or stuff happens, or whatever they say. First thing was that Jack Matthews² decided that he'd run, too, and he came out just a little bit to the right of me, a little bit more conservative, and cut up my support. In fact, Jack and some of his friends went around the state and told the editorial boards that I had agreed to withdraw and support him. It took me three months during the campaign to revive my workers, my supporters. Finally got past that and got it back on track again, when all of a sudden Bob High³ decided to run, and he went to the left of me, and so there were about four of us drawing from the same pool. High, myself, Matthews and Dickinson⁴, to some extent, and by the time we were through we all ran low down. In effect, as we often say, the field finished in the inverse order of their competency. I ran last.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that.

FK: Oh, yeah.

PK: Well, then, I accept that it was in the inverse order of its competency. So, after you ran for governor in the middle sixties [1960s], then what?

FK: Well, that was a bitter loss. I ended up \$75,000 in debt.

PK: That's a good number back then.

²John E. Matthews, Junior, state senator from Jacksonville.

³Robert King High, mayor of Miami 1957-1967.

⁴Fred O. Dickinson, Junior, Comptroller of the State of Florida.

FK: That would be equal to maybe \$300,000, \$400,000 today. It was much more than I was earning. I was making maybe in the neighborhood of \$25,000 a year and thinking that was big money, and it was. So, I wrote everybody who had extended credit in my name and said, "If you'll just help me, I'll pay you back every cent. I'll not default on anybody who had extended me this credit to the campaign." And so, that was my first responsibility. And I have paid that all off, by the way. It took me about ten years after tax dollars, but finally got it paid back.

So, there was a period of three or four years when I was very quiet politically, trying to rebuild a law firm and regain my financial status because I had spent all my money and still owed \$75,000. But within a few years, by 1968, some of the citizens—some that you will remember—J. Saxton Lloyd, Tom Cobb and a delegation from that group came to my law firm and spoke with me and with my senior partners and asked that I be willing to run for the state Senate. So in 1968, I took on a Republican incumbent in a five county district including Volusia, Lake, Sumter, Citrus and Hernando Counties. And he was a country boy entrenched in that rural area, but I challenged him and succeeded. So in 1968, I was elected to the Senate to represent that district.

PK: And you accomplished a great deal in that period of time between sixty-eight [1968] and seventy-four [1974].

FK: Well, that's the period when I got deeply involved in the suspension and removal of public officials. You remember, the first thing at the organizational session before we were really even sworn in for that session, the president, who was Jack Matthews, asked me if I'd chair the select committee on suspensions and removal of public officials, and I took it on. He gave me seventeen cases to begin with, and before that four year term was over I had handled fifty-two or fifty-three cases. Those are the files that are here at the university [University of South Florida] in the library⁵ of public officials who the governor suspended, and I chaired the committee that heard their evidence and recommended to the Senate that they either be reinstated, and in some cases paid attorney's fees for the trouble or permanently removed from office and forbidden to run for public office again.

PK: And because we are supposed to focus on the county, I don't want to spend a whole lot of time here either, but it does need to get asked. And that is, of all of the cases of the seventeen that I got to examine—at least that I've seen—which one was your, I don't know, favorite, and why?

FK: Well, favorite is probably not the word.

PK: Right.

FK: The one that sticks in my mind or that probably stands out was the sheriff of St. Johns County⁶. I don't know if you read that file or not, but he was the man who took children on camping trips and hikes and was popular in the community, and he was accused of bribery and tried by a jury of his peers in St. Johns County and was acquitted in seven minutes. But Governor [Claude] Kirk suspected that he had been guilty of some misfeasance and malfeasance, and so he suspended him and left it up to the Senate to decide whether, notwithstanding the acquittal, he should be removed from office.

⁵The Frederick B. Karl Collection, located in the Special Collections area.

⁶Lawrence O. Davis, who was sheriff from 1949 to 1970.

And we did a pretty thorough inquiry, and sure enough, it was a paradox. He was on the one hand, a public official that stood out in the crowd that people liked and would follow to the ends of the world. But, on the other hand, he was protecting the gamblers and prostitutes and doing things that were considered, at that time, to be serious corruption. And so, we made that finding and recommended that he be removed from office, and the Senate backed me up and he was taken down.

PK: I know that in the—and this is a semi-legal question on the subject—I know that in that file of Sheriff Davis, there were a number of people who wrote to you as chairman of that Senate Committee on Suspensions and Removals that it appeared to them, he having already gone through a trial and, indeed, acquitted in seven minutes, that this was some kind of double jeopardy. But—

FK: Well, it is a legal question. But the fact is that we didn't try him for bribery, though we could have because it was not a criminal trial. It was testing his right to hold office under the constitution. And the constitution provides that if you're guilty of misfeasance or malfeasance, drunkenness in office, neglect of duty, and a few other similar offenses, the governor can summarily suspend you from the office. And then, if the Senate finds after a hearing that you're guilty of one or more of those offenses, you can be stripped of your office. And you don't have to have committed a crime.

See, just so you—in fact, one of the first things I did when I took that committee was to develop legal definitions for those words that were in the constitution and set the precedence for that. So, even though he was acquitted of a crime, this protecting the gamblers, the prostitutes, the other things that he was doing that obviously were illegal, were grounds enough to remove him from office.

PK: And it was at least my reading of the case, and I read it with great detail as you know. I found that one of the more fascinating examples of political imagery. On one, side this paragon of perfection and virtue in the community, and on the other side, doing the things that you've already elicited.

Let me ask you a question about the other—the thing—when I think of you, I think of Florida and the Sunshine [Law] and the importance of open government, that period of time when you were in the legislature, that came to life. What was your role?

FK: It actually started shortly before I got to the Senate in the mid-sixties [1960s]. But, as you can imagine in the 1968 period, 1969 was my first session. There was a new constitution, the 1968 constitution that spelled out the ethics in government requirements and mandate for the sunshine and all that. So, almost everything that we did during that four sessions that I was there in some way related to the expansion or contraction or identification, the refinement of the government in the Sunshine Laws. It did not apply to the legislature, but we were very conscious of them being out there and the need to develop a set of standards for them. And, in fact, the work I did in Suspensions had a lot to do with it. Some of the people that I—whose cases I heard—were suspended from office for failure to provide by the Sunshine Law, for violations of that law.

But I just have to summarize it and say I helped to refine it. I didn't originate it, but I was supportive of it, and whenever I had an opportunity to speak to it in writing or in debate, I always was supportive of it, and helped to refine it and develop it and set the tone that has prevailed ever since.

PK: And it certainly prevailed for you ever since.

FK: It sure has.

PK: When we get to Hillsborough County—have evidence of your support of that Florida in the Sunshine on a significant basis. But before we do that, again, 1974, you decide to end your legislative career.

FK: Seventy-two [1972], actually.

PK: Seventy-two [1972], I'm sorry, you're right.

FK: Fall of 1972.

PK: You stopped your legislative career. Why?

FK: Well, I was in a very strange position in the Senate. I had been asked to be the President of the Senate, and actually offered the job. At that time there were thirty-six senators, and if you had a majority of them willing to pledge to you, then you could announce that you were going to be the President Designee. And I had been asked to be the Senate President, and the whole leadership group came to me and presented their pledges and there were enough to guarantee me to have it.

But I had to talk to my law firm in Daytona Beach, because I was dependent on that firm for assistance when I was away at the legislature. That was the way I made my living and supported my family. And to shorten it up, the law firm objected to my being the Senate President. So, I had to decline the opportunity and go back and practice law, and I just had this feeling that if I couldn't be the Senate President there was not much point in just hanging around as a routine senator. So I just let my term expire and did not run for the re-election in 1968—I mean, in 1972.

PK: Canceling your chances for future elected office consciously and willfully at that point?

FK: Well, I was in an economic crunch, and I felt the need to give it up. And I felt, when I had to pass that opportunity by, that probably was the end of the line, that—the person who picked it up, by the way, was Dempsey Barron, who served in that term as President that I was designated for. And, at that time, I just sort of felt that my career in politics had probably ended and I'd just close it down and concentrate on the practice of law. But I was very unhappy about it because politics and government had been such a major part of my life, all my adult life. I'm not going to say I was bitter, but I was hurt by it and distressed, and resolved that I was going to work out something with that firm different than that so I'd never be in that kind of a dependent position again, though I didn't do it because of the politics because I really was prepared to give it up at that point. Didn't, of course, and history shows I —

PK: Yeah, I think you've had a thing to do with government and politics since then.

FK: It wasn't long till I was running for the Supreme Court.

PK: That's the next stop. You ran for the Florida Supreme Court.

FK: The last elected justice of the Florida Supreme Court.

PK: Is that a position that—I guess philosophically—that you think should be elected?

