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[Transcriber's Note: Interview starts mid-sentence.]

Dr. Gary Mormino: —September 8th, and I'm talking to Dick Greco at his office on Cypress Avenue [Cypress Street]. Mr. Greco, I'd be kind of interested in your family background, first of all. And we've talked about this several times, but could you tell me something about your parents and grandparents, what you know?

Richard Greco: My grandparents were all born here of course. My grandfather on my mother's side was born in Spain, and her mother—my grandmother—was born in Messina, Sicily. My father's mother and father were both born in Sicily, in Santo Stefano. That makes me, I guess, three-quarters Italian and a quarter Spanish.

GM: Right. Quite a background there.

RG: My grandfather, my father's father, came to this country and became an American citizen, then went back and got his family. And my—

GM: What did he do? What kind of work?

RG: He was in the jewelry business, had two or three other small enterprises, as I understand it.

GM: In the old country?

RG: In the old country and over here. He came over and brought all the family over. My father was six years old when he came. My mother was born in this country. Of course, my grandparents on my mother's side, both were cigar makers in Tampa. And my father's

mother died in Europe, so he came over with his brothers and sisters and was raised in this country.

GM: Right.

RG: And when he was about twelve years old, my dad went to work in a hardware store in Ybor City, and after a number of years he became a partner in it and he bought out the partner, later in life. And so he spent all of his life, from the time he was twelve till he died when he was seventy, working in that business. He and my mother were married for forty-seven years. She worked with him in the business, which was rather typical in those days.

GM: Where was it located?

RG: On Eighth Avenue and Fifteenth Street in Ybor City.

GM: It's a stained glass place now¹?

RG: Right.

GM: Yeah, right.

RG: Stained glass in there. But they were on that corner for forty-seven years. And, of course, he had worked for fifty-eight years, really. It was very typical of families working together, especially in the Ybor City area; a number of them lived in apartments above the store and that type of thing and raised all their families that way, and that was a very usual way to go about it. The interesting thing about the area where they lived in Ybor City is that so many people basically started there, and as the other generations began to come into being, they were better educated because of the hard work of their parents, and they began to move out and do their own thing in various areas.

The reason, of course, as we were talking earlier, that most of us spoke three languages is that of course we learned English because this is where we lived. In my case, I stayed with my grandparents as I was coming up, and they spoke both Spanish and Italian in the house, all the time. So, I never really remember learning those two languages, I merely knew all three of them all of my life, and that was typical of everyone back then. I married a girl who's English and Irish and my three children don't speak either language, which is very unfortunate.

GM: And you were born in what year, now?

RG: I was born in 1933.

¹Referring to West of the Moon Studios, Inc.

GM: Nineteen thirty-three. What do you remember about Tampa, growing up in 1933? What was Tampa like?

RG: Of course, Tampa was much smaller. City limits were Fifteenth Street, and to the north, I think, was somewhere before you got to Sulphur Springs. Beyond Sulphur Springs was like going on a trip, there's nothing. Back then when I was a kid, I had an uncle that built a house about two, three miles north of Sulphur Springs, and that was out in the woods. We actually felt that way when we went out to visit and stay a weekend. You could walk for miles out there and run into very few people. I used to like to hunt. And all the Palma Ceia area and out in here, there was nothing here much, just a few homes.

GM: Were you aware there was a depression going on when you were growing up?

RG: No. No, because I was—thirty-three [1933] was toward the end of it, and I was just born.

GM: What was Ybor City like in those days?

RG: Ybor City was a lot more going there. That was the pride at the time when I was growing. It was a hustling, bustling city where people worked and played. I can recall that there was a lot more family life and participation in those days on the part of a number of families. When I was a kid, almost every Sunday, someone had some type of a picnic or something, where a number of the Latin families would get together and go somewhere on the Hillsborough River, or they had those Latin picnics like they still have now, but there was much better attendance in those days. People just didn't dare miss them. That was their form of recreation.

I remember as a kid with my uncle and so forth, going to the Italian Club and some of the Spanish Clubs. The man would come home from work and clean up and eat, and generally go down there and play dominos till eleven or twelve o'clock at night, every day of his life. And then weekends, they generally spent around the house, type thing. But this is something everybody did. And then when someone died, everyone went to the funeral; or when something good happened they were over there, too. There was a lot of unity between families. You knew everyone. You knew who was who, basically, regardless of where they lived in town.

I was born in Seminole Heights, which is five or six miles north of Ybor City. I was born in a house on Shadowlawn Avenue there that my folks lived in for years, and I lived there till I got married. People didn't move a lot in those days.

GM: Was that an area mainly of first generation Latins who had moved from Ybor City, or was it Anglo?

RG: No, Seminole Heights had very few Latins, mostly Anglos.

GM: Did you ever think about self-identification as a young kid? Were you Italian American or American, or was it just something you really didn't think about?

RG: Well, of course, I was raised in and around mostly Anglo people because of going to Seminole School and Memorial [Junior High School] and then Hillsborough [High School]. A few times I felt, you know, peculiar about speaking other languages, because back in those days, people thought it was impolite and that kind of thing, didn't realize the advantages of it. So, I refrained from doing it a lot, unless I had to. But I was around so many different people from the time I was born that really didn't matter to me. And only as you begin to grow up in the schools and so forth do you realize that there is something different about you, or was then, in that some people would allude to it, and that type of thing.

