

**Interviewee:** Ensley, Gerald  
**Interviewer:** Robin Sellers  
**Date of interview:** April 30, 2007  
**Category:** FSU and Tallahassee  
**Status:** Open  
**Tape location:** Box #55

**Sellers:** Okay, Gerald, why don't we start out by you telling me a little bit about where you were born and grew up.

**Ensley:** I was a military brat; both my parents were born and raised in Norfolk, Virginia. My father was a child of the Depression, he joined the CCCs when he was eighteen and then joined the Air Force when he was nineteen, and then spent the next twenty-six years in the military. I was born in Nagoya, Japan. He was part of the Occupation Forces after the war, but I was born in 1951, so this is well after the war. Born in Nagoya, Japan, we lived half a dozen places, then we pretty much settled in central Florida, in Satellite Beach, which is right next to Cape Kennedy. He was stationed at Patrick Air Force Base, and then that's where he retired. I graduated from high school in 1969. I have two twin sisters, they're twins to each other. They were born a year after me – actually, it's fifteen months – and we grew up essentially there in Satellite Beach, Florida. I came to FSU in 1969, after I graduated from high school. I guess one of the things I've been thinking of is that both FSU, Tallahassee, and maybe America, I think into the '60s, the start of the '70s, is sort of the tipping point between sophistication and non-sophistication, maybe. The Tallahassee I came to was still a small town and FSU was still a relatively small university, and I found both of those things charming. I found Tallahassee particularly charming because I had grown up on military bases and in central Florida, and though central Florida at that time was not like it is now – in fact, those of us who are from Brevard County often talk about those early '60s, when I moved to Brevard County, being the glory days of the East Coast because there was still lots of “wilderness.” It was not as populous as it is now. But even then, I did not like central Florida. I thought central Florida had two seasons, wet and dry. I thought it was all palmetto bush and low stucco buildings, I found nothing about it charming. I mean as a kid (as a kid, you're only relatively, I guess, conversant with some of these ideas), but I never liked the weather in central Florida. I never liked the sort of sense of newness. Everything in central Florida, everything in Florida at that time was new. They used to say there are no Florida natives, there are just people that moved down there. Though we did know a couple of people in Brevard — we knew people in Brevard County who had been there since the '20s, when it was truly a wilderness and they'd had to use machetes and jeeps. But largely, everyone I knew in Brevard County was like me, transplants from somewhere else, no sense of permanence, and the area we moved to was not pretty, had no sense of permanence. Everything had relatively been built in the last twenty or thirty years. So I come to Tallahassee, and here is this city that has been here, in my mind, forever. I was fascinated by the sense of community here. I was fascinated by meeting people whose names were on the streets and on the buildings. There was this sense of community that I had not had as a military brat, that I had not had in central Florida. So I found Tallahassee fascinating. In fact, the two

pivotal moments (and I've written columns about these), the two pivotal moments happened in my freshman year. One of them involved – I lived in Kellum Hall, and our RA, our Resident Advisor, was Terry (and I forget Terry's last name). He was a diver. The sixth floor that I lived on had the scholarship swimmers back in the day when the scholarship athletes all lived on campus. Terry took about four or five of us for a drive one night in his '64-'65 Mustang. We went out Old Bainbridge Road, and as soon as we passed Tharpe Street we were in the canopy road of Old Bainbridge and there was little out there. We were in the woods, and I was just so fascinated by how that looked in those days. We still have canopy roads in Tallahassee, but as you probably know, they've become thinner and thinner, and populated more and more by housing developments. So here we are in this sort of jungle-like thing, I was struck by that. I was also struck – later that same freshman year, my next door neighbor in Kellum Hall was a local kid, Dobby Kerns, played in a local band here. Even though his family lived here, he wanted to live in the dorm. One day, for whatever reason, I accompanied him on some of his errands and we wound up going all around town. We went to White's Drug Store, where we met Mr. White; we went to Mutt and Jeff's Drive-In, which was, which was legendary here. It was not a particularly remarkable place, but the people who owned it were right there and there's all these kids gathered there. We wound up downtown in the middle of rush hour, and I was really introduced to the sense of this of this town having a character and people who'd been here forever. That fascinated me, again, that fascinated me.

FSU at that time when I came had 15,000 students roughly. It was the end, again, of the unsophisticated era. That first year, girls still had to report back to their dorm by midnight; freshmen still could not have a car at campus, although several people did. I had several friends in the dorm who parked their cars up on Tennessee Street, which if you can imagine – you can't imagine now – but there was parking on Tennessee Street. So there was this sense — and you knew most everyone back then. Fifteen thousand is a lot of a people, but we had orientation in Ruby Diamond and there's still a handful of people from that freshman year who I still see around town. There was this sense of coming to both a city and a campus that had a sense of community and also had a sense of simplicity about it, and I found all that largely charming. I found that charming, too, as I learned more and more about Tallahassee. I guess I often talk about the sink holes here. You used to be able to go swimming in the sink holes, which are in the national forest and are now off limits. You can take a guided walk there or something like that, but you can't go swimming. There was a sense of this still being a small town, surrounded by wilderness and having a history and a sense of community, and I found all that charming.

