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Gary Mormino: Today is September 15, and it's my pleasure to be talking with Mr. Julian Lane at his home in Tampa. Mr. Lane, why don't we begin? Maybe you could tell me something about your family background in Tampa; Tampa roots.

Julian Lane: Well, my father came here about 1890 from South Georgia. In those days, everybody here in Tampa came from Georgia.

GM: Right.

JL: He went in the dairy business, and stayed in that until he passed away in 1931. Now, my wife's family came here about 1850—sixty [1860]. I think she's third or fourth generation. Of course, they have seen Tampa grow from a small village, you might say, town, until it's a metropolitan area.

GM: Sure. Right. How about yourself? Where were you born, and when?

JL: I was born right in Seminole Heights.

GM: Seminole Heights, yeah.

JL: At Central and Buffalo Avenue[s].

GM: Is that right? What year was that?

JL: Nineteen fourteen [1914].

GM: Right, 1914. Tell me, what do you remember about growing up in Seminole Heights as a young boy?

JL: Well, of course, that was in the country in those days. The streetcar ran there right down Central Avenue to Sulphur Springs. In fact, in those days you could ride a streetcar from Sulphur Springs to Port Tampa for ten cents. We had a lot of fun, particularly on Halloween nights. (inaudible) on the car tracks, and we would cover the switch, (laughs) getting the conductor all upset. Of course, I remember mostly it was rather in the country, at those times. I can remember ducks being down on the Hillsborough River in the pond there off of Florida Avenue.

We swam in the Hillsborough River, where I learned to swim. It's a wonder I didn't get drowned. I remember going to the Buffalo Avenue Grammar School. After school was out, some of us would slip down to the river, go swimming, and walk home barefoot in the sand, get our legs and feet dirty so our mothers wouldn't know we'd been swimming. (laughs)

GM: What was the neighborhood like, in terms of your neighbors? Any particular ethnic group? Did it tend to be WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant]? Had families moved out of Ybor City into Seminole Heights?

JL: No, not at that time. Most of the Latins were still in Ybor City and West Tampa. Of course, at Hillsborough High School—we only had two high schools in those days. According to the districts, most of the Latin people living in West Tampa and Ybor City went to Hillsborough. Of course, Hillsborough was a large school. In those days, it had about 2200 students. It was an ordinary neighborhood, with corner grocery stores, corner drugstores. No TV, very little radio. We had a lot of sandlot ball games, baseball games, things like that.

GM: How did the groups get along in those days? Would you ever go, as a young boy, would you go to Ybor City or West Tampa for recreation?

JL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. My father used to go through Ybor City every day going out to his farm on East—what we called Seventh Avenue then; it's now what's called East Broadway [Avenue]. I remember one thing; they sold bananas by the dozen. They had a lot of little fruit stands out there. My dad would stop and buy a dozen bananas, and I could almost eat a dozen of them. (laughs)

GM: You brought up an interesting question. A number of Italians in Tampa were in the dairy business. Can you shed any light on exactly you think that was? In fact, were not most of the dairies owned by Latins in Tampa?

JL: Yeah.

GM: Why do you think that was?

JL: I don't know. You know, I never thought of that, but they were. The majority of the wholesale producers had the small dairies, and sold the milk to the processing plants; we had one of those. And also, my father had a producing dairy, too. But a lot of our

producers were small Latin dairies, like the Gualliardos and the Zambitos. In fact, although those two are out of business, I don't believe there's any Latins left in the dairy business, on the producing end. Of course, we don't have now nearly the number of dairies we used to have. Most of them now are large. In fact, I think there's four hundred producing dairies in the state of Florida, and they average four hundred cows per herd.

GM: Very large, yeah. Now, you would have grown up during the [Great] Depression, as well.

JL: Yes, it was a tough time.

GM: How would you describe the Depression in Tampa to an outsider?

JL: Things were real hard. Money was scarce, and you had people on welfare—well, WPA [Works Progress Administration] in those days, when [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt became president. Things were just tough. Money was scarce. I went to [the University of] Florida as a freshman in 1933, on a so-called football scholarship, which only amounted to the registration fee, and I had a job waiting tables at the College Inn, and that was it. My mother sent me a dollar every now and then, when she had it. It was tough. Things were cheap. Gosh, you could have a date on Saturday night and go to the Tampa Theatre and get you a Coca-Cola, and you'd spend a little over a dollar.

GM: Is that right? (laughs)

JL: (laughs) Hamburgers, at one time, were fifteen cents.

GM: Now, during that period, was Tampa a wide-open town? You know, like when you were a teenager during Prohibition?