FK: No. I don't think it should be elected. I was campaigning for the office, but at the same time supporting the constitutional amendment that made it an appointed office and felt very strongly about it. But it was an open seat, it was up for election, and I qualified for it. And one, I had two stiff opponents and a hard campaign all during 1976, and finally succeeded in that and took the office and was pleased that in that same election the people voted to make it an appointed office. That technically, I'm the last one who was ever elected to a seat in the Supreme Court.

PK: Were you interested in pursuing a judicial career?

FK: Yes, indeed I was. I thought I had arrived when that happened. It's one of those things that the day I was seated in that court I thought, "This is what it's all been about." I was very happy and very content. I had a tremendous investiture ceremony. The governor came, and the president of the bar and the bishop and all my friends and family, and it was a happy day.

But it didn't take very long for me to realize that it wasn't to be, because economic conditions were such that my house wouldn't sell. I couldn't get rid of my stock, and my debts were running. And, at that time, the salary of a justice of the Supreme Court was \$40,000 a year. The year before, as a private lawyer, I'd made about \$150,000. And to go from \$150,000 to \$40,000 overnight was kind of a shock in itself. And to their credit, all the children sucked it up. You know, they were in college, and they all went to work and things like that, and we could live on the \$40,000 salary even after they took out all the deductions.

I have to digress a minute and tell you this. The first time they gave me a check on the Supreme Court, it was like less than \$2,000 for a month's work, and it reminded me of that story about the drunk that was at a party and he had a drink in his hand and he ran into a doctor. He said, "Doctor, I've got a terrible drinking problem."

The doctor said, "How much do you drink?"

And he said, "I drink a lot."

He [the doctor] said, "Do you suppose you drink as much as a pint a day?"

And he said, "God I spill that much." And that's the way I felt about that first check. I spilled that much.

But in any event, none of the assets that I had counted on being liquidated came to pass, and so I just had to make some arrangements. I was half sick, as you may know if you know anything about me. In 1975 I was really on my knees, physically, emotionally and otherwise, from a terrible aftermath of an operation in my esophagus, and then I had gone back into the hospital in December of 1976 for further surgery. So, I was physically weak and economically hurting because of the economic conditions. Nothing would sell. Nothing would turn into cash, and I was faced with a situation in 1978 of either trying to refinance all of my debt and put it on a basis that I could handle it or getting off the court.

And, when I thought about it, I realized that it just wasn't possible for me to use the power of that office to do the refinancing. No banker in his right mind would lend somebody making \$40,000 a year that kind of money and take interest only for a long period of time and things like that. They'd only do it because I was on the Supreme Court.

So, I opted to just resign from the court and go back to earning some money and pay off the debts and recoup again. It was probably one of the saddest days of my life.

PK: So, how did you get to Hillsborough County as attorney?

FK: Well, when I left the court, I really was determined that was the last of public offices I was going to do. So I practiced law with all my might, and I made a good bit of money and put some aside, and got to the point where I was ready to slow down in 1984, 1985, in that time period. And I had a lot of money in the bank, and some property and things like that. And I was now tired of that activity. The law practice was sort of mundane. No excitement like I'd had in government, things like that.

Though I was very lucrative, I started looking for a way to slow down and to wind down my career. I was in my early sixties at that time, and Larry Brown, who was the [county] administrator of Hillsborough County, had hired me to help Hillsborough as outside counsel. Actually, Norman Hickey, his predecessor, had originally asked me to do some legal work for them. I participated in the contracting for the resource recovery facility and implementing the new charter. I was in Washington helping them get that cleared; a number of things like that.

And so, Larry Brown continued that work with me, and I was representing the county in the power line suit and other major litigation, and he came to Tallahassee one day and asked me if I would consider being the county attorney. And I said, "No, thank you. I can't do that." The pay was like \$85,000 a year or something, and I was earning far more than that and wasn't interested in a full time job anyway.

So, he offered me the county attorney's position on a contractual basis, part-time contract. Said, "Come down three or four days a week. Come to the meetings and just kind of run the law firm. It's like a little law firm over there." So eventually I worked it out with him. He paid me \$125,000 a year to manage the county attorney's office, without being an employee, and without being committed to any special number of hours or any routine things that county attorney's or assistant county attorneys are committed to. So, I came down and took it on that basis. And it was like I was commuting between here and Tallahassee for a period of months.

And then, it turned out that work was just so heavy that it just wasn't a part-time job, and the office was in such disarray and there was so much confusion and so much acrimony between the attorneys and the administrative branch of government and also the commission itself. The notion of a separate county attorney who had some autonomy and couldn't be fired unless the county administrator and the county commission both agreed—things like that were so new and radical in terms of county government here in Hillsborough County that I found that I was really needed a lot. Not so much for the litigation, or even for the management of the daily activities, but to set the tone of the office and to establish relationships between the different branches of government, the constitutional officers and the administrators and the commission. And so, I found myself working virtually full time, and eventually in 1988 I agreed just to roll it over into an employment kind of position.

PK: The other thing the county, at that time, had—and you've mentioned the new charter; maybe we need to back up for everybody and talk a little bit about the difficulties the commission itself was having in eighty-five [1985] and the difficulties in government you walked into.

FK: Yes. I did catch the residue of all the scandal. There were three commissioners who were taken off the commission for fraud and bribery or other such crimes. Some of them were led out of the courthouse in handcuffs before I came down. And it was in the aftermath of that that they brought Norman Hickey in for two or three years, and then Larry Brown followed him. And a new charter came into being in the early eighties [1980s] as a result of that scandal, and it was being installed and it was challenged by some of the minorities, who felt that the seven person commission, with four of them running from districts and three running county-wide was unconstitutional, and there were all sorts of controversies about the charter.

So, the commission was off balance and uneasy and newly elected, and operating under a brand new charter that was untried. The notion of a professional county administrator was new, and they had tried that once with Norman and didn't make out so well. And then Larry was there, and that wasn't going too well. So there was this terrible turmoil, and some of the commissioners were pretty shrill and acrimonious, and they were very hard on the staff and very hard on the staff attorneys, demanding things they're not used to.

And the county attorney's office was relatively new. It had had six or seven lawyers, I'd say, a year before I came down, and in the year before I came it had grown to the point that when I got there it was twenty-one or twenty-two lawyers. So, it was about three times the original size, and people just didn't know how to deal with all that at that time. It was a tumultuous time in county government.

PK: Why you, Fred? From Tallahassee, successful lawyer, statewide prominence and influence, I think I can understand why somebody from Hillsborough County would say, "He's the man we need to come here." And I can hear you say slowing down and wanting to change from the boredom of a law firm, but I think I know you well enough to know that you had a very good feel for the politics you were getting ready to walk into, the difficulties you've just described.

FK: Yes. I sort of sensed it was an opportunity to meet some new challenges. And you know, I had been city attorney in Daytona Beach and Ormond Beach, and I had worked for the county school board in Volusia County and other public agencies. So I sort of knew what I was doing, and I knew that times were tough here and that there was a need. And I'm sure that was part of it. There was also a part just to get back into the public sector again. I missed it, and I didn't consciously say I'm going to go look for a public job, but when I was working as outside counsel with the county and got acquainted with it and knew what good people were here and could see the torture they were going through and thought I might be able to help this in some way. That was part of the incentive to come.

PK: It just sort of dawned on me that turmoil has either found you or you have found turmoil.

FK: Or I've created it.

PK: Or created it. It's got to be one of those. But there was a lot of turmoil in the middle eighties [1980s] here that you helped sort out and you helped smooth out. The time that you were county

attorney, what would you say or what do you remember as the significant non-political but nonetheless legal issues that the county was facing apart from charter and acrimony in relations?

FK: Well, it was at that time that we broadened and strengthened the minority business enterprise law, the policy of the commission. And it was promptly challenged in court and we went through an awful lot of expensive and long litigation over that, and finally succeeded in having it upheld.

There was a terrible situation that occurred in the Norman Hickey administration in the southeastern part of the county, known as Ruskin and Wimauma, down around Sun City Center. There was a sewage system installed down there, contracted for, and a little bit unique. Instead of it having transmission lines for the sewage to take to the sewer plant, it was—they installed sort of a plastic sophisticated septic tank that was pumped by the county. It's called a step system, and there was a novel idea. It was inexpensive and it was sold to the people on being such a great idea.