Shortly before I was born, the places like Sulphur Springs Pool and so forth prohibited Latins from going there to swim. But you have to really almost admire the people who worked so hard and rose above the misunderstandings of yesteryear. A generation or two later, you saw Latin people taking their place in so many areas of our community, politically and professionally and otherwise, largely because of loving families who made it possible for them through a great deal of sacrifice. Many of the doctors, lawyers, politicians and so forth, look back a generation or two and you realize their families had a really meager beginning here and showered everything on their children. This was a typical Latin trait; they wanted very badly for their kids to have more than they had.

My own family, even though we lived in an area that wasn't totally Latin like many others, we worked every day in Ybor City that was, for many years. I recall the first pair of khaki pants or dungarees that I ever had was after I got married. My folks did not want me to dress that way; that wasn't proper as far as they were concerned. It just wasn't—they wanted me to look right and look nice. It was perhaps more important to many of the Latin people that their kids do better than they did, to the extent that it became their whole life, really.

GM: What kind of aspirations did you have as a young student in high school?

RG: When I was about fourteen years old, I started shooting skeet, which is shooting clay targets, and I did that rather extensively and got pretty good at it. And my family saw to it that I traveled all around the country in the summers. The three years that I was in high school, I shot all over the United States, and again, that threw me with a great many unusual people. I won the nationals one year. I was on the All-American Team. So I was able, at a young age, to do stories for *Sports Afield* magazine. And every place I would go, I would meet rather unusual people. I was thrown with generals and big businessmen and this kind of thing from fourteen to about seventeen, which I think played a big part in my life.

I really didn't have aspirations for any particular thing. I was so interested in that in high school that that's basically all I did besides go to school and the little social functions. But where someone else played football or so forth, I did all that in junior high. When I started shooting skeet, I would look forward to the travel in the summer time and all the meets all over the country. I shot all the way from here to Texas and up to Connecticut and back. It put me in contact with a lot of different type folks that I never would have met, perhaps, and also, I think, made me a little bit more mature at an early age because of learning to win and lose and that type of thing.

So, after that was over and I went to college and—

GM: Where did you go to school?

RG: I went to the University of Florida my first year, then decided I wanted to get married a year or so later, came back, and went to the University of Tampa. So, the only time I'd ever really been away from Tampa for any extended period of time was my first year of college. So I came back, went to the University of Tampa, worked with my folks in the hardware business. Did everything relatively young. I wasn't quite twenty when I got married, and when I was in my early twenties, I was president of a civic club in town. I felt like I owed something all the time. Life had been very good to me.

When I was twenty-nine, I ran for city council. Opportunity came up and I had helped in other campaigns and I really liked that. I just liked that involvement with the people.

GM: Sixty-two [1962], right?

RG: So, I ran for council and I stayed there for four years, and then decided it would be a good time to run for mayor. The unfortunate thing, in a sense, is that I ran against a gentleman I thought would probably lose, who was Mr. [Nick] Nuccio, who I think did a remarkable job politically and otherwise, when you consider he was of the same mold of a generation back from me, with limited education and so forth.² Came a long way, did a great deal for the city. However, I felt that I had my youth once in my life, and that he either had to move up or move out. I had felt that he was not going to continue with it. And he had given me that indication, but looking back I can see that he could never really bring himself to give up what all of his life had been at that time.

GM: This was sixty-four [1964], I think? What year was it?

RG: Sixty-seven [1967] when I ran.

GM: Sixty-seven [1967], okay.

²Nick Nuccio 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.

RG: I won, I think largely because Tampa had changed a great deal. He still represented the old views and ideas, which weren't bad except we had merely grown up more than that. I think young people were coming into being in public office all over the country. It tended to lend more change or hope to some to see younger people taking over the reins. Not that he had not done a good job; he had. Unfortunately, he ran the second time again just hoping to come back, simply because the job meant something to him. I don't mean financially, I mean as something to do. He was really quite a person, as you know.

But at any rate, they had two Italian mayors in a row in Tampa. And another gentleman is —

GM: Now, growing up in the fifties [1950s] in Tampa, Nuccio ran against Curtis Hixon and then he later won.³ Would you characterize politics in Tampa in the fifties [1950s]?

RG: Well, it was—

GM: I know that was a particular bitter race between Nuccio and Hixon.

RG: Tremendously different from the eighties [1980s]. I think there were more people concerned about if you were Latin [or] if you weren't. There was a lot of political patronage in those days, you know; you would give the job of sanitation chief to your friend, purchasing agent, that kind [of thing]. It was just a way of life. And certainly even before that, Tampa politics was tough. If you didn't have certain people backing you, then there was no way you can win. Gosh, back when I was born, around that time, they used to put machine guns at the polls and vote dead people.

GM: National Guards and all that.

RG: All sorts of things, which began to change as Tampa changed. Interestingly enough, by the time that I ran, I carried many, many precincts that weren't typically carried by Latins.

GM: Such as?

RG: Such as the Interbay area, places like that. They just didn't do that before. And the newspapers—interestingly enough, both newspapers backed me.