JL: Well, they started tightening up in the late thirties [1930s], but in the early thirties [1930s] it was wide open. You had houses of prostitution up in Ybor City on Fifteenth and Sixteenth Street. You had your gambling houses, not only in Ybor City but there were one or two in West Tampa. They had the dice games and roulette and blackjack and those things. And *bolita* was wide open; you could buy *bolita* at any grocery store, and the peddlers were on the street.¹

GM: Now, for instance, could you buy *bolita* in Seminole Heights?

JL: Uh—

GM: Or was it pretty much—I mean, you could buy it in any Latin grocery store, but places like Seminole Heights, it really hadn't—

¹ Bolita is a type of lottery which was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Cuba and among Florida's working class Hispanic, Italian and Black population.

JL: No, you wouldn't find the sellers out there, and you wouldn't find it in the grocery stores. But if you came downtown in downtown Tampa and West Tampa and Ybor City, you could buy it at any store, just about.

GM: So, after your college career at Florida, did you return to Tampa?

JL: No, I went to work for Firestone, and was with them three years.

GM: Where was that?

JL: I went to their training course the first, which you went to Akron [Ohio] in a state up there, and the factories were six weeks. Then you went in different departments. There was a district off of Jacksonville [Florida], and you worked, and then they'd send you out into a retail store and you'd work in the battery department and the tire department and brakes and all of those things—budget, did the whole job. After about three years, I was called into the service. I received a commission in ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] at Florida, and went in the service, spent five years in the field artillery, came out a lieutenant colonel. Good experience. I would not want to have missed it, but I wouldn't want to go through it again. (laughs)

GM: Right, right. When did you finally return to Tampa?

JL: I came back here January 1, 1946.

GM: Forty-six [1946]. How would you describe Tampa after V-J Day?

JL: Well, it was—

GM: Had it changed a lot since you left, or not?

JL: It had changed some. It was still—you kind of got a feeling of a small town, but I think it was getting ready to move ahead. Even in those days, it was sort of the distribution center for the west coast [of Florida], and becoming the banking center, but it was kind of a sleeping city.

GM: Would you describe it as a Southern city? That's always an interesting question. Was Tampa a Southern city? I don't think it is today, but how about in forty-six [1946]?

JL: Well, when you talk of Southern cities, not in the same class as you would put Atlanta or Natchez, Mississippi, or some of the Georgia cities or Louisiana, where they still have the Old South atmosphere and feeling. No, we were a mixture here. I think MacDill Field had a lot to do with new people coming in; they had come in here and decided to live here. We just had a mixture of people. It was somewhat Southern, but not in the same class as you would say the old Southern hospitality.

GM: All right. How about in terms of race relations?

JL: Well, at that time, you heard very little about race problems and race relations. There was still segregation. You had your Negro sections, or your black sections, as we call them now. The Latin people were moving out from the Latin districts onto Davis Islands and other areas. Things were moving, things were changing, but you just didn't—you didn't get into integration or racial problems at that time.

GM: Right. We'll deal with that later.

JL: We can pick that up a little later.

GM: Curtis Hixon was mayor when you came back.² How do you view Curtis Hixon now, in retrospect?

JL: Well, he was the mayor when I came back. From all I can learn about him and I know about him—I knew of him when I was just a boy and he ran the drugstore on Nebraska [Avenue] and what's now Columbus Drive; in those days it was Michigan Avenue. He is very well thought of in the business circles, and most people think that he was an outstanding mayor.

GM: Recently, the [*Tampa*] *Tribune* has run some articles, you know; [police sergeant] Danny Alvarez has supposedly spoken out. Do you believe those allegations, that Hixon was receiving payoffs?

JL: No.

GM: No?

JL: He wasn't—I'm sure he wasn't receiving any payoffs. I think what he was probably doing was when election time came around, then he expected these people to make contributions to help his campaign. And I think that's what took place. I'm sure that Curtis Hixon never took a payoff and put it in his pocket.

GM: What was the role between politics and *bolita* in the forties [1940s], when you returned?

JL: It really wasn't too wide open. Of course, I think we had the Kefauver Committee came down,³ but it wasn't quite as wide open in the forties [1940s] as it was in the early thirties [1930s]. After the fact—after I came back in the forties [1940s]. But there was still *bolita*. Now, the gambling houses weren't wide open, and the houses of prostitution, but I think that a lot of that was probably affected by World War II. The military police kind of helped clean things out.

² Curtis Hixon (1891-1956) was mayor of Tampa from 1943 to 1956. He was also on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County Commission.

³ The Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce, also known as the Kefauver Committee after its chairman Senator Estes Kefauver. The committee traveled the country in 1951 and 1952 investigating organized crime.

GM: (laughs) Right, right. What about Sheriff Hugh Culbreath⁴?

JL: Well, you know, Sheriff Culbreath, during part of one of his terms, he was in the service and then came back here and was sheriff, and was then—at one time, I believe he was relieved by the Governor. He ran a strong department. I have no evidence that he ever accepted bribes or anything like that. Gambling, you know, doesn't operate unless you've got protection.