Well, about the time that I was getting warmed up as county attorney, those tanks started to burst and flood people's yard with sewage, and they started making claims that there was fraud and deception going on in the construction part of it and that it wouldn't work—it had backed up and sewage came back into their houses—that there had been a misappropriation of the land. They had conned people into thinking they were just giving up a limited easement, when in fact, they were giving easement to their whole property and would prevent the construction of swimming pools and things like that. It was—well, I characterized it as a cancer on the county because it was about to eat everybody alive, and—

Tape 1, side 1 ends; tape 1, side 2 begins

TK: —persisted into my term as administrator. Just to give you just a little feel for acrimonious and bitter that was, more than once when I was going to the Wimauma area for a meeting in the evening, my office would be called and I would be warned not to come because somebody was going to shoot me that night. That happened many more times than once.

PK: Hmm.

TK: And the feelings were running very high. Well, I'd worked through that and resolved and developed a plan for it, and we were able to get the federal government to go on with most of the grant money and we didn't lose a great deal of that, and then we litigated with the contractors and the makers of those tanks that failed. The county eventually came out of it all right, but it was a terrible, terrible thing to have happen in the county.

PK: Yes, it is. Sounds that way. I take it the sewers were fixed, whatever—

TK: Yes, they put in cement. Eventually put in cement receptacles, instead of those plastic tanks that were rupturing.

PK: When you got to Hillsborough County, again before you become county administrator—and it's not a question I've ever asked you before, but I'd be interested in your thought process about it. The county is sort of unique in the United States in having one very big city and then having Plant City incorporated and having Temple Terrace incorporated, and obviously the city of Tampa, and then the bulk of the county population and resources. In fact, we're under the direction of county government:

larger amounts of not just land, but people and dollars and revenues. This county business was a big business here, unlike that not always operating the same way when in other counties in the United States.

FK: It is a bit unique, particularly for a bigger county, because in many counties, you know, there are multiple municipalities. And some only have one or two municipalities, but most have many more than that. There are not very many where the county government is really a municipal form of government. There are so many people in the unincorporated area of Hillsborough County that it is like a big city. So, you have the regular municipal functions and then you have the county functions, which—in Hillsborough County, you know, the county runs the libraries. It has responsibility for the museums. It does so many things that overlay both the city and the county, in addition to providing water and sewer services and sheriff's protection and things in the county area. So, it's just like a giant city.

It has—at the time I was administrator, it had more people living in the unincorporated area than in all three of the cities combined—far more. The total budget of the county—and that is all aspects of it, the transfers and everything—were said to be \$1.5 billion dollars, which is a major operation. And of course, there's a thousand miles of land and water within the boundaries of the county, and only a small part of that was within the city limits of the three cities.

PK: Well, we're talking about a government entity—for example, bigger than, say, Rhode Island or Delaware, at least, in terms of budget and size and—

FK: There were 4,500 employees all together, you know, counting the constitution—not counting the constitution law. Constitution law says there were probably seven thousand or 7,500 employees countywide.

PK: We'll get to how you feel about appointed versus elected county administrators, obviously. But I think it would be necessary to get a view of consolidation. You know and I know the number of counties—Volusia County being one—that periodically come up on votes for consolidation, and they fail. Other counties it has happened successfully, in Duval, and I guess partially successful in Dade. How do you feel about consolidation for Hillsborough County?

FK: From a political reality point of view, it's virtually impossible, because Tampa is known as the city so if you consolidated the city and the county together, it would have to be called Tampa as it was in Duval County and Jacksonville emerged. And the people in Temple Terrace and Plant City and Wimauma and Ruskin would—not everybody, but by and large they would resent being made a part of Tampa, because they want no part of the City of Tampa.

So, I just have to summarize it and say pragmatically it was just not doable. Economically and governmentally, it would be a smart thing to do. It would have been very good if this was just one government unit, because there is a lot of duplication and there's a lot of unnecessary activity. For example, there's a City/County Planning Commission that spends millions of dollars each year, simply because there are more than one governmental entity and the coordination of the zoning activities and the master planning for all of those—coordinating the master planning for them requires a staff of people that you could eliminate completely. You have two different sets of police officers. You have two different sets of government officials—actually, four sets, although the two smaller cities are not quite as extensive as Tampa and the county.

So, from an economic and a good government point of view, it would be far better to have one large single governmental entity that had real clout and status in the state and the nation. But pragmatically and politically, it would just never happen, in my view.

PK: Given the fact that it, in your view, would not happen politically, can you look in a crystal ball and see where places like Carrollwood and Brandon, then, should incorporate? Does that help balance the issue in some way?

FK: I guess you could argue that. I was always opposed to additional municipal charters, because every time you have one of those you compound the problem. If there's ever going to be any hope of consolidation, the fewer municipalities, the fewer mayors you have, the fewer the commissioners that would resist it, the better chance you have. And also, that just exacerbates the problem. If there's duplication between the county and the three cities that existed while I was there, and you add to it three or five more cities, you just have that much more duplication and that much more of a problem to cope with. And the taxation of the people, you see, goes up, because there's a duplication of taxation within the city limits. So I've always resisted that, and I don't think it's necessary. I think if the county government works the way it should, it's capable of running the whole thing.

PK: That's an interesting way to phrase it: if county government could work the way it should. There's been a long debate in Hillsborough County about how county government should or should not operate, and you certainly played a role in that. In 1990, when I was serving on the Charter Review Board, you became county administrator right in the middle of that exercise.

FK: November of 1990.

PK: I guess my first question is, your predecessor, whom I didn't know very well at all—and I wouldn't expect you to deal with it on a personal basis, but what did he do wrong? Or, what had gone wrong with it?

FK: I don't like to evaluate what my predecessor or my successor, so I don't want to do it in those terms. But my observation was that, at that particular time in the history of the county, the powers that be—that is, the county commissioners, the political pundits, the constitution officers—found the presence of a professional administrator unacceptable. There wasn't anything they could do about it, but the notion that somebody was going to be in charge of the employees and the county government, the commissioners were not to meddle in the affairs of the county on a daily basis or fix potholes and things like that were just foreign to some of the people of the county.

And he was a good administrator—this is my predecessor. But I think it's fair to say, and he probably would admit that he wasn't a great politician or a diplomat. And so, he soon found himself at odds with certain of the commissioners. And they were unmerciful in the way they punished him with his budget and things of that nature that just made his life just almost more than he could handle. And so, he had no recourse but to just go ahead and move on out.

PK: Well, I do know that you are in favor—or were in favor; I guess you still are—in favor of an appointed—I mean, of an elected county administrator, a strong county administrator. Why? I guess maybe just the easy place to start in Hillsborough County.

FK: I just think that it would be a much more efficient operation if it had a strong administrator. Whether you call that administrator mayor or administrator or whatever, there—you cannot govern, actually govern, by seven people on a committee. You can't govern well. People argue that the corporate world, the business world, is governed that way. That there's a board of directors of every corporation and they hire a CEO. The difference is that the board of directors of a corporation, by and large, entrust the daily operations to a CEO. I've served on many boards, bank boards and others, and that's the way it's done. If the CEO doesn't perform, you fire him or you restrict him in some way. But if he's performing, you don't interfere with it. You don't show up every day and keep an office in the corporate headquarters and check on him and second guess him and go around him to his employees and order people to do things.

In county government, though, it's almost impossible to have seven elected commissioners and expect them to abide by the rules that a corporate board of directors were to abide by. True, they set policy, but they also have responsibilities in budgeting and things that all have to be done in the public. So they strive to be successful politicians and be re-elected and to accomplish things on their own, which makes for seven people actively participating in the running of government. Most of the friction that I caused while I was the county administrator—and I admit to it—was trying to keep the county commissioners from crossing the line and being seven extra administrators, because each one had a tendency to do that in one way or the other. And I just always felt that an administrator was at a disadvantage because he was appointed.

For example, when it came to dealing with the constitutional officers, the constitutional officers were elected, the clerk, the sheriff and others, and they would talk directly to the elected county commissioners, and it was as though the administrator was a non-entity. When I was there, I made it a little more significant than that. But they had a tendency to just go right over the head of the administrator.

The typical administrator is powerless to stand up to elected officials, who have the power to hire and fire him. I was independent, because I didn't have to take the position. I was asked to take it, and I always insisted on a thirty-day severance provision so that they could get rid of me any time they wanted and I could walk away any time I wanted. And I just felt that if I could run the county the way I did—because of my political expertise, if you will, and my ability to deal with the press and to lead people—then an elected person in that position would fare far better than another appointed person. And that if they could do that and let the administrator or the mayor or whatever you call that elected person really run the day-by-day activities, the whole thing would run much smoother and much more effectively.

PK: Supposing you had a county commission—and I guess partly I have to name names, but I don't mean these people specifically, I mean for types. If you could have your favorite seven commissioners in Hillsborough County, if they could be however—if they could each be a clone of Fred Karl, would you still feel that way about the structure?