**Sellers:** Why did you choose FSU over University of Florida?

**Ensley:** The truth of the matter is that I applied to FSU and to Florida, and FSU accepted me first. I've always thanked my lucky stars for that bit of kismet. I would like to think I would have chosen FSU. I once wrote a column about the difference between FSU people and Florida people, and there is a difference. The people who in high school were arty, or in the theater, or into English, or sort of already then liberal/hippies, they came to FSU. The people who were your student council leaders, your business people, your future doctors and lawyers, they went to Florida. It was a sort of self selection process, but I suspect many of them self-selected like I did

without knowing they were self-selecting. I just thank my lucky stars that I came. I had come to Tallahassee in seventh grade, with my seventh grade class. We came up here to tour, we spent three days touring the capital and all. So I was already familiar with Tallahassee and I liked it. It was one of the great pleasures in the old days to come up Apalachee Parkway and see the Old Capitol, especially at night, this sort of white old lady amid the oaks. I can remember as a seventh grader being charmed by that. So I was familiar with Tallahassee, I was familiar with FSU and I liked it better. But who knows, if Florida had accepted me first. I just thank goodness it didn't go that way.

One of the things I think strikes me, too – back to this sort of idea of sophistication and non-sophistication is that — again, this is a time in America – I mean, everything has become more sophisticated over this past ten years, certainly, since the advent of the internet and online and all the many electronic and technological advances. Changes in the business world, where everything is driven by the stock market (which plays a big role here in journalism, here at this newspaper). The FSU I came to was such a bare bones, Spartan existence-type school. I realize now in retrospect, you know, you come to a university and you think, “Well, this is better than high school, so it must be quite the deal.” But when I came in ‘69, FSU was only twenty-two years removed from having turned coed. It's buildings – the big, the most recent building boom had been the late '50s and early '60s, when they built most of the west campus: the Education Building, Kellum Hall, the Keen building, even the nuclear reactor. Everything was quite Spartan. The dorm rooms were very basic, the facilities were basic, the student union was simply a couple of open halls; we had a bowling alley. And I guess, again, part of the sophistication of America is the great consumer society. We were still on the edge of the non-consumer society at that time. I came, I was paying \$15 a credit point. I had a scholarship through the Air Force aid society that I believe paid \$600 to \$800 a semester, and that covered all my bills, just about. My parents gave me some money for food, but it was much cheaper to be here.

By the same token, we did not shop as much. Northwood Mall had opened in '69, but you didn't go up there. It was not like today, where the kids went to the mall. You went to the mall only at Christmas, pretty much, as a college student. When I shopped, I walked from Kellum Hall to downtown Monroe Street, which is about two miles as a crow flies; it never occurred to me that there was any other way to get there.

**Sellers:** And it's uphill both ways.

**Ensley:** And it's uphill both ways! I used to know every house on that last stretch coming up College Avenue: 303 College Avenue was a big old house, it had apartments in it; 404 was a big old house. But you used to walk everywhere. Again, it wasn't a consumer society. Besides paper and pens and such as that, I remember buying a winter coat at Penneys, which at that time was still on Monroe Street where today the U.S. Federal Court is, right across from what is now the Tennyson Condominiums, one of the taller buildings in town. FSU was a more Spartan operation. I started at the *Florida Flambeau* after — I dropped out for a while and came back and was sports editor of the *Florida Flambeau*, and Paul Dirks, who was the head of intermurals, used to say, “Gerald, we're gonna build a student recreation center. It's gonna have a pool and

exercise facilities and a gymnasium.” And I go, “Oh yeah, that’s pie in the sky.” Well, that’s today’s Leach Center, and the Leach Center now has gotten to be so overcrowded, they’re talking about building another one. We had no amenities!. This isn’t to complain about that. But if you wanted to play basketball, you played on the outdoor courts behind Montgomery Gym or you played behind Florida High. The Student Union pool, yes, you could go use when the swim team wasn’t using it. But it just was a different, more Spartan existence.

I don’t lament that; I sometimes look at today’s college opportunities and offerings and I’m just struck by the change – the change in sophistication, the change in amenities. But you know, I was still struck by coming to college. I think professors were still on the edge of that time when teachers and professors had authority to you. You know, how many stories do we hear now about children in school talking back to teachers? We didn’t do that when I was coming up. My wife now is a professor at the university, and it’s not unusual for someone to challenge what she says in a classroom. I think in those days you got to know the professors well enough to challenge some ideas, but for the most part it was still a very – what is the word I’m looking for here? Still sort of Socratic technique, where those guys were up there lecturing and we sat there in if not boredom, then something approaching awe.

**Sellers:** What did you study when you were up here? What was your direction?

**Ensley:** I had thought when I first came here I was going to become an attorney like everyone, I suppose like everyone thinks. I majored in government, which is now political science, and which I was sort of disappointed wasn’t called “political science” at FSU when I came. It is now called political science, which sounds far more important than studying government. I was majoring in government; I dropped out for several years and went back, and when I came back, I came back with the intention of becoming a newspaper writer, frankly, and only continued in government, then called political science, because I already had a lot of credits built up. My major wound up being political science with a minor in English. Most of the second half of my educational career was spent in English classes because I knew I wanted to write.