GM: Sure. Kefauver people seem to point that there were tainted departments there, but on the other hand, he never was in jail.

JL: No, he never was convicted. There was some hectic times around here when Kefauver was holding his hearings, a lot of accusations, but I don't think anybody was ever convicted of any wrongdoing.

GM: Right, right. Tampa, in forty-six [1946] when you came back, from my reading of the history, seemed to have suffered from an image problem. You know, there was that famous newspaper article or magazine called "Tampa: Hellhole of the Gulf Coast."⁵ The whole *bolita* problem, the Kefauver Committee, the cigar industry was dying. It would never be the same. Tampa seemed to be searching for a new direction. Do you agree with that or not?

JL: The cigar industry, which was one of our major industries for many, many years—in fact, they still call us "Cigar Capital of the World," but we're not. That industry was going out, and I think we were kind of on a wait-and-see attitude of where we were going. But we were—we were beginning then to develop, as I said earlier, the financial district. Tampa was becoming a financial center for this part of Florida.

I think probably we were not growing so much as the east coast down around Miami. That had gotten the spotlight, you might say, and it was kind of the playground of America, you know, the United States, people coming down there. And we didn't get the publicity; we didn't have the P.R., the public relations, they used over there. But as the west coast developed and industry came in, started moving in, the distribution of all the major corporations, it started a slow growth. As we get farther down the line, I remember the problem that we had trying to revive the downtown. Well, you know, in the late fifties [1950s] and early sixties [1960s], the departments stores and others started moving out in the suburbs. That was the trend of the times.

GM: Sure.

⁴ Hugh Culbreath was sheriff of Hillsborough County from 1941 to 1952. He was one of the officials investigated by the Kefauver Committee. Culbreath was indicted on five charges, including one for bribery; four were dropped and he was acquitted of the fifth. Governor Fuller Warren suspended him for two months, after which he returned to office and finished his term.

⁵ This is from the book *America's Cities of Sin*, written by Noah Sarlat and published in 1951.

JL: And downtown just got worse. And we made a lot of efforts to bring people back, but I think it's a process of evolution. People now are going back and doing that, because of the high cost of transportation and gas and fuel. A lot of the cities in the north, people have moved back, got apartments downtown. Some people never own an automobile.

GM: Mm-hm. Sure.

JL: And that's where—I think that's what's going to revive downtown. That's the cause of all the building taking place right now.

GM: What role do you think the Committee of 50 had in the growth of Tampa in the fifties [1950s]?

JL: You mean the Committee of 100⁶?

GM: The Committee of 100, right. (laughs) Double it.

JL: I think they had a great role in it.

GM: Were you a member of that?

JL: No, but Henry Tolland, who was a friend of mine, served in the service with me, was, I believe, the first chairman. They took the old Henderson Airport⁷, where Busch and Schlitz and those people are today, and made that into an industrial park, and had the right legislative bills passed so they could do it, and really went out and went to work trying to bring industry in. Of course, they landed Busch and Schlitz, both of their breweries.

GM: Right.

JL: And that was the beginning. Since that time, other industries have moved in, in that area, and then of course the University of South Florida came along. It's just been a gradual growth in, I guess you'd say, every area of industry and education along those lines.

GM: Curtis Hixon dies in fifty-seven [1957], and Nick Nuccio is elected.⁸ How do you view Nick Nuccio over time, now?

⁶ Tampa's Committee of One Hundred (est. 1954), the Chamber of Commerce's economic development department that promotes community growth through programs and job creations that diversify and strengthen the local economy.

⁷ Henderson Airport is located just south of The University of South Florida and just north of Bush Gardens.

⁸ Nick Nuccio (1901-1989) served two terms as mayor of Tampa, from 1956 to 1959 and from 1963 to 1967. He also served on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County Commission before being elected mayor.

JL: Well, Nick's been a longtime public servant. Gosh, he was county commissioner as long as I can remember. (laughs)

GM: Yeah, I think he was in for fifty years, altogether, his total.

JL: Yeah, at least. (laughs)

GM: The total of his community service.

JL: Nick, I think, was more of politician than he was an administrator.

GM: (inaudible) How would you distinguish the two?

JL: He was always doing special favors. He was always—he had little trinkets in his pockets for children he'd run into. You can go around town even today and still find the benches that he made with his name on them.

GM: Right, right.

JL: But he was a professional politician. That's the way he made his living. I think Nick had a good personality, very friendly, great cigar smoker.

GM: (laughs) Right.

JL: And he enjoyed people. He liked to do things for people, which he did. You could call him up and say, "Nick, there's seven to eighth streets out here we need you to pave." Back in those days, my place was out there where Clair-Mel City was. And I called him. He was my County Commissioner. He paved the road.

GM: Did you have to give anything for that.

JL: No!