FK: I suppose you could put together a commission that was immune to the politics of it, or at least felt that their proper role was to be policy makers and not professional politicians. Jan Platt does that quite well. Rodney Thursby—not Thursby; Rodney Colson did it quite well. They understood the charter from the inception, and there have been others. Pam Iorio was quite good. But there's just a natural

friction between an administrator and the commission, as there is between the City of Tampa between the mayor and the city council. And the administrator is disadvantaged in the county government, because he is an appointee of this elected board. And when the friction gets hot, unless he's got the capacity to stand up to it, he gets killed in the process, and that's why they've had like twelve administrators. So far, up until I left, I had stayed there longer than anybody since the new charter was put into being.

PK: Well, again, we're still talking philosophically. One of the arguments I remember being posed and has always made some sense to me is that if you have a strong mayor in the City of Tampa and you don't have a strong administrator as a counterpart in the county, you have no necessarily healthy way to establish solid and permanent working relationships. Would you agree with that?

FK: I do agree with that because, for example, the chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, who is usually the one who wants to relate to the mayor of Tampa, really has no official powers at all. He or she is just a single member of the seven person commission. No power, no special power to delegate it to the chair except to preside at meetings and a little extra pay increment and do the ceremonial things so that, if you have a meeting between the city and the county and it consists of the chairman of the Board of County Commissioners and the mayor of the City of Tampa, nothing can really be done. You almost have to have the administrator present. If the administrator is present, he has the expertise and control of the apparatus, and that's always offensive to the chairman of the board. And so it makes for a funny situation, unless the parties are really harmonious and cooperative.

PK: The other and last—my philosophical observation that I remember from 1990 is that the argument was posed that the constitution—if you change the charter to create this strong administrator that you certainly wanted to see in place, that the next problem would be that you would have difficulty with the other constitutional officers—the property appraiser, the sheriff—and why not bring all those folks under that same umbrella?

FK: Well, I think there would probably be the evolutionary result, but it didn't have to be. That's got to be the result, anyway. I think over time as the state matures and grows, I think the role of the constitutional officers is going to be diminished more and more in charter counties. But what I felt would help would be if the administrator was on equal footing with the constitutional officers. You could deal fair basis—playing field would be level, if you will.

Just the other day—this was in 1997—a constitutional officer called me and complained about the treatment that had been meted out by the present county administrator. And, the question was what should be done? Do you have a confrontation with the elected administrator or go directly to the county commissioners, who are friends and fellow elected officials? And of course, the conclusion is you go to the elected officials and go around the county administrator. But I always felt that [if] the administrator was on equal footing with the constitutional officers, there would be much more harmony and you could all work together much better on an equal basis. Just as they get along with one another, for the most part—there has been friction, but most of them get along pretty well together—so it would be an elected administrator and constitutionals.

Tape 1 ends; tape 2 begins

PK: Well, let's take the rest of this time to deal with county administrator and then we'll go to Tampa General [Hospital]. But I think the way to start this part of the discussion is to remind you and ask you to comment on perhaps the most amazing editorial I have ever seen in my life, which dealt with the position the [*Tampa*] *Tribune* took on acquiring the new county center building based on your recommendation. And in a nutshell—and it wasn't a very long editorial, and I don't remember the year it was written, either, Fred—they said, If Fred Karl wants it, it's got to be okay; go do it.

I guess the question is, even though I partly know the answer, how did you manage to overwhelm all of that political acrimony, all of that hostility—and I realize your political skills, but this is a rather awesome problem you inherited.

FK: You mean buying of the county center?

PK: Well, not just the county center. I mean the whole issue of—I use that only as an illustration—

FK: Oh.

PK: —of [how] your political leverage without being that elected administrator, was equal to or would be greater than any elected administrator under normal circumstances coming into that situation. You were able to overwhelm that county commissions politics in a number of senses of the word.

FK: Well, I don't know that I'd agree that I overwhelmed anybody, but I was able to deal with it in a way that most people could not. And I think the reasons are these: First, I was independent. That is to say I didn't need that job. I didn't have to have it. My children were all reared and educated and on their way, and I could leave any day on thirty days' notice and make out fine.

PK: And threatened to at least on one occasion that I remember.

FK: Yes, I did. Whenever I felt the urge, I would use that weapon. So, the independence was very important to establish the relationship.

The second thing was, if you remember, I've been where they are, the elected officials. I've been a legislator. And I've been elected to office. I've run two statewide campaigns and many smaller campaigns, and was successful in all but one. So, I understood and could empathize with them in their political problems and in their struggle to do the right thing and still be re-elected and not make anybody too angry and that sort of thing.

And, finally, I guess it's because I had a lot of experience in local government, in spite of the fact that I was in the state government a lot. I was the county attorney and city attorney and school board attorney, and did a lot of legal work at the local level, and had studied state and local government and active in the Florida Bar and that group and things like that.

So it's sort of a combination of things. I recognized that when I first came that it was important to get acquainted with the newspaper people. So, one of the first things I did was offer to go to the editorial boards and sit down and discuss candidly with them, government in the sunshine, my attitude about those things. And to offer to give them an update from time-to-time about what was going on and I did those things with real candor. In fact, it was said I was candid to a fault, because I would play out the

warts as well as the good things about it. I never tried to sell them anything, but just explain what was going on.

In that process, I developed a good relationship with the media—and I did the same thing with the television stations, by the way. They would set up editorial conferences. Channel 8 did not, but they had a different format and I'd meet with them from time to time. But Channel 10, Channel 13, they would sit together with me very much like an editorial board. And so, when I would get into a confrontation with the commission or with a commissioner, I was given a little extra status or stature that a typical person would not have in that position, both because of my past experiences and the stature that I brought to the job and also because of the independence. Because I'd just tell them to go to hell if that's what it took to get the job done.

And also, it gave me the ability to do some things on my own initiative, like the buying of the county center. I led the way on that and was able to get that job done, and for which people were terribly critical at the time but now have recognized what a good financial deal it was.

PK: Why don't you describe that? What you did and how it worked?

FK: A man named Bill Mack bought some land across from the courthouse, diagonally across from the county courthouse, and on speculation built a twenty-eight story building. Beautiful building with parking garage inside and he built it on speculation—that is to say, he had no tenants when he put it up. And he got as far as building the whole shell of it without furnishing it or building it out inside, because he intended to do that at the renter's request. There was a \$60 million dollar mortgage on the property, and he was drawing against that mortgage as he constructed the shell, and the records showed at that time that I was dealing with him that he had taken down about \$52 million and had \$8 or \$10 million left to complete the construction to the tenant's specifications.

Well, I looked out the window and could see that building and visualized, dreamed about the county being in there. We had twenty-two different leases around the city of Tampa and people scattered up and down Madison Avenue and Kennedy Boulevard. We were paying rent that was in the \$4 million dollars a year category. And it was awfully hard to administer that many people in those scattered locations. And that doesn't count all the fire stations and ambulance stations and all the other things that are remote. So, just the administrative people were at twenty-two different locations. So—

PK: Let me stop you for a minute for clarification. You say twenty-two different locations just for the county administrator?

FK: Yes.

PK: That doesn't include all the rest of us who were scattered in other places that from the constitutional officers. I, for example, was on Tyler Street working for the Clerk of Circuit Court at the time that you did that.

FK: That's right. I'm talking about the Human Resources Department, the Budget Department, just—they were all over the place.

Well, anyway, there was a long series of negotiations, and I must tell you that I played hardball because times were tough and tenants were hard to come by and just the notion that part of the building was going to be occupied by county employees would scare off regular civilian tenants. So I used that, and I knew that his costs were running—his daily costs were eating him alive, interest and all the other expenses that go with owning and maintaining a building. And so I took my time and kept bringing the price down, and the upshot of it was that he finally agreed to sell it to the county for \$30 million dollars in cash.

So, we got this beautiful building for \$30 million in cash, and at the time, the interest rates were just right. So, we borrowed the money to finish out the construction and to provide the \$30 million. And the way it ended up, the debt service on the property is about \$4 million dollars a year, so there was no cash flow difference. The money we saved taking out—canceling out—the leases and the rent we were paying pays the debt service on it.

But in terms of rental per square foot, four hundred thousand square feet at \$4 million dollars a year is around \$10 a square foot; it really figures a little less than that. And it's committed for thirty years, and then the building belongs to the county completely. And that includes all the furniture and all the fixtures and the cable spine, all the fancy things in the board room and all that sort of thing. So, it's really a bargain. It's a—rent in downtown, today as we're talking, is probably \$17, \$18 a square foot, and this is not much more than half the going rate, and it's gorgeous space. There's 1,750 people housed in that building.

PK: And it is a beautiful building. I spent several years working in it myself, and I enjoyed the—and I think the estimates were something like that if we were going to build a new county structure would have been—back then, I guess—still in excess of \$100 million.