GM: Which they certainly never did with Nuccio. Right.

RG: No. Of course—again, I don't think it was something they didn't like him as a person, they just simply felt that his style of politics more resembled the old Tampa: patronage, that type of thing. That will always exist to a degree, but—

³Curtis Hixon was mayor of Tampa from 1943 to 1956. A pharmacist by trade, Hixon also served on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County Commission.

GM: Did people perceive you as Latin, or were you more a—

RG: I don't think that they particularly did.

GM: —in your style?

RG: I think that today, very few people perceive somebody as Latin, as compared to many years ago. In other words, yes, they know you are, but it's not important. It's like when I think of somebody, I don't think whether they are Latin or Jewish. They're just a person. That has really come into being more in the last several years than before. Before it was very definitely, "He's Latin," and, "He's Anglo," and, "He's Jewish," you know, whatever the case might have been, and it had a tremendous influence on the vote.

I think if anything today, the person who's Latin would be more prejudiced in voting for another Latin than perhaps the other way around. As strange as that may sound, I think that you could take results and analyze them and really see that. There are still a lot of the older Latin people around who really have affection for the name and that type of thing. Many people who helped me when I first ran were because of family ties that went on before I was born, things that they had done for one another and helped one another through hardships. There's some those people still around that I'll always cherish very, very much. They're a different breed of cat, almost.

GM: Well, what were the major issues in that campaign of sixty-seven [1967]?

RG: I thought—if I were to say what the major issues were—you know, we were going to plan to make things happen, rather than let them happen as they were. There wasn't going to be the patronage type of thing. A lot of things needed to be changed that weren't changed, because if you needed a street light, you call the mayor's office and you were made to feel that he gave it to you. That's not bad; it's just a way of life, though, that people don't get involved in politics in the right fashion. They don't feel it's working for them. They feel that everything is favor. Nick played that well; he did a marvelous job at it, almost—just brilliant.

GM: Concrete footprints. (laughs)

RG: Yeah, because his name was—Tampa just simply outgrew that. There wasn't anything wrong with it, it was just—it wasn't the time to do that anymore. And I think that's basically—I think that the younger person felt that they understood me better; the older person wanted to help because I was younger. And his time had run out, that's basically—my gosh, he'd spent forty years in political life and did an awful lot. So he put his name on sidewalks and benches. So what? But if I would have done that, it just—something would have been wrong with that. I mean, it was a different time. I was a different guy.

Talk about being Latin or Anglo, I probably was more aware of it when I got into politics then I was as a kid.

GM: Why is that?

RG: The reason being I know a lot of people that did not vote for Nick because they felt that his image did not represent the city well. And strangely enough, even though I ran against him, I felt funny about that. I never had any dislike for the man. I liked him very, very much, and I do today. I think he did tremendously well, so much so that my—more than myself, with what little he had to work with, you know: an immigrant, little education. We had just so much more given to us.

But when I ran, I felt that if a guy like myself messed up or didn't do a good job, then I was going to really hurt many people in the Latin community. I was probably ultra careful, as a result of that. Here was a new breed of person, a younger man with also a Latin name, one that did not speak with an accent, one that had had a college education. And if I messed up, those few who still weighed things on the basis of are you Latin or are you Anglo, were going to say to you, "You see?" And I probably went a little overboard inside without people knowing it, recognizing and knowing that I had to do a job that was beyond reproach.

I made too many speeches, most of them because I felt I was pretty good at it, and I was not only putting forth a new image for Tampa but for probably everybody that had a name like mine. And I know a lot of people never understood this, I never really said it but I was very conscious of it. I figured, you know, my kids and other people's kids—if I messed up, it would have been very hard on them. They would have expected it from an older guy; if he had an accent or something like that, well, fine. But not from Dick Greco, or not from anyone that had the opportunity that I had.

So, I was very conscious always that whatever I did had to be a good image, because I felt that that was helping a lot of people that were Latin. Many times, I'm sure, they didn't feel that I was Latin enough, whatever that means.

GM: How much TV did you use? Was that a factor in the campaign?

RG: Yeah, I used a good bit of TV.

GM: Did you think that was instrumental?

RG: Oh, I don't think there's any question about it. Yes.

GM: Is this probably one of the first elections in Tampa, in local politics, where TV was

RG: Became important, yeah.

GM: —an important medium?

RG: Yeah. And, of course, I knew that I would have the edge in that medium, being so much younger. I had, certainly, the good fortune of there were going to be X number of Latin people voting for me because of my family, so I split that vote. I knew that in my own mind that possibly the rest weren't going to beat me in another part of town. And having the newspapers support me, that sort of really sent—of course, we worked awfully hard, too. And I did that on a different basis.

I limited what people would give in campaign contributions, did a lot of things that I think needed to be done. And I didn't pick all friends, and that made some people mad. Through the whole campaign, I told everybody that worked, "If you're here for any other reason other than you want good government, don't come." For instance, my purchasing agent was a guy we borrowed from industry. I never met him in my life. My police chief [was] an unheard of. I tried to find who I thought was well-respected in the department, and probably picked the most likely guy on Earth for political reasons. [James Grantham] "Babe" Littleton, who I picked, would arrest his mother gladly if she did something wrong. And that's what I wanted.