GM: No?

JL: (laughs)

GM: Were there allegations that he was receiving kickbacks or anything, as County Commissioner?

JL: No, I never remember him being accused of that. Of course, one of the things that came out when Jimmy Lumia, who was one of our local gangsters, was killed⁹—he had a note in his pocket where he had loaned Nick some—I don't know, \$1500.00, something like that. That doesn't look good for a public official. Maybe it was just an ordinary loan; it might have been a gift. But those things, public officials shouldn't get into.

⁹ Lumia was killed on June 5, 1950, shot while seated in his car.

GM: What did Nuccio do as mayor? How do you view his first term, fifty-seven [1957] to sixty-one [1961]? How would you assess him?

JL: Well, I think he had a fair administration. Things were real tough. For example, when I took office, we were nearly a million dollars in debt to Tampa General Hospital, accounts payable. He didn't run a very efficient administration. The different departments did their own purchasing. Civil service was something that he paid no attention to, all down the line.

GM: How about bids?

JL: That didn't exist very much.

GM: Was there a law then that you had to have bids for public contracts?

JL: They were supposed to bid, but I don't guess anybody rode—heard on it too much; the newspapers didn't.

GM: His strength was where, during elections?

JL: Hmm. Well, his strength was among the black voters and the Latin voters.

GM: Why do you think black voters—why did Nuccio appeal to blacks?

JL: Well, I think that he had helped them. Now, we're getting into integration, segregation, and it was just coming to the forefront. He had—they thought he was a friend of theirs. I guess Nick—in our election, he probably got 75, 80 percent of the black vote.

GM: And West Tampa, of course, [and] Ybor City were very, very strong.

JL: He got everybody there; both areas were very strong for him. He was one of their people, and I don't blame them.

GM: Would he have been a strong proponent of annexation? Because, having been county commissioner, he would have done a lot of favors for those people in the county, or not? Who had the most to gain by annexation?

JL: You know, that's a hard question. The people outside the city—in fact, nobody wants to pay more taxes, (GM laughs) regardless of where you are. If you're annexed into the city, you're going to get more services, but you've got to pay for them. I don't believe, during his term in office that the subject came up, as far as annexation. Before he came in, they had already annexed this part of the city, from Howard Avenue on out, and I think they had gone north—I believe they took in Sulphur Springs. But I don't believe in Nick's first term that the problem came up.

I know it did under us; we incorporated Port Tampa, brought them into the city. There really was no need of having Port Tampa out there; it should have been part of the city in the beginning. Port Tampa was older than Tampa, but they had no sewers and very little utilities. We got that through Sam Gibbons, who was [state] senator.¹⁰ In those days, we only had one senator. He got that through the legislature without a referendum.

GM: Were Port Tampa people happy about that? Did they want to be annexed? What would you say?

JL: Some did, some didn't. It was about a fifty/fifty basis. We could furnish them services that they didn't have, and it didn't cost them a lot. We gave them police protection; we put a library out there, the community center; and ran city sewers eventually; lights, street lighting, all those kinds of things.

I remember one problem came up in those days; it was right when U.S.—that plywood outfit came in. I think it was United States something. Of course, some of the city fathers said, "Leave them out. Don't annex them." I said, "We can't do that." They said, "Well, they won't come in. We were out looking"—this was part of the Committee of 100. I said, "Well, I just think they will."

So, I called the Chairman of the Board of the company, a fellow named Baker. He wintered down here somewhere, in south Florida, and I called him. I told him the situation. He said, "Don't worry about that. We're coming to Tampa because we think the future is good. We don't want any special privileges. We'll pay our share of the taxes." I told him it'd be something like thirty, thirty-five thousand dollars a year. He said, "That's all right," and we went ahead. I went back and told the civic leaders about my conversation and said, "There's no problem. Let's move ahead with it," which we did. You'd hear all kind of things.

GM: Right, right. Tell me about the evolution of Julian Lane from dairy farmer to mayor. Had you been politically involved at all, up to 1961?

JL: Well, I'd always sort of been interested in public office, even in high school; I was active in student government, and of course the University of Florida also.

GM: Were you student body president up there? No?

JL: No. I was in high school.

GM: Oh, okay.

JL: I belonged to the wrong party at the University of Florida. (laughs) You couldn't make it. (laughs) I was actually back from the service. I was interested in civic activities

¹⁰ Sam Gibbons, in addition to serving in the Florida Senate and the Florida House of Representatives, also served in the U.S. House of Representatives for thirty-four years.

and in government, got interested in Dan McCarty's campaign for governor.¹¹ In fact, his second time, I managed his campaign in Hillsborough County. It was just having an interest, I guess, and wanting to serve my community. I did run for schools trustee, back when we had the school board and a trustee, but again, I was not on the right side. In those days, the trustees were—they had a powerful organization and they mainly speak for the schools. I wasn't their candidate. (laughs) There wasn't a lot of interest. I don't know, after that some of the people got interested in me running for public office. I first announced for city council.