FK: Oh, yes. It's a real bargain. There's just no way to look at other than just to say it—we were there at the right time, the right place, the circumstances were correct, and we had the boldness to get it done.

PK: And, then there's Yankee Stadium.

FK: Yeah, I was involved in that up to my ears.

PK: Well, we wanted the New York Yankees to be here, because George Steinbrenner lives in Tampa and his family is here. And frankly, we could see a lot of benefits from he and his family and his team being housed here. And he came to us with the notion that if we'd help him get a stadium structured in some way that he would put his whole home office, back office for the big league team in this town. We'd have a farm team baseball team. We'd have all of his training facilities. We'd have the scouting activities and everything operated out of this area. So it was more than just spring training. It was like getting a new business into the community.

Who started it, Fred? Did Steinbrenner approach the county, or did the county approach Steinbrenner?

FK: You know, I don't remember. It just seems like it was out there, and everybody knew that the Yankees were in Ft. Lauderdale and were looking for a change. They may have mentioned it to us first, or we may have solicited them, I'm not sure. But before I was in a position to do anything about it, it was bouncing around, and it just couldn't get off the ground. The Boston Red Sox wanted to come and

the Yankees were rumored to be willing to come if we could house them, and nobody could seem to put anything together. So, I sort of took it as a personal challenge and we went out and actually did it.

It was a very complex arrangement, because they wanted it at one specific site, which is where it is, the corner of Martin Luther King [Boulevard] and Dale Mabry [Highway], directly across from the football stadium. And that land was owned by the state and it was then subleased to various state agencies, and it was the most complex, convoluted kind of leasing and negotiating arrangement you ever saw in your life. But we were finally able to get thirty acres from the state for the fair market value, and at the time, we had worked out an arrangement. I had worked out an arrangement that would let us pay for that in barter, more or less—that is to say, we were going to find a site for the jail for them, for a new state prison facility, and no matter what we paid for it or where it came from or whether it was county land, we could turn it in at the fair market value and get the price reduced.

We needed to replace five hundred employees that are in the old hospital out there, and if we could find a facility to put them in, we could do the same thing. And I had a deal worked out for downtown building that would be virtually given to the county, and then we would value it at somewhere around \$8 million dollars and turn that over to the state for the—to house that department. But after I left, that fell apart somehow.

But the worst case scenario was that we ended up paying \$13 million dollars for the site, and then built the stadium. And we get a ticket rebate on the tickets, and maintenance is taken care of by the Yankees, and the county and the Sports Authority gets the use of the facilities for various purposes. It was a fair deal.

I like to tell the story about in the process of the negotiations. I raised the question about what if the Yankees leave, and everybody said, “Well, they're committed to stay here thirty years.” And I examined the structure, the partnership that owned the team, and came to the conclusion that there's nothing stable about that. The partnership could sell the team, or the partnership could dissolve or get transferred to a different entity, and you wouldn't have anybody to hold responsible for it.

So, I insisted that George Steinbrenner and his family be personally responsible for all the bonded indebtedness if they leave before the thirty years are up. Whatever the balance due on the bonds, they should pay. And the negotiators readily agreed that the team should pay that if they decided to leave, or the partnership would pay it. But when it came to personal responsibility, they didn't want anybody being personally liable for it. And I explained that in my mind that was a deal breaker, and I wouldn't recommend the deal unless he accepted that responsibility. So we adjourned while they went to talk to him, and they came back with just a short message, and it said, “George thinks that's fair,” and so we signed it on that basis and he committed to pay off the bonds if the team leaves here within thirty years, whether he owns them or not.

PK: I don't suspect that he did most of the negotiating with you. Did he do any?

FK: He did some, yes. He would come to some of the sessions and the meetings and visit with us and talk to us and explain some of his problems and his desires, what he'd like to see out there and things like that. He was very, very decent about the whole thing. He left most of it to the lawyers.

PK: Sure. What would be your impressions of George Steinbrenner?

FK: Very dynamic. Very successful. Very bright, of course. Very strong. He's opinionated and overpowering if you're around him. But from my limited personal contact with him—and I say limited, that's relatively speaking. I don't know him like I know you, but relatively speaking I had little contact with him. I find him to be a real gentleman, very good. He never asked me for anything that was improper or inappropriate, never offered me anything. I asked him to contribute to my fund that I set up for the employees of the county at one time, and he did. He contributed \$250, which was—I was very grateful for it. But it wasn't like he tried to buy me or induce me to think special of him because he gave a lot of money. Just a very decent citizen. Good citizen of the community, I'd say.

PK: I would agree. He's done a great deal philanthropical in this community, to be sure.

FK: And that stadium is a thing of beauty, and it's filled up every time they play a game there. And they're bringing some youth programs to it. The community college uses some of the facilities and it's just been very successful so far.

PK: The \$13 million dollar deal—or \$30 million dollar deal for the stadium, I shouldn't say \$13 million—pales by comparison to the current situation that the county negotiated with the new construction costs for the new football stadium. At the time you were doing yours, was there any consideration—I mean, Mr. Culverhouse was alive, and there was no reason to assume, except that he had begun in ninety-two [1992] or ninety-four [1994] to make some noises about maybe moving the team⁷ to Orlando, and I know he was complaining about revenue and things of that sort. Was there any talk that you were setting a precedent for how the county might have to negotiate with the Bucs later?

FK: Well, it was said at that time that there were three things that needed to be done. One was the Ice Palace, or the hockey arena. The other was the Yankee facility. And the third was renovation or the rebuilding of the stadium. It was on the table at that time. Rightly or wrongly, I was successful in putting the stadium to the back burner. My notion was that if we could get the other two done first, then we either will or will not do the Bucs thing. But it was really important to get the ice hockey team here and get the Yankees committed here, whether we kept the Bucs or not. So I admit to favoring those two over the Buccaneers and giving it higher priority.

By the time I was no longer county administrator, the Bucs thing came into fruition. And I was supportive of it, and would have been had I still been there. But I tell you, I kind of shoved it to the back burner to get the other two done first. I just felt by the time you got through with a major undertaking like the rebuilding of the stadium there wouldn't be enough left to talk about for anything else.

PK: While you were doing all of this, any thought about baseball, because I know St. Pete was actively pursuing major league with the Dome. Were in your sort of power discussions, were there any discussions about trying to land a baseball franchise for any of this?

FK: No, nothing that I was involved in had anything to do with trying to revive the talk about a Tampa group getting a baseball franchise here. That was the St. Petersburg process, and I was always supportive of what they were trying to do. You remember Norman Hickey eventually became the city

⁷Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

manager over there, and we were very supportive of whatever efforts they made to get the team or to buy a team or an expansion team. But we never competed with them, as far as I was concerned.

PK: Ice hockey. I think if you were to ask the average non-literate about hockey person why hockey and why build a stadium for hockey in Florida—back then, anyway—I think some people would have said that doesn't make a bit of sense. It's a winter sport, so yes, you'll get some tourists, but it's not the kind of thing that will attract crowds. Why the Ice Palace?

FK: The hockey team⁸ came into existence, if you will remember, through a long series of controversies. There was an unsuccessful run at it, but there was enough talk on the street, anyway, to tell me at least in my subjective judgment that if you could build at least an Ice Palace, people would go. And when the franchise was finally brought in, Mayor Sandy Freedman was instrumental in getting it into position. The first games were well attended, and there was a lot of excitement about it.

But the thing that turned me toward it and made me try to be active in developing it was that I worked with David LeFevre, who is the lawyer from New York. He grew up in Ohio and was practicing in New York, and was brought down by the Japanese investors to make the ice hockey thing go. And the way he explained it to me was that he was going to build a basketball arena that was suitable for hockey. So, the notion was that if you could have an arena that had both basketball and hockey in it, a sort of multi-purpose arena, you'd have other shows and things you could make it succeed. And he persuaded me that that was what the ultimate outcome would be. And then, we set about trying to do it in a way that was safe for the county and not hurtful.

You remember that that's financed, from the county's point of view, by a bed tax addition that the legislature put on and provides most of the repayment for the money that the county put in it or intends to put in it, and the rest comes from an override on each ticket that's sold. So as far as ad valorem tax payers are concerned, they were not asked to contribute to the hockey arena at all. And, as you know, it turned out to be a thing of beauty and very popular. It's open a hundred and some days each year. The first year it was open, I think there were a hundred and twenty some events there, counting hockey games, and most of them were well attended.

PK: I suspect that when the NBA expands, Tampa would be a logical place to look because of that facility.

FK: And they tell me that the people who are talking now about buying the franchise—you know it is for sale—and they would buy the lease on facility as well as the franchise of the team. But I'm told that they have connections that are substantial, and if they do take control of it, you can anticipate in the early expansion basketball team or something like that occurring, transferring a team in from somewhere; they need to bring one in as soon as possible.