**Sellers:** What about your journalism bent? We didn’t have a journalism program back then.

**Ensley:** Did not have a journalism school. I will tell you, and this is perhaps a good segue, I became fascinated with journalism because of the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Again, I’d grown up in central Florida where, ironically, *Florida Today* came in 1968. *Florida Today* is one of the flagship papers of the Gannett Company, which two years ago bought this newspaper. But I’d grown up in an area where I always loved newspapers growing up. We didn’t have online, when newspapers were your thing. I was a sport fan as a kid, so I liked newspapers. I liked sports, I liked newspapers, and I liked writing. There came a point — I was driving a cab for several years here when I dropped out, for four years when I dropped out, and I can remember reading the paper and reading the sports pages and thinking, “I can do that. I like sports, I like writing, I like newspapers, that’s what I ought to do.” I thought that the best way to

do that would be to get some practical experience. I thought, “Okay, FSU has the *Flambeau*,” which at that time was still a very respected college newspaper. I thought, “Okay, I’ll go back to school and I’ll start working at the *Flambeau*,” and that’s exactly what I did. FSU had had a journalism school, yes, until like ‘65 or something like that. I will say that today journalism is the province of young people who went to journalism school, but when I started at the *Flambeau*, I either knew intuitively or something that you did not have to go to journalism school to be in journalism, that it was a lot about practical experience. I went back to school, I spent two years as the sports editor at the *Flambeau*. A week after I graduated from FSU, I was hired here at the *Tallahassee Democrat* as a sportswriter. When I first came to the Democrat, easily half the newsroom was non-college graduates. That percentage has shrunk considerably; we still have many who aren’t, but journalism who used to be the province of those who had an ability to communicate and a curiosity, who didn’t necessarily go to journalism school. Certainly always there’s been journalism schools, I would guess since the early twentieth century. So there’s always people in the business, even when I got into it, who had been to journalism school, but it was not as strong a requisite as it is now.

**Sellers:** Who were some of the faculty members that you remember fondly, and then not fondly?

**Ensley:** There are no un-fondly ones.

**Sellers:** Okay, that’s good.

**Ensley:** I don’t believe I’ve ever had a teacher at any level who annoyed me. There have been some I could recognize as boring or not trying hard, but I’ve never had a bad professor or teacher. So many of the professors I remember most would be those – well, Elston Roady; I would have to say Elston Roady was up there. Webb Salmon – he was in English, Webb Salmon. I’ve got to say, Webb Salmon is always the one who I remember first and foremost. He reminds me of my favorite teacher in high school, Mr. John Clark. Both of them had a no nonsense and yet kind adherence to the importance of literature and language, and they were firm. Mr. Salmon would always – I had him for three or four classes, and he would always say, “I don’t want you to interpret what William Faulkner is saying (or whoever the author is), I want you to understand what he is saying first. When you understand what he’s saying, then you can worry about interpreting it.” So Webb Salmon always stands out as a person who taught me about learning and about understanding literature. Elston Roady impressed me; he was one of those Socratic method ones I was talking about. It would be fascinating. Dr. Roady would stand up to talk about, oh, whatever the subject was, and pretty soon he was off on World War II and his experiences, and he’s off on his experiences at the University of Illinois, and about a summer job he had. I think that in high school you hadn’t that sort of personal sense of who the people were that you got when a professor. A professor at FSU could have authority and yet could also talk about things that weren’t necessarily on topic. I was impressed by that. I was impressed by most everybody I had in English – Hunt Hawkins, Doug Fowler, Jerry Stern; several in government who have died now and whose names I’m blanking on. Vance, Maurice Vance. I

used to like him a bunch.

**Sellers:** You were at the Jim Jones dinner – did you —

**Ensley:** I was at the Jim Jones dinner. I'd known Jim simply since I was a sports writer. I met him – he conducted a Sports in America seminar in the late '70s, when I was *Flambeau* sports editor, and I got to know him then. I've known Jim mostly in his role as a historian and as a sports historian. When I came to the *Democrat* – Jim's always taken a big interest in journalism and sports, and so I've been talking with him since about '78, '80, certainly. I never had him for a class, which is unfortunate.

**Sellers:** You still have time, apparently. [Laughter]

**Ensley:** As he goes into his sixth decade of teaching. Yeah, that's true. But you see, so many — here's what I've always liked about — most of the professors I've known are like Jim Jones in that the knowledge becomes supreme. I know among you guys — now, I don't want to talk out of school here, but I told you I am married to a college professor, Sally Karioth, who is a noted professor in the School of Nursing, a world famous grief therapist. So I am privy, if you will, to the discussions that faculty members have among themselves, and they are as small and mean spirited as any we have here in journalism. Academicians themselves are a squabbling little bunch. But pull them out and have them talk to students, and I find most them to be fascinating because they make the knowledge — they will tell you – most – Jim Jones is the kind that can tell you what is the truth and what's not the truth about history without worrying about how does it reflect on him. I mean, he doesn't play politics with knowledge. And that's how I felt about most the professors I had. You asked them a direct question, they gave you a direct answer, and they weren't worried about how it reflected on them. They were as eager to share knowledge and to get you curious about knowledge as they had been.