GM: In sixty-one [1961]?

JL: No, fifty-nine [1959].

GM: Fifty-nine [1959]. Did you run?

JL: No. I announced, but then in about two weeks some other people came to me and said, "Why don't you go ahead and run for mayor?" So, we changed (laughs) the situation and I ran for mayor. It was a short campaign, right about—the first primary [was] about six weeks.

GM: That was with—

JL: That was against Nick Nuccio.

GM: So, you won in fifty-nine [1959]. Okay. I got the dates mixed up, I'm sorry.

JL: It's okay. J.L. Young,¹² who was—

GM: Interim mayor.

JL: —the interim mayor, he ran, too. He got eliminated in the first primary, and then Nick and I were in the runoff. It was a rough campaign, I'll tell you. I don't know how many hands I shook, going from daylight to dark, and sometimes later.

GM: An unnamed newspaper reporter told me that Red Newton¹³ selected you to run for mayor. How do you respond to that?

JL: No. Red Newton was a longtime friend of mine, in that he was a sports writer for the *Tampa Times* when I was in junior high school and high school and college. He was always kind to me. But no, he didn't. I never talked to him when I was about to

¹¹ Dan McCarty was Florida governor for eight months in 1953, dying in office after suffering a heart attack.

¹² Junie Lee Young, Jr. (1913-1968) was on the Tampa City Council and served as acting mayor for four months after Curtis Hixon died in 1956. He ran against Nuccio for mayor, but lost the election.

¹³ Virgil "Red" Miller was the managing editor of the *Tampa Tribune* from 1943 to 1964.

announce. He was a friend of mine, but I only spoke with Jim Council, who published the *Tribune*.

GM: Was it your decision to run, or did citizens come to you? I'm kind of interested in how did you make the decision?

JL: Well, it was (inaudible). Red McEwing, who was State Attorney at that time, some of the Chamber of Commerce people, Junior Chamber of Commerce people, and others. "Well, let's go ahead and run. We think you ought to run for mayor. We think you've got a good chance." Well, I didn't know what kind of campaign it would be. I knew it would be a lot harder than running for City Council.

GM: So, you decided to throw your hat in the ring in fifty-nine [1959]. Describe the campaign. You mentioned it was a rough campaign. What were the major issues?

JL: Well, I was running from a businessman's standpoint. My platform was advocating a businesslike administration, setting up centralized purchasing and civil service, those kinds of things: getting efficient. The rallies attacked both of us; of course, Nick was trying to look over my background and find out what I'd ever done and where, anything. He couldn't find anything. But it was just a deal. We had very little television, [and running] was not nearly as expensive then as it is now. It was the main thing, according to different rallies that the Democratic Party was putting on, going through factories and standing on street corners and shaking hands. We started debating in those days, and had debates before the civic clubs and things like that.

GM: With Nuccio?

JL: Yeah.

GM: How many times would you say you debated?

JL: Oh, I imagine—in fact, we were on TV, I guess twice, debating. I imagine probably five or six times. And he had his strong supporters, and we had mine, and sometimes it got a little rough. (laughs)

GM: You, of course, had the *Tribune* on your side. That was a powerful ally.

JL: It was helpful.

GM: Right.

JL: They endorsed me, and all the politicians wanted [their endorsement]; sometimes it might help them. In fact, I guess it's always helpful. Those that don't get it give the *Tribune* hell, and those that get it are pretty happy about it.

GM: Right, right. Can you pinpoint a pivotal issue in the election, or an incident that you think is why you won?

JL: Yes. I think that one of the strongest points we had at that time was that the Nuccio administration had purchased the old Atlantic Coast Line property along the waterfront. It was our opinion that it was a bad deal for the taxpayers. We so published it in the paper; it said that, and that was one of our key points, the “Great Railroad Robbery.”

GM: Looking back on that—I mean, in time; it’s twenty-five years [ago]—how do you see that now, looking at property values?

JL: I still think we paid too much for it, but of course it’s been a great improvement for downtown. That piece of property ran from Kennedy Boulevard today down to Cass Street—approximately Cass Street; it’s a railroad track. We had to go in, after I became mayor, and purchase the old Jackson Green plant, between the railroad track and Cass Street. That was probably one of the first times that we had a coordinated effort with the county. Ellsworth Simmons was chairman of the County Commission. The county—the whole community was going to profit. So, we got together, and the county came up with about half the price to buy that piece of land. I think that was the thing that—the development of that waterfront property was probably the beginning of the revitalizing of downtown. Of course, it was a long time coming.

GM: Whose credit is it? Nuccio, yours, a combination?