PK: And the issue of you as county administrator, and the development we've been talking about in terms of sports facilities, leads me to a question. What was your relationship with Sandy Freedman?

FK: Surprisingly, it was very good. She was a difficult person to deal with from the position I was in, because she was very turf-oriented and very strong there in her own right. And when I first arrived, she

⁸Tampa Bay Lightning.

was not amenable to meeting me on her own plain. It took me a long time to work through that process. You know, a year or more before we could really sit down as equal. But eventually we got so that we could exchange ideas and conversations and have very high-level conversations and meaningful joint efforts. And, if you remember the times, it was quite often after that she would announce from the podium that the air of cooperation between the city and the county has never been better, and I would do the same thing. We in fact did work very well together.

PK: Well, I think of one of the major events of your time in office—and I don't know where credit falls or discredit falls on this issue, but certainly the indigent care program has got to be one of the major achievements of your time in office. What was the implementation of that all about?

FK: I don't claim individual credit for it, of course, because everybody else claims credit for it. It's like the situation the Chinese described, you know: when the best leader's work is done the people say, "We did it ourselves."

PK: Right.

FK: And that's sort of the thing. But the plan came about because Tampa General Hospital was in distress, and two committees of citizens were formed to try to find solutions to it. And then the two committees eventually merged under the leadership of Commissioner Phyllis Busansky. And they came up with the notion of getting an additional sales tax and developing a health care program that was administered by the county for the indigent population.

And so, we supported legislation that authorized the collection of a half-cent sales tax. Got it without a referendum, got the legislature to do that. It took five votes from the commissioners to implement it. And then, we hired a consultant to come in and describe a plan that presumably would be workable. You know, it's easy to say you're just going to take care of the poor people, but nobody knew what that population was. Nobody knew whether the families would come to it. Nobody knew what the reception would be. The universe of poor people in a county like Hillsborough is just guesswork.

So, there were a lot of serious questions about it. Then, as we started to get the program together to get it ready to go, then people started reaching out to try to take control of it, because it promised to throw off \$40, \$50 million dollars a year, and you know, people kill for that sort of money. So there were people who were eyeballing the program and trying to get a chance to take control of it. We fought that off.

PK: Was the health consultant that you used, was that report advocating this—did that report indicate that there was going to be that large revenue?

FK: No. The estimate was that the sales tax would be worth about \$40 million dollars, and then there was a required county continuous effort of \$26 million. So it was estimated that \$65, \$66 million would be about what it would produce, or somewhere in that neighborhood. I'm not quite clear about my recollection of the numbers. It was nowhere near what actually happened.

PK: And that is really the intent of my question. It's unusual for a consultant to underestimate and to be that far off the mark in that direction. I always think of that as being overdone. And this was a case in which it was underdone.

FK: She was an outstanding person, this consultant. She developed this notion of dividing the county into four districts so you could have an element of competition in it, of having a network in each of the four districts that involved the top hospital like Tampa General with community hospital facilities, specialists, doctors, clinical work and a primary care doctor for everybody who came in the door, and at the clinical level, you had social workers working with them as case managers. She put together the outline of this plan that was eventually adopted by the commission and put into play. And the county has managed it ever since, and it's worked beautifully.

But it was—I've simplified it, the way I've described it. Every step of the way was painful and arduous and controversial. But eventually it emerged, and it's turned out to be a good thing. It's probably time, now, in this time and age, where it ought to be rolled over into some sort of outsourcing arrangement, at least for parts of it.

PK: Why is that, Fred?

FK: Well, it needs some insurance expertise. It is now an insurance company. It deals with \$70, \$80 million dollars a year in health care monies and it's a lot of people. We could improve on the quality of care and improve on the management of the clinics and the way the thing is executed. We know so much more now in insurance circles and health insurance businesses than we did at that time. And we still are running it as a county entity. I understand they're moving to get more expertise in, but they really must either staff up like a private insurance company or they need to farm it out. I think the least expensive way would be to outsource big parts of it.

PK: Keeping it simple for me, because I'm not smart enough to understand the complexity of the health care plan, question one, how did it get so much bigger than anticipated? And question number two, is it going to stay that kind of size in terms of your view of it down the road?

FK: The number of people served was not necessarily underestimated. We guessed at that at the time. It was not underestimated. The revenue that came in was more than was anticipated, because the sales tax brought in more revenue than it was bringing in at the time we formulated the plan, because the economy of the county had improved dramatically. And the population increased, you know; from the last census, even, we've shown a pretty dramatic increase in population.

So there was more money coming in than was needed to fund the program, and the commission, at the request of the advisory board, created a reserve rather than to spend to the limit or to increase the limits of eligibility. They decided to just hold onto the money and accumulated a reserve of over \$100 million dollars. I'm not sure that was bright, because that came to haunt them during the legislative session, because legislators thought, "If you don't need the money, why would you tax the people to have it?"

PK: And that really is the intent of my question, is to explore that concept of is it necessary to continue to fund this the way that it is?

FK: I think that before you cut the support for it back, you ought to increase the eligibility. There's a layer of people whose income is above 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines but below 150 percent, the so-called working poor, who have enough—they have a job, and they have enough money to eat and to have a home, but there's not enough there to pay medical bills, and they have no insurance.

Those people cost Tampa General in the neighborhood of \$18 million dollars a year today. And those people could be covered by this program, simply by extending the eligibility up to 125 or 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline. And I think they should have done that, rather than just accumulate an unconscionable kind of reserve and hold it back. First, you're depriving people of the medical care for which the law was intended. And, secondly, you've created the implication that it was not needed when there were people out there who are suffering because they didn't have this coverage.

PK: It was tough to get that program underway.

FK: It was.

PK: I remember that. Can you describe some of the difficulty?

FK: Well, we had difficulties from the inception. First, you had to agree on what to do. Then we had to agree on who was going to do it, whether the county or one of the private people who had their eye on it. Then we had to get the legislature to approve it, which meant selling the whole community on it, Chamber of Commerce and all that. Then, we had to go through the process of putting the plan together and getting the commissioners to implement it. Then monitoring it and operating of it and assembling the staff for it. There was just one problem after the other until it was fully running. And, there's still problems but they are a minimum amount.

PK: Well, in sitting here in ninety-seven [1997], we know that there's been some audit criticisms of the indigent care program, and I think for the record, because the record will go on long past you and I; this tape hopefully will exist. You want to comment on any of that?

FK: I think those are symptomatic of the management problems that I have mentioned before that could be resolved by getting insurance expertise in it. See, it's really just a big insurance company, health insurance company, and there are risks that are taken and there are underwriting techniques and management techniques that are not common to bureaucracy. Not that they don't have the capacity to do it, but they've not been trained in that way. And I just think there's a need for insurance expertise in the management of it, and that will clear up most of the problems.

PK: Why wouldn't you have outsourced the management to begin with? There wasn't—and maybe I'm wrong—but there wasn't all that much inside county expertise—in county government—for managing a program of this size and dimension, was there?

FK: Well, as I mentioned, there were groups that had their eye on it selfishly, one in particular, and I was just determined not to let that happen. Take a brand new program like this and all that money and just put it out in somebody's hands that didn't know how they were going to run it or what their capacity to do it would be. And it was moving in that direction, and so I had to use all the influence I had to resist that. And I didn't do it alone, but I joined the effort and we stopped it from going outside of the county. And now I think it's mature enough and under control long enough so that it could be done safely, or parts of it could be farmed out safely.

PK: What do you see down the road for the indigent care program?

FK: I see it existing right on. Continuing to perform its good work and making a big difference in the health—level of healthcare—in the community and gaining in public support as it goes. If there's no scandal, if they do outsource it or bring in expertise, it will run smoothly from now until the end of the time till there's a federal program or some other thing that takes the place of it.

PK: I've got to ask you a question, Fred, and that it's just to have a recorded answer for. When you were county administrator, had the president of Tampa General Hospital come to you and said, "I need to tap into the indigent care fund in order to put my hospital in the black," only you're still county administrator, would you have said yes or no?

FK: I would have said no. But when I was hospital administrator, or president of the hospital, I put a lot of pressure on the—to get my successor to agree to that. The truth is—and I don't want to skip over the hospital yet without making one last remark about the county, but the truth is at the time that I was administrator of the county, I did not understand the nature of the problems of the hospital. And when I came to understand them, I felt differently. Had I known those at the time I was county administrator, I would have done some of those things for the hospital. But I didn't know it.

PK: And that question is fun to ask you in public and watch you have to deal with what I thought was going to be your answer. What are you most proud of as county administrator, before we go to the hospital? What—of all the things that you accomplished as county administrator, what do you look back and say, "This is it, this is Fred Karl's legacy"?