**Sellers:** They were teachers.

**Ensley:** They were teachers.

**Sellers:** We're running low on those now.

**Ensley:** I think so. And again, this kind of goes back to my wife who is a teacher. I know that research is king for how you get promoted at the university, and it is important to have research and I'm always proud of whatever research gets done by Florida State. Increasingly, this is a university that trumpets great breakthroughs or great discoveries or great explorations in research. But it still has to be about — it's still a largely undergraduate university, and the first role of the undergraduate university has to be teaching. It's the great teachers who are sometimes not rewarded; they are acknowledged, "She's a great teacher, he's a great teacher, but we're going to promote this guy who just wrote a book who most the students couldn't recognize on a bet!" So yes, I feel fortunate to have had many people who were teachers first. Now, I will

say that perhaps history and English, and to a degree, political science, loan themselves to the sort of research that allows them to also be in the classroom. I mean, much of the research for a book is going to a library. I mean, they're not doing science experiments or having to travel to the Antarctic to conduct their experiments, so they are largely in the present. I almost forgot, Gil Abcarian was another great professor I had. As I was saying that about doing your research in the classroom – he was the first one I ever knew to take a sabbatical. I mean, I'd never heard of the idea of sabbatical. I had Gil Abcarian, and I'd had him for two classes, and I was just so fascinated with him and I wanted to take him a third semester. "No, I'm going to be on sabbatical this year." "What's that about?" Well, he was researching one of the half dozen books that he wrote. But those disciplines do lend themselves, perhaps, to being more available to the students while they are also conducting their research.

Yeah, at FSU I had the good fortune, it seems like, to always have somebody who was interested in teaching, and I liked that so much.

**Sellers:** It may have been your personality reacting with them, too, that made them, because —

**Ensley:** I will say that one of the advantages I had was that I went to school for two years and dropped out for five or six and then went back. I hate to say it this way, but I would recommend to everyone to sort of take a break. When I came back to school, I was more interested in learning and more dedicated to doing what I came back for. I think when you go straight through, you have this sense of it's just grade thirteen, grade fourteen, grade fifteen —

**Sellers:** More of the same.

**Ensley:** It's more of the same. You do not have any sense of wanting to be in college. It is what is expected of you to do. I've graduated from high school, I'm expected to go to college. I do think it's important to college, but I also don't think that it's so bad to take a break, figure out what you want to do. I think it's one of the great sillinesses that we expect kids to know what they want to do at eighteen. I got out, I worked several jobs, I began to cull the thoughts of what it is that I can do and what I like doing, and as I said, I came back to, "Hey, I like newspapers, I'm interested in what they say. I like writing, I like sports, let's put those together." At eighteen, I was thinking, "Well, I ought to be an attorney," because that's what I read: you go to college and you become an attorney. So I think I was lucky in that I had a break. My father didn't think it was such a great idea at the time. But I will say that he was also very proud of me when I did go back to school and did graduate and did get into journalism. But having been a Depression kid, here you are, you've got a chance to go to college, why wouldn't you go straight through? But I do think there is something to learning what it is you want to do with your life. I think it's a truism in the universities that the adult learner is almost always more avid and more enthusiastic than the young kids.

**Sellers:** What did your being a sports writer on the *Flambeau* involve?

**Ensley:** It involved going to games, writing stories. I tell you what, I spent ten years as a sports writer, two there, another eight here. I can not stand being a sports writer now. I will tell you that one of the great lessons that I learned from being a sports writer is it can ruin the things that you think you like. I dare say that – oh, I don't know, I would hate to be a food critic because I would probably get tired of food.

**Sellers:** You would become anorexic.

**Ensley:** Yes. Being a sports writer ruined sports for me, because I went behind the curtain, if you will. And it is hard to idolize these people you meet who have got any number of their own issues and for whom – I don't want to get off on all the problems wrong with sports, of which one is the great amount of secrecy and importance that get attached to it and sort of spoil it. But one of the great things it did was introduce me to — all of journalism introduces you to this – this is something I tell young journalists all the time: journalism really is not about writing, it's about reporting. When you start out, you think, "Well, I'm just going to get to comment on this. I'm going to go to a game and I'm going to comment on it." Well, not really. You've got to learn to report what happened accurately; you're not commenting on it, you've got to report it accurately. You have to go and talk to the people, report what they said about it. What sports writing did for me and what journalism does for me, it introduced me to the great need to talk to and get along with people. I would say that this business is about learning to talk to strangers. Oddly enough, not oddly enough, most writers are introverted by nature. They write because they are not salesman type, because they are not "Hail, fellow, well mets." Their form of communication is the private internalized writing. And yet you get into this business and suddenly realize, you've got to be able to go out and meet strangers and talk to them. My very first assignment at the *Flambeau*, I will always remember this, I come in, I'd only been there a half an hour, "Go talk to Hugh Durham, the head basketball coach, and ask him why his graduation rates are so low." In retrospect, that's — Hugh Durham, to his ever lasting credit – here comes this guy knocking on the door, sticks his head in (and more accessible – nowadays, you couldn't get to the head basketball coach, you first have to go through a phalanx of helpers and all that). But I could go right up to Hugh's office in Tully Gym, I knocked on the door, stuck my head in, "Coach I've been sent over here to find out why your graduation rates are so low." Hugh Durham says, "Come back tomorrow and I'll find out what they are and I'll talk to you then." And that's what we did. I realized as I went there, suddenly I was going to talk to someone who I'd read about in the newspaper and who I, frankly, even at that age, 26, I was kind of nervous. That has been what this business has been about ever since, is going up to people you don't know and trying to talk with them, and sports introduced me to that in a hurry. You cover games, you go in the locker room, you have to talk to a bunch of athletes, you have to ask them questions on the fly, you have to establish what you're trying to say. Sports writing helped acclimate me to the world of journalism. Frankly, the world of journalism, aside from sports, is far more polite and easy to deal with than the world of sports. If I call a city commissioner, he calls me back; he can not afford to stiff the press. You go and ask a nineteen year old, "How did you play?" and he can say, "Get the heck out of here." He doesn't have to talk to you. So sports toughens you up for learning how to deal with public figures and how to ask your question