And always in the back of my mind and ever present was, you know, you goof up, you make a bad mistake or you make something look real bad, there're always going to be those that say, "Look at those people!" I couldn't help but think that. So, I was very conscientious about it, and I began to make the speeches that I think sort of uplifted the town in many areas. I would go places like Bradenton, Sarasota, Lake Placid, and do their chamber [of commerce] banquets, graduations—Kissimmee. People would come up afterward and say things like, "We never come to Tampa much."

Tampa had a bad connotation in the minds of some folks, because politics was always being written up. It was being written up as being rotten; you alluded to the fifties [1950s], some of the crazy things that went on back then. They had a ward system of politics. People all around us here had in mind that this wasn't the best kind of government in the world, and it wasn't being run by the best kind of people in the world. That was the image, at any rate. And I felt it was important to go to these cities and let them see some younger guy who was also Latin and who could speak on their level and have them ask questions and that type of [thing]. I think it did a lot of good, because people would come up and bring this up to me—I mean not once, but constantly. They were glad to see over there.

And then again there was the TV media, and I used media a lot, every kind. I did three radio programs every week on purpose, to let people—I even did one in Spanish, and my Spanish isn't that great. And what it was was a recap of the week, what's going on in city hall. I'd go before the chamber of commerce once a month, coffee club, and initiate it, tell them what we what we were doing, 'cause I sincerely believe that if people

understand what you are doing with their dollars and why, for the most part—they may not like it, but for the most part, they'll be understanding.

GM: Were you ever thinking at this time that the mayor's office would be a springboard to Congress or something like this?

RG: No. it's a funny thing. I loved politics, I really loved it, but the second time I got ready to run, I realized that I probably couldn't afford to be in politics for a long time. I had been asked to Washington to interview for an undersecretary position when [President Richard] Nixon was there. I went two or three times, and realized for what they paid, I could have never have done it. I didn't have any reserved dollars or anything like that. Couldn't have a house both places and raise kids.

It began to really worry me, and in fact, I tried to find some people that would run the second time I ran for mayor. No one showed an interest. Either they thought I wasn't serious about it, or—but I literally went to some people. And, of course, in the middle of my second term, I began to get real nervous about where I was going. I was forty years old, and that, I think, is a little bit of a trauma to people. It was to me.

And Mr. [Edward] DeBartolo came along and offered me a job that, number one, paid extremely well; but secondly, he understood my kind of position.⁴ It's one that is so varied. I do so many things in the course of a day, which—I don't know what I'd have done if I left politics to go in some office where I just have to sit there and be isolated from people, which is my thing, so to speak. But what I do now is I deal with public officials. I deal with all sorts of people in the course of a day.

GM: Are you doing anything with the White Sox, by the way? (laughs)

RG: I don't know yet whether I'll be involved there or not. Never can tell with this company.

GM: Right. Well, when you assumed office in sixty-seven [1967]—academics always like to talk about power elite and power structure. Where was power in Tampa? Who controlled Tampa?

RG: I don't think anybody controlled Tampa back in sixty-seven [1967]. I was asked that question last week, someone doing an article on who controls it today and what happened. Each year that went by beyond the fifties [1950s], more and more people start coming in here and making contributions. Like, for instance, today you couldn't get—certainly you would call X number of people if you were going to call them a power structure. They don't necessarily have to live here very long, anymore; you used to have

⁴Greco resigned as mayor in 1974 to accept a position with the Edward J. DeBartolo Corporation, a development firm. After his second mayoral administration was over in 2003, Greco worked for DeBartolo Property Group, another corporation owned by the DeBartolo family.

to. Back a few years ago, before the time you are talking about, you went to see X number of people. You had their blessings, you won at anything, because they basically controlled the town. Now, that's not true anymore, and it was starting to change drastically long before I ran, and that's one of the reasons I think I did win. People were beginning to resent that type of thing.

What makes you in a power structure today is just basically what you represent many times. If you were to talk to someone in the power structure, Chester Ferguson is a name that would probably come up for years and years. He controls the Lykes' interests and that type of thing, always been active politically, is president of one of the largest—I mean, chairman of the board of the largest bank in town. If you were going to talk to power structure today, you'd go to all the bankers in town, the large ones. You'd go to the phone company, Tampa Electric, by virtue of their position.

Strangely enough in my own sense, because I went work for a very successful man, it keeps me in the forefront of many things that I wouldn't have been in, because certainly I wasn't born being someone who was part of the power structure. Not that I am today, except that I am in a position of people having come see me for one thing or another, whatever it might be and I think that's what it is today. There are so many people in Tampa today that are contributing something, that are doing something, that hire a great many other people, which by virtue of that certainly makes you a little more successful or something of this nature. But that won't ever change here.

GM: So has the [*Tampa*] *Tribune's* power diminished or increased?