JL: Well—

GM: I know this is one of the big issues in the next campaign, exactly who gets credit for it. There seemed to be an overlap in there. You would claim, and Nuccio would claim, and there would always be that—

JL: They purchased it, we developed it. The Chamber of Commerce had a great deal to do with it. But then somebody had to carry out the plan to finance it, and it was my administration that did it. We looked for the best architecture firm that we could find. We thought we did at that time. Paramount of Dallas, Texas had done all the planning for the university system in Dallas, and he worked with a local firm, Norman Six, I believe it was. There was a lot of ideas of what we should build: a convention center, sort of a theater, or so forth and so on. But the thing was at that time, the convention business was hot. That’s what they wanted.

So, after we selected our architects, then we got a—again, we thought the best land use firm in the country, an outfit out of Nashville, Tennessee. They must have been pretty good, because with the exception of the museum back of Curtis Hixon, they stayed with that plan. The parking lot today is going up north of the Convention Center; that was part of the plan. Where the rose garden is supposed to be is where the music hall would go, but I don’t think they’re ever going to do that. But we did those things, selected the architects and land use plan and contractors. Paul Smith did the contracting. No, he

wasn't; I got in trouble for that, because he wasn't the lowest bidder and he thought we should get him to do it, because he was a Tampa contractor. I said, "We can't do it. We ought to give it to the best qualified person." So, we did that, and some of the people didn't like it, but again, that's good business.

But we went on and started working, started building. Then Nick came back and beat me in sixty-three [1963], before we had it completed, but it was well along. I remember when we opened the bids for the construction of it; it came in eight hundred thousand dollars more than we had anticipated, so we had to take some surface bonds and put in there (inaudible), cut off a little bit here and there. But we went ahead and ordered the bid, and went to work on it.

One of the things—that parking that's down below the Convention Center, that was an afterthought. One morning our Public Works director came in to the office and said, "Mayor, you know there's quite a drop from Ashley Street down to the river. Why don't we put parking in there, underground parking?" "It sounds good; let's look into it." So we got the engineers working on it, and sure enough, we could. We designed, frankly, not only for parking but also if we ever wanted to have a show of farm equipment or other things like that, it was designed to do that. I don't think it's ever been used for it.

But then we had to fund that, difficultly. And that was funded on the revenue that that would generate from parking. Of course, we also had to place the funds from the on-street parking against that. It ended up—I think it's a real outstanding facility, both parking and convention-wise, and the other rooms that we have, very reasonable. It cost us four and a half million dollars, something like that.

GM: Do you consider that the highlight of your administration, Curtis Hixon Hall and the parking garage?

JL: Well, that's one of them.

GM: What other major achievements, you think?

JL: Oh, gosh. We started building swimming pools; nobody would build a pool because they were scared of integration. We built the beach on Cote and Caramel.

GM: Davis Beach, where Davis [Island] is?

JL: Yeah. We built all those things. No, I think the significant part of our—there are probably two things in our administration. One is putting the city in a businesslike operation, by setting up centralized purchasing and consolidating the garages into one city garage, making civil service strong on qualified people.

The other thing was the race relations that I had. I just think that's the most significant accomplishment that we had. We integrated everything. Of course, I was accused of being a "nigger-lover" and so forth and so on, but that didn't bother me. You've got to do what

you think is right, and I think that was the Christian thing to do. We integrated the pools, we integrated schools, but we worked together. Crockett Farnell was superintendent of schools. He would call us, and say, “We’re going to integrate such-and-such a school.” We had a special enforcement unit of police officers, and we would hold them in reserve. We’d have some there. We integrated the lunch counters. We integrated the theaters. Everything.

One of the things that helped us most was the attitude of the news media. Jim Council was the head of the *Tribune* in those days, and we had a meeting when this thing got hot and I saw we had to integrate. The federal government said, “You’ve got to do it.” So, we had a meeting in my office of all the news media—TV, radio, newspapers—and we asked them if they would hold off the news, not telling in advance what we were going to integrate. After we did it, we let them go ahead and publish it. My idea was that the rednecks, they were the ones causing trouble, and they would cause the trouble. If they didn’t know about it, it would be over before they knew it. And that’s the way it worked out.

GM: Interesting. Do you think you’d do that today, or not?

JL: No.

GM: Could a mayor do that today?

JL: The newspapers and news media wouldn’t cooperate like that. But we—I remember one day at—we build this (inaudible) school out in Seminole Heights. School had gotten out, the manager called me. Again, this is, as I say—we were still a small town. People thought they had to talk to the mayor personally. (laughs) The manager called me from out there, and said, “The blacks out here want to go swimming.” I said, “Well, let them go. They’ve got the right to do it.” And they did. We never had any problems, never did go back. Now, the pools that really were integrated where we never had problems were West Tampa and Cuscaden. No problems, ever.