quickly, fast, real quickly and succinctly, or some version thereof.

**Sellers:** When you first came to campus in '69, how long were you here?

**Ensley:** I've never really left Tallahassee.

**Sellers:** No, but I mean how long did you stay as a student?

**Ensley:** As a student? For two years. I stayed two years and then I dropped out until '78, and then went back. I essentially stayed in Tallahassee. I spent three months out in Idaho working for Ken Kesey's brother, Chuck Kesey. Ken Kesey's the novelist. That's a long story in which I just stumbled into meeting him in Idaho, and then I also spent six months in Nebraska. But aside from that, I've stayed in Tallahassee and continued to be here.

**Sellers:** Conditions on campus from '69 to '71, that was truly an evolutionary period. Dorms were opened up to coeducation, women quit having to wear trench coats, they could wear slacks.

**Ensley:** Right. And as I said, that first year, they still had to come back by midnight. After that they changed it.

**Sellers:** How do think that affected things?

**Ensley:** I think there was a whole sense of exciting turmoil. You know, President Marshall recently wrote his book about – he calls it the tumultuous '60s or whatever. Really, it was the tumultuous '70s. I mean, he takes over in '69. I went to all those rallies on Landis Green; I was at rallies with radical Jack Lieberman, we went to meetings at St. Mary's Primitive Baptist Church, I was in Westcott when the Black Student Union took over Marshall's office. I don't pretend to have been a radical. The honest fact about being a radical, being a hippie activist back in the '70s was a lot of it was for the socialness of it. Everyone was doing it, so you went along. I shared a lot of the political views, but I don't pretend to have been a radical protester even though I was at all those events, because you could not avoid them. There wasn't a day hardly that Jack Lieberman and his cohorts weren't taking over the Union green or the Union courtyard to hold some sort of rally. So I think there was a great sense – all of us who are Boomers feel like we were part of this tumultuous time that was changing the world. When blacks were getting equality, when women were getting equality, when we were protesting war. We feel like those were tumultuous times for the better, and I certainly feel that way. You almost got blase about it, you know. Things now that get written up as really meaningful were just another rally in the student courtyard; "For god's sake, get out of my way!"

**Sellers:** You weren't aware that you were part of history.

**Ensley:** We weren't aware we were part of history, exactly.

**Sellers:** Did you ever feel insecure or threatened during those years? By either the administration or the situation —

**Ensley:** Never. You know, one of the things – I've always told this to Stan Marshall, one of the great credits was, we marched on his house several times when it was on Tennessee Street —

**Sellers:** The President's house.

**Ensley:** The President's house. It was on Tennessee Street, up there on the hill. At nine or ten o'clock at night, there'd be 400 or 500 kids out in his front yard, "Peace now! Peace now!" Here would come out Marshall, and he would speak calmly to us and say, "Well, those are good questions," he'd answer the ones he could. I realize now, if 400 kids showed up on my doorstep at nine o'clock at night, I would say, "Get the hell out of here! What are you doing?" And Marshall has gotten a bad rap for being such a conservative and all that, but I thought he handled it politely. I came to think of that as the way things are done at a university. "Yeah, yeah this is wrong, this wrong, this is wrong! But we're going to talk about it." I did not experience a Kent State, I did not experience a University of Wisconsin explosion. I know things were different at those campuses where the violence made people uncomfortable. Here it was really all about the talk. And I had the sense that the grown ups, if you will, were annoyed but tolerant. "You kids don't understand, but let me tell you why don't understand." So I mean that was sort of a continuation of – I believe that's kind of how my father was. My father was very authoritarian, but by the same token, "You have questions, well, here's the answer," I mean, my father never reacted —

**Sellers:** It wasn't "Just because I say so."

**Ensley:** It wasn't, "Just because I say so," that's exactly right. That's how I had the sense of the grown ups. They were all annoyed — I mean, again, Marshall, the Black Student Union came and sat in his office. But he talked with them and explained this, that, and the other. I did not feel the sense of insecurity that I might have felt at campuses where it became violent. FSU had a lot of tumult without violence.