RG: No, I think the newspaper's power is great. I really do, and a lot of people would disagree with that. But the more people that come to town; the more new people that are in town, you can't expect them to know people intimately. They wouldn't know this power structure business we're talking about. If you've been here three, four years, you know, it wouldn't mean a thing to you. And you'll talk to people who've been here three, four, five, six years and then have very staunch ideas about who they're going to vote for, what they're going to do, and I think a lot of it certainly has to be formed by the media. How else would they know? They never met any of the candidates. They won't admit to that, and they say, "Yes, I like this guy," and have something very positive or negative to say. Never met him.

So, I think the media has an awesome, awesome responsibility. I think certainly TV is an important media, in that everyone feels that they can relate to someone when they see them and see him talking—or her, whatever the case might be. He comes off as a nice guy, a bad guy, whatever. So, the television media can be used for good or bad by people in politics; depends on how they come across. But if we didn't have the media, goodness knows what we'd have politically.

GM: In that power structure, a lot of people think that Tampa during those days was controlled—or, a group known as the mafia had significant influence. What do you think? Was there a mafia in Tampa when you took power?

RG: I don't know what you'd call it. I think years ago, from what I've heard—you know when I was a little kid or before that time, there were certain wards and places when you had that kind of politics that were controlled by people—you know, Latin families or names, that kind of thing. I don't think that exists anymore, I really—I know it doesn't. When I ran office, I never had anything of that nature. I never was approached the first time.

GM: Had *bolita* pretty much died down by the time you took office?

RG: No, *bolita* still exists today.

GM: But certainly not in the—

RG: Again, see, to me—

GM: (inaudible) that it was.

RG: I'll tell you something I haven't told many people, which is that—it may sound strange to you. In picking a chief of police, there would have been no way to pick a Latin chief of police for me being Latin, and have anything happen, let's say relative to *bolita*, and have the guy say, "I'm not aware of this," 'cause that would be bullshit. I was aware of it. They sold it at the barbershop where I got a haircut, all over Ybor City. I remember the guy used to come in with the numbers in his mouth, his papers. I guess someone raided the place, he'd eat them. And I never did that in my life; I wouldn't even know how to go about it. My family wasn't the gambling type, so they didn't. My family didn't have any of those types of habits. But gosh, everywhere I went, that was in existence. It was against the law. I had to enforce the law.

A very strange thing happened, and I won't mention any names.

GM: Let me—

Pause in recording

RG: For instance in the *bolita* business, we really started arresting a lot of people in the *bolita* business when I took over. That's not to say they were laying off before, I don't know, but it really made it tough on a lot of people because some of them, whom I'd known all of my life since I was born, that I'd grown up with. A very close friend, who had been in this business for years and years, who was an older man, asked me to meet with him one night and some of his family and some of the people in his business. I didn't know what it was about. I didn't want to be rude to him. I let my chief of police

know who I was meeting with and so forth, so in case anything came up they would understand.

When I got to his home, I met his daughter, son-in-law, both of whom had been in this business for years. I knew that. A couple of the other bigger guys in that business were there. Basically what they started telling me was that, “You’re killing us. We can’t stay in business,” and this and that. And I explained to them that those days were over. I could see that the younger ones basically understood what I was saying, but the older ones, never—it wasn’t getting to them.

I got to the place where towards the end of the conversation, I said, “Is your son”—to these people—“is he going to go into your business?” They said, “Oh, no, he’s in college; he’s going to do such and such.” And I say, “Well, I’m my father’s son. That should answer it for you.” I couldn’t possibly put myself in that position in this town—in a position, you know, laying off this type of thing.

The older gentleman took me back to my house. I’ll never forget it. He’s been a friend of mine all of my life. We both like to hunt, been hunting together. He never spoke to me again, ever, till the day he died. Never came back in our hardware store. He was there frequently. All of his life, if I would see him at one of the Latin gatherings or something, he would merely walk across the room. I felt badly about that, simply because I could understand how he felt. See, I was his friend, my family was his friend, for years and years and I had turned my back on his children and his profession, and he had come to rationalize that there was nothing wrong with it. After all, you’ve got jai alai, you’ve got dog track, you’ve got all this stuff here with people gambling. They want to gamble, we don’t force anybody to do it.

I went through all that session with him. The young ones understood: it’s against the law, you can’t have it. But he never, ever understood. The sad part is, I could relate to that. They had done it all their lives. I was picking on his kids. And to a Latin, you just don’t do that. They’re not wrong, regardless of what they’re doing. And there was no way I could rectify that. I tried. I tried talking the man, and no way. He died with that feeling about me. It had to be.

Some of the other names that were noted for being in perhaps that area treated me with the utmost respect. I’ll never forget. A couple of big names in that area would be maybe the Columbia Restaurant. I would walk in; they would never, ever speak to me first, unless I spoke to them, for fear of embarrassment.

Another gentleman in that business, I recall, came by the hardware store to see me. “Is there anything you need?” He said, “No. Anything that I can do, I’ll be glad to do. And I don’t want anything from you. I’ve known your parents all my life.” And he meant that. Never approached me with anything, never once, other than that one meeting I told you about. Any of the people that I know who made their money from that business ever approached me. I think they all understood that that this thing was on its way out and

took their chances and, if they got caught, understood that I wasn't that type of a person. Amazing.

GM: An end of an era, you know. In many ways, another era was also beginning at that time with the civil rights revolution.

RG: With everything; it was just the whole country in turmoil.