I know the Ku Klux Klan—when we constructed the beach on Courtney Campbell [Causeway], the Klan came down to the city and wanted to parade. I said, “All right. We’ll give you a permit. But I want to tell you one thing: If you violate the law, we’re going to put you in jail.” The only time I have ever seen the Ku Klux Klan (inaudible). (laughs) We gave them a permit to parade, and they did. They came downtown with their hoods on; quite a sight. But we had no problems. The thing got a little rough out on the beach at one time, but no riots. It never did come to blows. We found out that that was the way to go.

Of course, we hired the first black police officers. We hired the first people in the Water Department, so-called “white collar” jobs. They’ve been discriminated against for years and years. We had the old policy in the South of separate but equal education facilities, but it wasn’t. I remember one summer a young graduate from Florida A&M [University], nice looking young black boy, came down and wanted a job as meter reader. They

thought that was a white collar job. I had no idea that he would fail the civil service exam. All he had to do was go down and take the civil service exam. And all this job required was a high school education, or the equivalent work. He failed it. He failed it. College graduate. But when we could get blacks who were qualified, they were good employees. Tremendous job, I think.

GM: Right, right.

JL: Another thing (inaudible) of course it doesn't make much since, but. In the City Hall, you still had the signs up, segregated signs: the toilets. One day, I told our custodian, "Tonight, take those signs down. Don't tell anybody, just take them down." So, he did. I guess it was six weeks later that we had a group of black leaders came down to see me with a list of grievances. One of them was the segregated signs in City Hall. (laughs) Those signs had been down for six weeks or two months! (both laugh) They were surprised.

GM: That's interesting. Of course, Nuccio opposed you in sixty-three [1963]. Why do you think he won in sixty-three [1963]? What were the major issues? How would you compare that election with the fifty-nine [1959] election?

JL: Integration.

GM: Integration?

JL: That's what it was.

GM: Is that right?

JL: No question about it.

GM: Any particular precincts or wards or districts?

JL: Well, you can look at the voting over out there in Seminole Heights and Gary. In the first election, I lost those people were not ready for of integration. Then I had a scandal in the administration and City Council. We got five of them indicted.¹⁴

GM: Would you describe that issue?

JL: It was zoning, accepting graft. We got them indicted, but none of them were ever convicted. It was a terrible situation. This was when Dale Mabry [Highway] was developing. They wanted to get zoning for—wet zoning, for example. They thought they had to pay off some of the councilmen to get it. It just got wide open. And there were other areas, throughout the city. Of course, all of that reflects on the administration.

¹⁴ This refers to a 1963 incident in which three members of the City Council (Lee Duncan, Dick Bacon, and Fletcher Stribling) were indicted for bribery in a probe of liquor zoning practices. The indictments came shortly before the election for mayor. All three councilors were acquitted. Duncan was later reelected to the City Council and served several more terms.

GM: Had the flooding also hurt you¹⁵? I believe that was one of the issues in the election—up in North Tampa.

JL: It was an issue in fifty-nine [1959] and sixty [1960], but no. You know, that was another thing, the flooding in fifty-nine [1959] and sixty [1960] the Hillsborough River flooding and that's where the Southwest Florida Water Management District started. The idea was then to divert the water north of the dam to Six Mile Creek and McKay Bay. That's where they started. It still hadn't been completed. They spent millions of dollars on the Southwest Florida Water Management District to ensure they do a good job. I know that when I was in the legislature, their budget was something like eight, ten million dollars a year—from the taxpayers in Florida. It didn't count the money they got from the federal government.

But what we did, we did two things to prevent the flooding, and we really have not had bad flooding since then. One was the (inaudible), which is just east of Sulphur Springs on the river. There was a sharp bed there with a lot of rocks in there. We spent a little over thirty-five thousand dollars dynamiting those rocks out and deepening the channel so that more water could go down.¹⁶ At the dam, we spent a little over three hundred thousand dollars putting in different type gates, so we could control the water coming through the gates. To give you a better idea, when the tide was coming in during the flooding—high water—we would hold it back at the dam, and we'd limit the amount coming out. Then when the tide was going out, we would open it up and let more water come out.

We did a lot of things, though. We bought Sulphur Springs Pool during my administration, mainly for water, and the rest was to preserve water supply. We also bought the water field out in the northeast part of the county for later development, so we wouldn't run out of water.

GM: Right. Going back just a second to your sixty-three [1963] campaign, what issues did television play? Was television a more important factor in sixty-three [1963] than fifty-nine [1959], or was it still limited?

JL: It wasn't as important as it is today, but we used it more in sixty-three [1963] than we did in fifty-nine [1959].

GM: How do you react now to the famous “Black Talks” with Nuccio and McMullen? (laughs)

JL: Well, that was innuendo and a lot of untruth. They take things out of context, you know, and just show this part; they wouldn't show the other part. That's politics for you. There's no way you can answer.