**Sellers:** What about integration?

**Ensley:** Integration was just starting here. I can remember the Black Student Union led by people like John Burt and several of the basketball – well, John Burt was a basketball player but I wouldn't say the other athletes were as active as he was. They used to gather in the Union cafeteria, and that's sort of where they held their Black Student Union meetings. I will say that as a military kid, I came already with a sense of "integration is right." I'd gone to integrated schools all my life, because the base schools were always integrated. In Satellite Beach, even

though it was off base, that was an integrated school. I don't pretend to have said, "Oh, I've got lots black friends," but I was always around black kids. So I thought that what they were doing, the Black Student Union, made perfect sense to me. I will say that the most shocking part of integration in Tallahassee, or lack of integration in Tallahassee, was when I dropped out in '71, and spent those four or five or six years working. I worked at several jobs in Tallahassee that were still run by Old South mentality. I worked at a landscaping place where I made a \$1.75 an hour. I worked alongside two black men in their fifties or even sixties who made a \$1.60 an hour. And they had worked for the family, Dennis Law's family, for twenty years. I was so struck by the paternalism of how Old South Tallahasseeans treated blacks. It was considered good enough payment to give them the leftover furniture and clothes, and to speak with them – frankly, I don't know that I heard too many say "Boy," but I certainly heard them call Thomas and John by their first names rather than by their last names. So I was struck by the paternalism. One of the great progresses of Tallahassee, you just can't say it enough, is race relations. I'm telling you that this town, the blacks here were treated as second class citizens. The idea that they should have the job — you know, the fact that we have a black city manager; the fact that we've had a black police chief; the fact that all positions in city government are held by – not all, but I mean, we've got blacks everywhere.

**Sellers:** Black mayor.

**Ensley:** Black mayor. I mean, it was such not that way in '69, '70, the early '70s; this was still very much the Old South. It's a testament both to the older people who came to accept it, it's a testament of us my age growing up and becoming in positions of responsibility, too, and all. But the race relations on campus were as okay as they can be. I mean, I have good memories. I was in an elevator with Calvin Patterson, who was the first black football player here. I saw him two or three times in the dorm. I spent an evening one night with an Otto Petty, Ron King, sitting in Landis Hall waiting for our dates to come down (because they never came down), so we sat there the whole night. All three of us knew girls who were there and for whom we put in a request at the front desk and then sat in the couches and waited and they never came. But the point is, I thought race relations on campus were – I did not have any sense of unease there. It was only out in the community where it was so clearly still the Old South, which has been the most remarkable change in Tallahassee.

When I came here, I can even remember every black person I spoke with on campus just about, talked about, "Oh, I hate Tallahassee, I'd never wind up living here." That has changed so dramatically. Charles U. Smith, the retired FAMU professor who has written extensively on the protests of the '50s and '60s here, with the bus boycott and with the violence after Martin Luther King in '68, and with the marches on the theaters and the lunch counters in the early '60s. He's black. He said Tallahassee has now become a good place for blacks to live. You know, almost every neighborhood here is integrated, it's all integrated on the basis of what you can afford. Tallahassee has become a good place for – for the same reasons – I mean, the blacks who same here are the same type of people who stay as whites in that they like this sort of town, this medium size town. If you are one who likes the urban pace, whether you're white or black, you don't stay in Tallahassee. But whereas blacks would not have stayed here in the old days

because they knew they'd have to live in a certain area, that's changed.

**Sellers:** What about women on campus? Obviously the ratio was still a bit out of balance. It was favorable to men.

**Ensley:** Right.

**Sellers:** Where did you go on dates?

**Ensley:** Oh, there was nothing to do here. I can remember spending a homecoming – my girlfriend had come up from Satellite Beach and we went to – there was a seafood restaurant across from what is now Moe's on Tennessee Street; it's where Papa John's is right now. That was one of only half a dozen restaurants. Now without cars, you were constricted. But there was nothing to speak of. Everyone cites the litany we had, we had Mom and Dad's Italian, we had Joe's Spaghetti, you had the Silver Slipper, you had a couple of little restaurants downtown, and then you had the first few fast foods. We were talking the other day, I mean there was no fast foods to speak of. You had McDonalds —

**Sellers:** There was a Whataburger.

**Ensley:** There was a Whataburger. But I mean there were not the choices, Tallahassee was not a consumer society well into the late '70s, early '80s. I always date the change of this town as 1978, when Governors Square gets built. Up until then, you didn't really do — I mean, I mentioned that you could go to Northwood Mall for Christmas shopping and you did. But it was slim picking.

**Sellers:** There was Sears on the Parkway —

**Ensley:** You had a Sears, yes, you had a Penneys, yes. You had those kind of things, but the great change to the consumer society starts about '78, with the opening of Governors Square Mall, where for the first time you've got a whole range of stores. When we dated, you know, how can I say this delicately? There was a whole lot of private partying going on back in the day. I've written this column, so I guess I can say it. I think it was a better world when people smoked pot rather than drink a lot of beer. I think beer makes you angry and sloppy and litterers. The kids in my neighborhood now – I live near FSU, and half the neighborhood now is students whose parents buy them four-bedroom houses to live in while they go to college and then they sell them, presumably at a profit. We're talking right now two days after graduation in the Spring of 2007, and the street is littered with plastic beer cups. They drank them, I guess they didn't want to be caught driving with them so they throw them out on the street. So there was a whole lot of private partying going on in those days, and what I remember most about socializing and dates was we generally went to someone's house. We went to events on Landis Green. Landis Green, like now, was still a place to go out and meet some girls, strike up a conversation, throw a frisbee. Just like now, I'm sure, your roommate's from Fort Walton and he knows a girl

from Fort Walton and you get introduced. I know it's certainly – the times are changing for them politically. It's within a year that we do away with that whole idea of “midnight.” What do you mean, you're going to make me check in at midnight? you know. I think women played a big role in changing the politics on this campus. The other thing I always think about women is they, you know, they dress differently. I don't remember midriffs; I sure remember a lot of granny dresses and jeans.