GM: How would you characterize your handling of race relations and what preceded it and what followed?

RG: I think there again, being Latin, I think that the black recognizes that we had been through the same type of thing. It's not as much of a shock to, perhaps, a black person to talk to a person who's Latin than one that has a Georgia accent, or something of this nature. Of course, having been brought up in Ybor City and so forth, it didn't matter to me what anybody was. I think this came across, and I made it a point to eat in the black section of town at least once a week for nine years. I would go in the bars and visit and drink. I would shoot pool with the black kids—I mean, on a continual basis—and avail myself of meeting a lot of people that I ordinarily perhaps would not have met.

You know, we have a strange feeling in people, in that we think everybody lives basically the same way we do, whatever that might be, and that's not true. In politics, if you avail yourself of what's going on around town, you'd find a great many people that have different needs and a different way of life than perhaps you've lived. It did me a lot of good. It's an education I'll never forget. And I enjoyed it. I had many, many friends in many areas as a result of it.

But I think I was able to converse with blacks. I knew they know I wasn't prejudiced. How could I be prejudiced? People were prejudiced against me. I think that was helpful.

GM: Did the race riot—was it sixty-seven [1967]?

RG: Sixty-seven [1967] to sixty-eight [1968].

GM: Now was that—did that surprise you?

RG: No, I think the race riot was not a result—

GM: I'm sorry, would you agree that the term riot is appropriate?

RG: Well, it depends on—yeah, it was a riotous situation; however, it wasn't a hate thing. Like in some cities, they seemed to hate one another and people would kill and hurt. Significantly enough, no one got killed here or hurt. And they certainly could have. I mean, I marched down the street one night with the police department and people all had guns on both sides. No one was killed. The reason being, I think, most of the riots here

were frustration, were part of what was going on in the country—like a panty raid deal at college: it happened at one college, so all colleges tried.

Many black people weren't getting a lot of breaks. I hired the first black fireman in the state of Florida.

GM: How was that received?

RG: The first black city attorney. I had a black girl in my office. It was right; it was necessary to be done. And I didn't hire them because they were black, totally; I hired them because they were qualified to do the job. And I always thought the biggest injustice you could do is put anybody, regardless of what they were, in a job that they weren't capable of doing. It was received very well.

GM: Was Tampa a Southern city? That's always an interesting question.

RG: Tampa is not a city where blacks and whites ever hated one another. I don't—I never saw that. I think everybody treated each other respectfully.

GM: Think that was because of the ethnic composition here?

RG: Well, I think that had a lot to do with it.

GM: (inaudible) something to say.

RG: I think that had a lot to do with it. Tampa has a little bit of everything, and I never saw a black and white hate in this city. I don't think it ever existed. There were a lot of things we didn't agree on. A lot of the black leaders in those days had to perhaps come forth with things they didn't totally agree with; they were trying to reach a goal to do something, so they shot a little higher than they really wanted to hit. But it did bring about change that was necessary. We did it with a minimum of damage and problems and so forth and so on.

But a lot of positive things happened as a result of the problems that occurred in the country. You had problems on college campus; you had strikes. I remember I went through every kind of strike you can imagine, marches on city hall, something going on constantly. It was a time in our history that happened. And after I was gone, then it all settled down somewhat.

But what was caused here was caused through frustration, or just because everybody else was doing it type thing. Or someone would break a window and steal something and the other guy, who had very little or nothing, felt, "Why not help myself?"—you know, almost felt justified. I can understand that. I don't condone it. Just like the old *bolita* man.

GM: Right.

RG: I couldn't expect him to think a great deal different then what he'd done all of his life, especially about somebody he considered a friend. So, you take a young black in those days, had very little or nothing or didn't have a great deal to eat. Somebody broke the front door of the supermarket, he felt justified taking food or a coat or something he didn't have, 'cause he saw the people who had it, and he didn't feel he had a chance to get it.

We started an on the job training program in the city. Had to be. There were so many blacks that could have come down and gotten a job just by merely taking the test. And many of them did, but felt that because they were black they'd never get the job, so therefore they never came. And I imagine a lot of Latin people years ago had the same feeling. And prejudice will always exist, always; you will never totally get rid of it. No matter what kind of lip service people give to it, deep down inside, people do have their prejudices. It's not totally race; it's a lot of things. It may be prejudiced the way a guy looks, or whatever.

But Tampa's people are good. By and large, this is one the nicest—I travel a lot, and I don't think I've been anywhere where people are more friendly or courteous and care for one another and their fellow man any more than Tampa, Florida. And I don't say that because I've been mayor of the city, I say it because I mean it. And that's one of the things I really love about this place. You can walk down the street and smile at somebody, they'll smile back. If you get in trouble, people will help you. It's just a super place. That means a lot to me. Even though we're getting bigger and bigger, we still—those characteristics are still here.

GM: Looking back during those years, what do you think? What went wrong with Ybor City?

RG: Nothing went wrong with Ybor City any more than it went wrong with the area around the old St. Joseph's Hospital—it was one of the nicest areas in Tampa—or Hyde Park, or any place else. Life's a cycle. What's going to go wrong with me when I'm seventy-five years old? My teeth are going to get bad, I'm not going to be able to see as well, my hair's going to be gray, my body is going to deteriorate. I'm not going to look like I do today, just like today I don't look like I did when I was twenty, and I can't do some of the things I could do then. And the same with a city: it's hard to keep one area great forever.