FK: They're so intangible that they're almost hard to identify. But it is the promotion of minority members, members of the minority groups, up to high ranking positions within the county government, breaking down of some of the old segregation customs and things and good ole boy stuff within the county, the proof that the charter could work with or without an elected administrator. If you get the right person in, you can make it churn and click. The building of the confidence of the public in the county government so that they would let you impose new taxes or that they would vote for new taxes even though times were tough. You know, they voted during that time for the environmental land, environmental protection act. They voted for youth sports programs. They voted for the children's board all during the time that things were so tough and money was hard to come by, and they allowed us to implement the garbage disposal fee and implement the indigent sales tax and do so many other things that were good for the government. They would never have done that had they not had confidence in the government.

So, I look back and say I had a part in bringing county government into its own and doing things for minorities and setting tones that are all intangible, but they're much more important than the county center or the Yankee Stadium, or the Ice Palace or any of those tangible things. If I could be remembered for anything, I'd like to be remembered for those wholesome and intangible benefits that I helped to bring to the county.

PK: I think maybe I should have done this in the other order. What did you leave undone? What do you see as your failure?

FK: Well, I probably didn't stay there long enough to make some of the changes indelible. That's one, if you concentrate on those intangible things. You know, it's too easy to undo some of those things. I got them pretty well entrenched and it's been hard to divert from them, but some of the things have gone

away since then. Some of the people have been changed out of position, and things have reverted to a certain extent to the old ways. I regret that, that I didn't really make it so indelible that it couldn't be changed.

I also feel like I could have done more to get an elected county administrator in place. That's kind of paradoxical, because if I had done a sorry job there'd probably be an elected administrator, and the better job I did the less chance there was that the people would get excited enough in the Charter Review Board to propose it. So I have some regrets about that. And there's some other minor things. But by and large if I had it to do over again, I probably wouldn't make decisions much differently than I did. And there were a lot of decisions that passed over my desk in those years.

PK: Did you like the job day in and day out?

FK: I did like the job. I enjoyed the activities. I must tell you, though, I was getting up in age. When I left I was seventy, and I was getting to the point where the routine seemed awfully hard to me. It was a day and night kind of thing. I had 4,500 people reporting directly to me and a big budget and annual strife and elections every two years and all the friction that went on. I sort of longed to get back to my notion of slowing down as I came to Tampa. You know, I was going to just ease into the three or four days a week work.

PK: Ah, right. And, then you went to Tampa General as a way to slow down.

FK: Well, it didn't happen that way. You remember I announced on my resignation as of November the eighteenth, or whatever it was, of 1994. And that was way in plenty of time so they could take the time and hire a good person. And I stayed till the end, and I planned six weeks' vacation in Europe. We had—I was going back to the Battle of the Bulge sites, and visit the battlegrounds and graveyards for my friends who were buried and all that sort of thing. I even had the cars rented to do that sort of trip.

And everything was going so well, and then the thing at Tampa General erupted very suddenly, remember, in October of 1994. There was the rumor that it was going to be sold, and the hospital board was badly divided and they came to me and said, "If the chief executive decides to leave, would you take it over?" And I said, "I won't discuss that with you. As long as he's in the position I'm going to be supportive of him. But if he leaves, then you can talk to me about it and I'll let you know whether, if I'm still here, whatever." But I would not discuss it until he was really gone, or certainly on the way out.

And as it turned out, his demise was precipitated. All of a sudden he—over one weekend I was in Tallahassee, and they called and said, "He's leaving Monday. Can we talk to you Sunday night?" So I packed up and came home, and they said—well, the chairman of the board and a couple of others and decided that I would try it. And I had to go to the county commission and asked them to let me go a week earlier, which they did.

And that was a real experience, that hospital thing. Lord, have mercy. At age seventy, starting a whole new career. I'd never managed a hospital. Never managed a medical care facility of any kind, and there I was, president and chief executive officer of a 960 bed hospital with 3,500 employees, and all of them well educated. You know, the thousand doctors working the halls and all the nurses with graduate

degrees and things like that. That was some sort of an ordeal. And I was—the way I described it, I was like the conductor of a symphony orchestra who didn't know how to read music.

PK: You had to get a quick lesson in it in a big hurry, because the hospital, when you took it over, was in some pretty serious straits, wasn't it?

FK: Yes. The hospital was in desperate straits. When I went there, the layer of administrative officers directly under the CEO were all gone except two. And then one of them left shortly after I went over there. There was no chief financial officer. There was no human resources director. There was no vice-president for services. There was just nobody there, except Dena Nelson who was a graduate nurse with a master's degree who was sort of the supervisor of nursing and an administrator. And she and I took control of the hospital and promoted people up to the rank of vice-president. Put together an organization. Got the hospital going, and just in summary, I can tell you that in the last six months that I was there, the revenues increased \$14 million dollars over the revenue for the same six month period in the preceding year.

So, within a year, we had it up and running pretty good. And I thought it was back on its feet to stay. We cleaned it up. We put new signage up. We put in valet parking at the door. We made some improvements. Put the one-day surgery center in a location where it would attract attention. We advertised. Remember the commercials that I did to tell people it was their hospital? And we really did a selling job, and it was successful. We got managed care companies to bring their business back.

But I was—see, I was so out of my—over my head, so to speak, because I really didn't know much about the inner workings. I knew people and I knew business principles, but it's much more than that. It's all the medical care. And I had a whole new vocabulary to learn at seventy years of age, and that was a tough thing for me to do.

PK: But you did it.

FK: Yeah, I did it, and I enjoyed it, too. But I just felt a moral urge to turn it over to a professional administrator. I just knew that eventually it would overwhelm me, because it was such a unique field, and it's so important to the community that that hospital be healthy.

PK: At the time you took over Tampa General, your predecessor was alleged—and I use that word, rather than accused or proven—was alleged to have been negotiating or serving in the position with a covert intent to take Tampa General out of the public sector. And that he was doing things as CEO that may have moved the hospital in that direction without anybody being aware of it. True or false?

FK: Well, let me answer it this way. There was substantial circumstantial evidence that he was not just taking it private but really making a joint venture arrangement with Columbia-HCA. There was evidence of legislation that had been proposed and that some of the legislators had agreed to pass for him. There was even some paperwork that later came to light. There was testimony, informal testimony, from employees about transactions and things that happened. There was just a whole litany of things that were circumstantial. Each one taken alone was okay. But if you put them together, it formed a pattern. But the plan was to go private and then to joint venture with one of the for-profit corporations. And I think truly that's where it was going.

PK: When you uncovered it, given your—or, when you saw that, given your own belief system and the importance of keeping the hospital public, what were the first things you had to do to start counteracting that or turning it around?

FK: Well, the first thing I did was when I went to the first meeting of the board of trustees, I took a sign in, a big sign that I had had lettered that said “Tampa General Is Not For Sale.”

PK: I remember that.

FK: Put it on an easel for everybody to see. And then I made a speech to them that described Tampa General as a beautiful wounded whale that was swimming for its life and that it was worth saving, and that we had to get away from those who were trying to harpoon it and who had damaged [it]. And I started creating this environment that we could save it if we went to work on it, and they supported me and we did.

I also talked to the attorney general of the state, who is my friend, and confided in him that I had this dilemma that I saw all this circumstantial evidence and didn't know what to do about it, and whether it had happened that way or for some other reason. Eventually there was quite an investigation, as you know. As far as I know at this sitting in 1997, the computers and some of the other things are still in the hands of the federal agencies, and they've asked me not to discuss the investigation, so I will not do it if you ask me questions. But it was a major investigation.

PK: Okay. Well, we'll leave it at that. History will record whatever history will record. The advertisements, the public effort, the remodeling, all of those image things that you did to regenerate or revitalize or move Tampa General back into what your impression of a public sector hospital was supposed to be, and others' impression of it. All of that effort really took a lot of time on your part, didn't it? That was a big deal.

FK: It was an unrelenting, unforgiving, twenty-four hour a day job. I can't say that I didn't enjoy it, because it was exciting every moment of the time, but there was never a moment when you felt really—I wore a pager that was nationwide. Wherever I went, if I went on a trip or a seminar or wherever I was, whatever time of the day or night, they could reach me. Indeed, they had to, because a little fire was a major catastrophe, or some incident in the hospital where someone was hurt or some accusation or some—you know, there's a lot of crazies that get into hospitals and things happen that cause all sorts of problems. And you just never knew. So it was like wearing a heavy sack all the time. It was always with me.