**Sellers:** Clothed bodies.

**Ensley:** Clothed bodies! I don't remember as many unclothed bodies as we see today. That's frankly, what a shame – from a male perspective. Boy, I don't know any guy my age who doesn't say, “Boy, I wish they'd dressed like that when I went to FSU.” Because they didn't. You could still tell a pretty woman's a pretty woman, it didn't matter about that, but they certainly dressed differently. Again, back to that socialization of why did you go into politics – a lot of times you went to the rallies because that's where the girls were. I mean, the girls were protesting. My God, if they're protesting, I'm protesting.

**Sellers:** Were you in a fraternity?

**Ensley:** No, I was not. I had two roommates freshman year, and one of them was rushed – not rushed – I don't remember rush being as big a deal as it is now, but I went with him to two or three dinners that he went to at a fraternity house. I never was a joiner, and I would say that I was never particularly impressed with the type of guys I met at fraternities, but that's going to sound like some sort of snobbery. Although now I certainly would express that snobbery. But I just wasn't a joiner. I didn't know they would paddle you, either, and if I'd known that, I certainly wasn't going to go. You're not going to get me into anything in which they hit me first, you know. But no, I was not in fraternities; I went to several functions with guys who joined fraternities.

**Sellers:** What kind of changes have you seen at FSU over the last twenty or so, I guess almost thirty years now, since the seventies? I keep forgetting we're almost ten years into this millennium.

**Ensley:** I see it as much more professional. That's a dangerous word to use, but much more professional and public relations-oriented university. It is still a province for a lot of learning and a lot of scholarship and a lot good relationships built between professors and students. Let me say, number one, the thing that strikes me most is the building. The building on FSU is incredible; there's not a nook or cranny on which a new building is not going up. The new dorms, remarkable. Again, I mention how Spartan the dorms were at Kellum Hall, Smith Hall, how Spartan they were. Nowadays they're competing with the outside world so they're building these lavish – I would call them lavish dorms – with individual bathrooms and everything else. A new football stadium, a new baseball stadium, complexes for every sport out there. A new – what is it – six, seven story chemistry building is going up. I am struck most by

the building on this campus, which is a testament to the money. When I graduated, you know, we used to write for – well into the ‘80s, we talked about the fact that the reason why FSU doesn’t have the building or the endowments of other places is because it’s still drawing off a largely female graduate, you know, the people you wrote of in *Femina Perfecta*. Now we have – since now there’s more and more rich, male graduates. So the money that is coming to FSU, the building that is going on, is one of the most remarkable things. I am struck by, again, the sort of professional savvy of it all. T.K. Wetherell, a former legislator who – I like T.K., I think T.K. has done some amazing things for the campus by virtue of his savvy, by virtue of his political connections. And T.K. has also retained a great love and great concern about the history of FSU. I don’t think you can say enough – I feel like the four presidents since I’ve been here, Marshall, Sliger, D’Alemberte, and Wetherell have all advanced this university, each and every one. I don’t think Sandy D’Alemberte gets enough credit for what he did for the look of FSU. He made the buildings and the appearance of FSU paramount and made many changes there. T.K. has punched up the history of the university and gotten the money that it take to do things. Bernie instituted a whole collegial sense of student/professor relationships on the campus; I think you’d be hard pressed to find professors here who didn’t think the administration of Sliger was one of the halcyon times of shared governance. And I think Marshall certainly brought it into the modern era of a real business-type leader. So I think what I’ve seen is the increasing professionalism, and I use that word guardedly because it makes it sound like they were unprofessional before. But the sophistication, back to the sophistication. FSU’s an increasingly sophisticated university. Not all this is good. It’s the same with our changes in security. The world is not necessarily a friendlier place as it gets more sophisticated because we do more —. Bundy comes in ‘78, goes into the sorority house and kills those girls, and we start increasing security then. And now, you know, I don’t know that – you can’t go in FSU building now without a card, right? I mean, the new classroom building was built, you couldn’t just go take a tour of that because you had to have a card. So in the sense that professional brings with it the increasing sophistication of security and lack of rule-bending, I’m sorry about that.

End side A

**Sellers:** The “sophistication” and this “professionalism” that you’re talking about, how has that affected the town and gown relationship?

**Ensley:** Well, I think there’s a whole lot more — it seems to be popular to say that there is not a town and gown relationship. I think, to a large degree, there is in the sense that so many of the university people are sort of integrated into the town to begin with. It used to be, “He’s a professor at the university,” you would say of a neighbor, a sort of separation there. Nowadays, I don’t know that a neighbor really knows he works at the university. I mean, I don’t think there’s such a distinction anymore about people being at the university. Partly because what is it now? We’ve got 40,000 students, it’s 5,000 to 6,000 faculty members. I mean, that’s a big population. I don’t think there’s quite that distinction there.