GM: Do you think the—

RG: Downtown. Look at downtown.

GM: —urban renewal programs worked out like people thought they would?

RG: To a degree, but look at downtown. Downtown is coming back like crazy. Ten, fifteen years ago most people thought, “Well, ready to give up; it’s all over.” Urban renewal had to be. There wasn’t any other way to do it.

GM: The difference though, is that people’s plans [for] Ybor City was that the buildings were simply removed. I mean, did they have to do such a radical job of urban removal, I guess, rather than urban renewal?

RG: Well, of course, at the time urban renewal was relatively new. It wasn’t something that we knew a great deal about. It had gotten in a very deteriorated situation. Let me compare. One of the reasons downtown is doing so well is there’s no housing in the middle of it, or something that precludes you building anything around it. Once you get the government subsidized housing, stuff like that, a business is not going to come in and locate across the street. They just won’t do it. And I went through that with many businesses.

Ybor City had come down to a very low economic ebb. One of the reasons that I was so bent on putting the college [Hillsborough Community College] there and letting them have so much of the land—they may not need it, but it precluded real low cost housing going in there, which you have to have in a community. But if we ever were to rebuild that and conserve the flavor and to have what we were trying to do with that Barrio Latino Commission, we had to make sure that that didn’t occur or it would have been all over.⁵

So HCC, as far as I was concerned, [that was] one of big reasons for putting it there, not what—I didn’t particularly think that’s where it was needed, to be honest with you. But it served that purpose, controlling that land and leaving it sit there till at least someone would do something around it, knowing that someday that’ll all be new, it’ll be college. Maybe they won’t need all that; [in] years to come, they may sell off some. But very little has happened out there, unfortunately.

But now—think about it. You got downtown; that’s going to be totally new in five years, one of the greatest in America. And you got just a straight shot to Ybor City, which could represent the old again.

We had passed legislation—I don’t know if you know this or not. A couple of us got together and passed legislation for bullfighting. And we were going to build a replica of this—

GM: A walled city.

⁵The Barrio Latino Commission, part of the City of Tampa’s Historic Preservation and Urban Development Department, is responsible for preservation and design in the Ybor City Historic District.

RG: A walled city, and that would have made it magic. With Disney World drawing in twelve million people our way, with Busch Gardens drawing three million. If we had had a bull ring by the interstate, and go through all the fanfare and have a Spanish walled city, everyone would have visited. But the Humane Society got after us, although we weren't going to kill the bull; it was Portuguese-style.⁶ They didn't care. So that went down the drain and so did that grandiose plan, which I think would have been built, 'cause we had some people capable of doing it. So—

GM: Do you think the affair in Brandon was over exaggerated with the bull going berserk?

RG: Well—

GM: Or was that also an exaggeration?

RG: Well, there are a lot of people who are very, very interested in animals, and I can understand that because animals can't take care of themselves. But I think the whole thing was exaggerated. I don't think Portuguese-style bullfighting, where you don't touch the bull—you merely go through the motions—would have hurt anything, but they didn't agree with it. They thought it was tormenting the animal and that type of thing. Those things are raised to do that, too; it's like a fighting rooster. That's a bloody mess. I wouldn't want that, but they are raised with that kind of spirit. I remember when that was taking place, I went to the De Soto [Heritage] Festival in Bradenton, and a bull broke through the pen and they had to shoot him in front of everybody. Rodeos, by the way, were also illegal, and we included that in our bill so that we could get some of the smaller county legislators being on our side.

GM: Very astute.

RG: But for a brief period of time, we had the only legal bullfight area in the United States of America. And I can just envision, you know, Saturday afternoon, playing the trumpets out there, and all the color

GM: It might have worked.

RG: Oh, I think so.

GM: In conclusion, how would you chart the future of Tampa? What do you see as the great assets? And also, some flaws and any problems in the future?

RG: I would—flaws and problems, I would address most of Florida, and include Tampa in it, in that we are blessed with many God-given attributes that are going to make people

⁶Refers to the style of bullfighting in which the bull is killed not by the matador in the arena but by a butcher away from the audience. Sometimes the bull may not be killed at all.

want to come here forever. It's hard to keep up with furnishing the needs of so many people when you have a state that's growing so quickly. For instance, we know today where we're going to need sewer and water and that type of thing, but how do you provide it in advance of the people being here? You have to punish those that are already on the system; you can only do that to a certain degree. So basically, we will always lag a little or run behind in the area of drainage, sewer, water—all the things that you need. But as far as are we going to make it and how things are going to go, my gosh, it's like shooting fish in a barrel.

It's a great place to live. People have now discovered the west coast of Florida, which they hadn't a few years ago. Everybody would go to Miami and places like this. They realize it's a great place to live where things are happening. There's ten square city blocks under construction in downtown Tampa right now, not counting Seddon Island and all the other things on the drawing board.

GM: Probably in the billions of dollars right now.