I remember one Sunday afternoon I was sitting at home trying to relax. I'd been to the hospital in the morning and I'd come back to the condominium across the river from where the hospital was, where we lived, and I was just sitting there watching a Sunday afternoon program when the phone rang and they said, “We've just found an almost fully developed fetus in the sewer system. What should we do about it?” And I said, “God, I don't know what to do about something like that. I'd never had that happen to me before, but I'll be right over.” Turned out that some poor woman who had been in a terrible accident gave birth to a child in the bathroom, and it just simply went through the sewage system and it was found. Nobody even knew it on the ward. Didn't even know she was pregnant. It wasn't fully developed, by the way.

But that kind of crisis could just erupt at any moment of the day or night, and you just never knew what was happening. So they'd call me from other hospitals and want to send patients in, and you have these monster decisions to make. Do we have room? Can we afford it? And all that sort of thing.

PK: Would you have stayed if there had been an experienced—if we call you the CEO, a COO, chief operating officer? You didn't have one, as I recollect.

FK: No, I did not. And I actually toyed with that notion. Had I been a little younger and felt like I could last a little longer, I would have insisted on doing that. I think I was in a position to find a good COO, somebody who really knew hospital administration. Let me do the kind of thing that I do best and let that person run it. I interviewed one very prominent person for that position and would have settled with him, but he asked to be paid much more than they were paying me, and they thought they were paying me too much at the time. Of course, history tells us that that was ridiculous. But there was no way I could retain him at almost twice what I was being paid to be my subordinate.

So I decided, for those reasons and for reasons of circumstances of age and things like that, it was just time for me to pass the baton and let them get somebody in of their own selection who really knew the hospital. And, here again, I gave them plenty of time. I gave them a long term warning and worked right up to the day I said I would work, and passed it over smoothly.

PK: The history of your pay statement in terms of Dr. Seigel's in 1977, Dr. Seigel's salary is one thing, but—

FK: Nineteen seventy-seven?

PK: Nineteen ninety-seven—is one thing, but the more important, I suppose, bigger issue is—not that pay isn't important, but is the fact that you did not succeed in keeping Tampa General from being privatized. It today sits in that environment. Looking back from that, that it has happened, the thing that you came in the breach to stop, you did stop it for the period of time that you were there, but it didn't sustain itself. Would you have done anything different? Could you have done something different that might have prevented that from passing?

FK: I don't know what I could have done differently, because I steered the board toward Dr. Seigel as the successor. And I had a hand in help making that happen. Because he was an MD, he was bright, and he's partly African-American, and he was in a public hospital system in New York, and he'd reportedly been in conflict with his bosses in New York because they wanted to do something private with the hospitals and he's stood up to them. And I went into that with full confidence that he would come here and just pick it up where I left off and make it click as a public facility. If I had known differently, I would have taken a different position with respect to the successor. But I have to bear some responsibility for that.

I certainly was surprised after he'd been here a few months he announced that the hospital could not survive as a public hospital. Now, I have to tell you for the record that I did not fight him on this, because I was, by this time, on the outside and I didn't want to reach out of the grave, so to speak, and try to run the hospital after I'd voluntarily left. I wanted to be as supportive as I could, and the plan that he'd announced was not foreign to me. He'd announced a plan for a central research and teaching

facility that was like a giant intensive care unit, and I had actually written a paper along those lines at one point in my time over there describing that with medical (inaudible) or medical clinics scattered throughout the county to do all the first aid and minor surgery and delivery of children and things like that.

So, his long-range plan was in harmony with what I thought ought to be done ultimately in the County. Difference was I thought it ought to be done as a public institution and not the Davis Islands site and he wanted to go private right away and then move it out to the university campus. And so, I made up my mind since the long range plan was acceptable, the means to getting there were relatively unimportant. If he could really pull off what he said he was going to do, then I would be supportive along the way. And so, while I didn't actively support him, I did not object to it. I'm hoping that by the time this is seen down the line somewhere, there will be a fine facility on the campus that is world renowned for its research and educational facilities and a good place to get quality care.

PK: The future of that physical site, you know, on Davis Islands, what could you imagine happening to that if it were to not be Tampa General Hospital?

FK: I don't know whether this is economically feasible or not, but the hospital was built in segments, as you perhaps know. In 1927 the old building was built, and then about the early seventies [1970s] or mid-seventies [1970s], the newer part was started and it was finished in—well, before eighty [1980]. That newer part is a first class building. It is in a prime location. It's of substantial construction, and it's exotically wired, you know, for all the high tech equipment that is used in the hospital, all of that. It wouldn't take much in my view, relatively speaking, to renovate that and turn it into some sort of a residential facility. The parking is all there. The location is ideal. It's safe. It's beautiful. The scenery from those hospital rooms is just out of this world.

So, if I had the resources and could get a feasibility study that would say it would be proper to do, I would take down the older buildings and convert the newer buildings with the big open cafeteria and auditoriums and sleeping rooms and all that into some sort of living facility.

PK: Well, we have about five minutes, and so we need to do some summing up kind of ideas, Fred. I think the first one is you still haven't reached retirement, and you're now in a law firm. And so far as I can tell, you have every intention of having as much fun as you've ever had, and you seem to be doing it. Is that true?

FK: Yes. I'm very happy in what I'm doing now. It's a much easier life. The transition from the hospital back to the law firm was difficult, because it's a slow pace and I found some troubles in readjusting. But I'm gradually getting used to it. Two things are happening. I'm getting used to the slower life, and the life is picking up. The law business is beginning to improve, and I'm getting more deeply involved in the operations of the firm and helping a lot of the younger lawyers with their work and things like that. So, it's more interesting than it was. And I'm getting used to a little bit slower life. I take almost every weekend off and go visit the grandchildren or something like that.

PK: Gosh, that's amazing. You finally are doing what you set out to do in the process.

FK: I'll tell you what I did, just for the record. I withdrew my name for consideration for the Constitutional Revision Commission. I know you're going to ask me if I'm going back into

government, and that would have been a way to do it. I had a chance, I think, to be appointed to that once every twenty-year thing. But I just decided that I needed to make room for somebody else, and I had it in mind that Peter Wallace—who is in our law firm, who just stepped down as speaker of the Florida House of Representatives—and I wanted him to have an uninhibited shot at being on the Commission. And for that and other reasons, I withdrew my name. But he didn't get it either, so—but I think that is evidence of the fact that unless something unsuspecting and unusual comes along, I'm probably not going to do anything else in public life.

PK: Well, you did take the question away. What would it take to get you—what crisis, what turmoil, what could you envision that it would take to get you to go back and do something like Tampa General or the county administrator? I mean, what haven't you done that you want to do?

FK: Well, as I said somewhere along the line, there are only a couple of things I haven't done. One of them is leprosy, and I don't want to do that.

PK: Yeah, right.

FK: I don't know what it would take to do it. I suppose—you know, I feel good. I'm in reasonably good health. I do have Parkinson's Disease, as you know, had it for several years. And the degeneration is slow, but I feel generally pretty good. And as you surely know, I work a pretty full day every day, except the weekends. Sometimes I work the weekend, but not often. So I'm physically able to do some moderately complex job, but I don't think I'd ever run for office and I don't think I would take on something for the long haul, because at my age and circumstances, I think I would do something on an interim basis. I don't have anything in mind, but you know, I'm deeply involved with state government and the insurance department and things like that and I do some special attorney's work for them. So conceivably something could come along, but I don't know of anything at the moment that I'm looking for, and I'm certainly not trolling for anything right now.

PK: And fishing or a park bench isn't it?

FK: No.

PK: In the minute we've got left, what do you want to say to everybody who may watch this tape, generations from now, about Fred Karl? What would you like to be remembered for?

FK: I'd just like to say that the work that I did in the public sector, being, or trying to be, a genuine public servant, was the most rewarding thing that you can imagine. It's an exhilarating feeling to be selected to take a high office and it's thrilling to make it happen. And I would encourage those who have any kind of aspiration to do that to take a chance on it, to get involved. I encourage young people all the time to think seriously about getting into government. Not because of all the bad stuff that's there, but in spite of that, so that you can go in and try to clean it up. I think honest practice of politics is one of the highest callings that you can possibly have.

And I'd like to be remembered as making some contribution to the uplifting of the political system and to the upgrading of the game of politics. I've done my part to try to make it better than it was when I found it. It's cost me an awful lot of money in some instances and other things more valuable than money, but I wouldn't change anything. I'm very proud of the service that I've performed, and I hope

that those who come behind me will pick up this kind of idea and carry it forward, and that if they will, the whole universe will be better off for it. It's been a real joy to me to be honored with the public offices that I've had and the responsibility that I've borne and I'm quite comfortable with my life as it is today.

PK: Well, it's been a real honor and a privilege for me, one to call you friend; and two, to have this opportunity to interview you on behalf of the University of South Florida. Thanks, Fred.

FK: Thanks you, Peter. It's really been nice. I wish you all well.

End of interview