**Sellers:** I mean as far the university trying to expand. The problems that they’ve had with

there wanting to be a condo on the corner where the university didn't want that traffic and things like that. That seems to me as if its becoming a little more contentious and adversarial when it might not need to be.

**Ensley:** Right. I do think there is the hassle, there is the contentiousness over those sort of things. I guess back when Sandy was president, there was that argument over "What are you charging us for utilities, when we are your biggest customer?" There was the sense by the university that you ought to be welcoming and helpful to our goals, when the city is saying, "Well, we've got to treat you like everyone else." But I think there's a lot of talk. Do things fall through the cracks? Yes. I think, for instance, over on Gaines Street right now, we've got the Master Craftsman program going up. That's being incorporated into the idea of what Gaines Street should be and the makeover as we talk about Gaines Street. The university is moving its intermural fields to the southwest part of town; the city and FSU talked about that. I think it's an automatic inclusion of the university in conversations about itself, but I do think what you have sometimes – again, this is what I was talking about falling through the cracks – the university is a mega-entity right now. It's a 50,000 person, 60,000 person corporation, so it's going to bump heads with the city of Tallahassee which is a 230,000 person corporation. I do think they talk. I think town and gown is sort of an antiquated concept of when these things were isolated, when FSU was at the far western edge of Tallahassee and was an enclave all its own. Back to some of the things written about in your book, about the women who stayed simply on campus and were governed by campus rules and *in loco parentis* and all that, and that was a fiefdom all of its own. So I often think it's just an anachronism to talk about town and gown. What you talk about is this business versus that business, which one are we going to favor, or which one are we going to help. I do believe that if FSU has a concern, the city sits up and listens. Does it agree with everything? Not necessarily.

**Sellers:** I've seen some cases where – for instance, when they built the wrap-around stadium, the areas beyond that ended up in flood zones because of that. It seems to me that there should have been some cooperation —

**Ensley:** I think that's a problem of planning, you're right. There still remains lots of problems with planning. I mean, we see this in the stories we write every day about the county and the city and everything else. I think projects get approved without maybe all the implications being known. Again, I don't think that's a university thing as it is —

**Sellers:** I'm wondering if its an arrogance on the part of the university to feel as though they can go ahead and do it and the city be damned? And if that doesn't cause some friction?

**Ensley:** Right, I think its mostly ignorance, I don't think they — that stadium was driven by some hubris, certainly, and by the desire of the Seminole Boosters to get a better facility, to get one that they could sell better so they could build skyboxes and raise more money and look as good as other things. There's some hubris —. And at that time, T.K. Wetherell was still a legislator, so there's some hubris on his part to make sure that his school got the \$100,000,000 it

took to build that. Did they realize the impact? I think all these as we go along, this is the increasing sophistication of civilization. As we go along, we realize how the rock in the river here affects the shore two miles away. I mean we're only now getting to that; we're getting to that in city government. I mean you've got people complaining about developments on Old Bainbridge because they affect Lake Jackson two and three miles away. I think that's all part of the growing sophistication of environmental planning and of just planning in general. I would bet you that fifty years ago, the planning department of the City of Tallahassee consisted of one person, if that.

**Sellers:** Well, it certainly didn't have anywhere to store records. I can tell you that from research.

**Ensley:** Well, talk about records – that's one of the great — go in a different direction here, that's one of the great problems. As soon as we entered the computer age, everybody quit worrying about their paper records. The city's records are stored in a warehouse down off Oak Ridge Road. There is apparently some sort of system to the storage, but if you want, say, the utility records from 1940 of a single house, well, that's a two or three week hunt, and they're not going to do that. I always quote Pat Hogan, former FSU Vice President, as saying, you know “Why didn't you guys keep track of this, keep track of that?” He says, “We were too busy making history to record history.” That is true of so many things. You want something that happened from '93 on anywhere in America, you can punch it up on the computer. Anything before 1993, well now, who knows. Record keeping — when I was doing my book, this book right here about the 100 years of the *Tallahassee Democrat*, the *Tallahassee Democrat* address changed four times while the building was in the same location. So I said, “Well you know, can you find me – how did that happen?” “That's a good question, that's a good question,” they said. “I'm sure the records are around, but we don't know.”

**Sellers:** Historic preservation records.

**Ensley:** It's the same thing. Our entire historic preservation, which was once a state funded agency, quit being a state funded agency, now a nonprofit whose leader changed three years ago – it's been three or four years – he came from somewhere else. He's got no sense of – I mean, this is no knock on him, but he's got no sense of history. So yeah, historic preservation, it's a coin toss because we haven't made that an official priority. So yeah, your heart breaks; there's a lot of records falling through the cracks. I mean, on the matter of the *Democrat* addresses, I could intuit why it changed, because it changed from a one digit to a two digit to a three digit. You know, somebody must have figured out that that was more efficient, but the records are lost.

**Sellers:** Can you think of anything else you want to add?

**Ensley:** No. I always say that I came to Tallahassee and FSU at the end of the golden era, when the things were still simple and unsophisticated, though I'm sure to those from twenty

years before they are far more sophisticated than when they had known it. But I do feel that I've been in Tallahassee and at FSU through a period of immense change, and mostly for the good.

**Sellers:**        Sounds like a good place to stop.

End