RG: Oh, I would venture to say percentage side, there's probably more going on than any city in the world. And that may sound magnanimous, but I believe it. We've got as fine an airport as you'll find anywhere in the world. We have a nice stadium. We have an NFL [National Football League] football team.⁷ All the things that took time coming are all coming together. I think we lack—this is strange—in some cultural facilities, sadly lacking. We need a performing arts hall. And a lot of people say, "Why is that important? We've got pot holes in the street."

The second most asked question in every company, practically, that I interviewed when I was mayor to move here was, "What kind of cultural facilities do you offer?" And I couldn't understand that. I wondered why, and I pressed it. And, of course, what's happening is that just like times changed for all of us, companies today are hiring people that have tremendous skills—they're very bright, have great educations—who are used to this type of thing in bigger cities. And if you can't offer it in Tampa, Florida, then they're not going to move their corporate headquarters, or whatever the case may be. They want to know first, how is your school system. The second most frequently asked question is what kind of cultural facilities you have, and that includes libraries and that type of thing. Amazing.

GM: Would you agree that Tampa faces a grave energy problem? What happens if gas goes here, in a city so dependent on the automobile, without mass transit facilities, in a state so dependent on tourism?

RG: We'll just have to make those adjustments, that's all. That's another thing that I was talking about a while ago when I said, "Water, sewer and that kind of—" You have to

⁷The Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

include transit. Right now the people who use transit are those that have to. Again, in Florida, you've got many, many people who come here from other places to get away from mass transit. You've got those of us who have lived here all our lives and never had to use it. So you have a built in resistance, but if it gets bad enough, then you'll use it. That's all. It'd be that simple, but don't look for people in Florida to anticipate that and do something way in advance, because they're not going to. They really are not going to do it.

And now, you talk monorails and this kind of thing? That's way out in the future. It'll happen someday, no doubt about it. But first you're going to have to have a very adequate bus system. And we have come a long way in that regard. But like right now, we had a little bond issue not long ago, and I got somewhat involved. (yawns) Excuse me. Most people did not want to vote a few more dollars taxes to support busses. I didn't figure they would, I figured would have to be those who rode busses that would have to go out and vote themselves. Most of those didn't pay. But we owe an allegiance to those people, 'cause most anybody was riding was working, and they're trying. It's the only way to get there.

So, transportation is going to have to be faced. Downtown Tampa is an example. You start filling up all the buildings that are being built right now, you're not going to park them all downtown. Everything that is going to be forthcoming is going to have to be parked somewhere and bussed in. So people are going to get more used to riding mass transit, and as soon as that happens, they say, "Well, that's not so bad." Why not ride a few blocks? Why not take it from home? It's nice and clean and has air conditioning, you know, save you fifty, sixty a month in parking, plus your gas bill.

The other thing that you're going to see happening is people moving back to the inner core of the city. Broke ground last Friday for Number One Laurel Place, which is a condo downtown. We were talking about that back when I was in office, getting off the ground. Back in those days, do you know when somebody wanted to build an apartment complex or townhouse or something like that? That was considered undesirable, and people used to come up and complain.

GM: In downtown Tampa?

RG: No, anywhere.

GM: Oh anywhere. Wow.

RG: Yeah, they didn't want apartment dwellers near them. First condominiums were built, they had a hard time giving them away. Now they're selling at a tremendous premium, based on figures of other kind of real estate. It's a great way to live. I did that. I moved to Bayshore Boulevard; it's a townhome. You're going to see a lot more of that. You're going to see people—once this condo goes downtown, you're going to see more people move in. Then what happens? They you have restaurants, then you have nightlife,

and then the whole thing becomes vibrant again. It's like—it can happen in Ybor City again. But downtown went downhill, and now it's coming back. It's a cycle. Hyde Park is doing the same thing. Ybor City area just hasn't had the right breaks.

But the good thing about it is people are hanging in there and want it to happen, and it will. As soon as downtown does a little better—Ybor City is going to represent the old and history. Hopefully, we've become more conscious of that type of thing, all of us. We shouldn't erase everything that belongs to our past, because it made all what we are, and if there's ever been a time in the history of our country when we ought to look back, it's now.

GM: Right.

RG: We've got to really look back.

GM: One final short answer question for you. Nineteen thirty-three [to] 1980, how would you characterize your stay in Tampa? If you could put a label on Tampa as the age of thirty-three [1933] to eighty [1980] what would you call it?

RG: I'd call it probably an almost total transition from a little town where we all knew one another by name and family to a community that has no end to what it can do right now in the eighties [1980s]. It's going to grow and flourish and be a marvelous place to live. And we have to control that as best we can, you know, and make sure that it's done right.

In addition to that, we ought to try to continue to have things like you did in Ybor City, not to totally forget or sweep that away forever, because that's where we started, and it was a good thing. It was a marvelous thing. It was something that we should always look back on and understand. It's so hard to do, because life has become exceedingly easy for most of us. And then you almost feel when it's real easy for you, you don't really need to put anything back. And in some fashion we have to do that, if we're going to continue to have the same kind of Tampa, Florida, or country that we've been used to. We're a fortunate place to live. We don't have to worry about winters. It's great.

GM: Okay, thank you very much. It was an enjoyable interview.

RG: I enjoyed doing it.

end of interview