¹⁵ GM is referring to the March 1960 floods, which was caused by a combination of heavy rain and the breaking of the Lake Magdalene dam. Several thousand people were affected by the flood.

¹⁶ JL is referring to the construction of the Tampa Bypass Canal.

GM: Right.

JL: There wasn't enough time.

GM: Right. Was weather a factor in that election, as well? Was that not the day it rained a lot, and the idea was that the Ybor City faithful would—people were [more] faithful than your voters?

JL: Oh, I don't think anything of that. We might have had a slight downpour.

GM: Were you surprised at the election? I know a lot of people feel that you were pretty conflicted. But I mean, everyone always predicts—

JL: No. I only lost by something like sixteen, seventeen hundred votes. He had a really good turn.

GM: It was the closest election in history, I believe. Anyway, were you surprised that you lost? I mean, truthfully?

JL: Yeah, I was surprised. I thought we had had a good administration. We had put the city on a more businesslike basis, and we got the policies that we set forth. We had a lot of progress, things that they'd never done before, insofar as recreational facilities. We were getting more industry in by improving the streets. We had had no racial problems whatsoever when Jacksonville was having them and every other city was having them. But I think segregation was probably the biggest thing, and then of course the indictment of our City Councilmen, which didn't look good. It rubbed off on us. It's just a lot of circumstantial, and it always—you don't please everybody when you make a decision. You make some happy and some mad.

GM: How would you assess Nuccio's second term, sixty-three [1963] to sixty-seven [1967]? Had he changed? Did he build upon your foundation, or pretty much the same old politics?

JL: I think the same old politics. Things had changed, though, with the policies we had set insofar as centralized purchasing and a central garage and civil service. He stuck pretty close to all of those things. We also—one of the problems we had was the hospital. We had two hospitals, you know, in those days. We had Clara Frye, which was the black hospital, and Tampa General, and both of them were a burden on the taxpayers. We only got funds out of the city taxpayers and we had to do a lot of county work.

So, we got an act passed the legislature, which—what we wanted was to create a hospital authority to spread the burden of taxes, the cost of these things. The legislature, instead of doing that, decided to consolidate hospitals and welfare, and it became the Board of Public Assistance—which I thought was a mistake, but we had to go that way. And eventually, of course, within about two or three years the Board of Public Assistance

became Health and Welfare Board. And now I think they do have the Hospital Authority, finally. But those were problems; you got all kinds of problems in government.

GM: Mm-hm. Did you ever think about coming back to the city life again? I know you became a state legislator in sixty-seven [1967]. Did you toy with the idea of running again?

JL: Oh, I thought about it, you know. It's not an easy life. It's a good experience to get, and I think everybody ought to run for public office one time. The campaigning is hard, but if you get elected it gets worse. (laughs)

GM: (laughs) How do you view the victory of Dick Greco in sixty-seven [1967]?¹⁷ And how do you assess Greco?

JL: Well, I think Dick is a great public relations man, and I believe he could delegate authority. That's one of the problems with Nick, he couldn't delegate authority. I think— (telephone rings) Dick had a good administration—

pause in recording

GM: You were talking about Dick Greco.

JL: Well, I think Dick had a good administration, well accepted by the people and very popular. Ran for reelection, got elected, and then quit. I was surprised that he quit. But, you know, in public service, an honest person will never make a lot of money. It's a financial strain, being in public office, and I know that's why Dick got out.

GM: Do you see him as a transitional mayor? I mean, if you look at the long run—Hixon, Nuccio, yourself—Greco as the first of the public relations mayors? He's a guy who, obviously, was in tune to the media. He was much younger than you or Nuccio, although you weren't old.

JL: (laughs)

GM: But I mean, at thirty-four—that's remarkably young.

JL: I remember Dick campaigning. His wife was always with him (inaudible). Very personable young man, when he was running for City Council. But the thing—I think it goes back, really, to the policy that I established in the different departments and the methods that we set up. None of them changed, except the Personnel Department. All of the other changes we made have stayed. They still have the central garage, they still have centralized purchasing, they still stick with the civil service pretty good. But of course, you're not going to be, with the unions organizing public employees. You don't need both

¹⁷ Greco was mayor of Tampa from 1967 to 1974, when he resigned. He was later reelected in 1995, and served until 2003.

civil service and unions bargaining for you. They've got good things both ways. Normally, a public employee would get an automatic raise every year in suppose of merit raises, it's just I had to (inaudible). It's the same way all the way up to Washington [D.C.].

GM: Right, right.

JL: But they still have the policies that we put in, in setting up government like a business ought to be.

GM: Well, thank you, Mr. Lane. I appreciate your candor and your taking the time to reminisce about your administration in Tampa. Thanks again.

JL: Well, I've had a full life, enjoyed everything.

End of interview