CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: SCOTT KELLY

INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA

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D=JAMES M. DENHAM
K-SCOTT KELLY

Transcribed by: K.C. Jarrett

D: I am here to t D O N W R 0 U 6 F R W W . H O O \ ¶ V K H U H D W K L V U H V L G H historical background, his business, and his political career. One of the things that we are going to talk about is Lawton Chiles. But what I would like to get to first is to talk about his early childhood memories. Mr. Kelly, can you tell us where you were born and what year you were born?

K: I was born September 3, 1927, in Madison, FL. A year later, in 1928, we moved to Gadsden County and that was where I was raised, in Gadsden County.

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K: James and Melissa Hunter Kelly. My daddy was the son of a Baptist preacher, William Scott Kelly where I got my name Scott, so I was named after my granddaddy.

D: And that was back in Madison?

K: Yes.

D: What did your father do for a living?

K: He was a farmer. He grew tobacco.

D: I have some relatives from Gadsden County and Calhoun County so I am very

because they had to move in another superintendent. Then we moved into Quincy and W K Dwere my boyhood from 14 on was in Quincy.

D: Did you have any relatives other than your mother to help you through when that horrible event happened?

K: We were a large family ±I had three sisters and two brothers ±and I was the youngest of the six. All of them were still living when my daddy died. I had one sister and my sister and brother-in-

he may have been in the horse track business. Then the citrus man from Howie in the Hills ±C.B. Griffin

months. And then the next year they selected me Mayor at 27 years old. I was the youngest mayor. .

D: That was in 1953-1954?

K: 1953 was the election, and I took office as mayor pro tem in 1954.

D: So you were mayor when LeRoy Collins was governor or I guess that was when Charley Johns became governor after McCarty died? And that was also the year of the Brown Decision 1954 ±Brown versus the Board of Education ±came down from the Supreme Court. What was the feeling around here when the Brown Decision came along about desegregation of schools?

K: Not then. It was in the 60s when it became an issue.

D: Did you ever have any interaction with Charley Johns when he was governor?

K: Well, I knew him very well. He helped us build a road from Lakeland down to Bartow. It used to be a hell of a way to get there.

D: Before 98 came in, you mean?

K: Yes.

D: Do you remember the election between he and LeRoy Collins?

K: Yeah, Collins beat him badly.

D: Which one of those would you have supported?

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D: How many years were you mayor of Lakeland?

K: Just that one year.

D: Did they rotate it every year?

K: Yes.

D: And who was the Chief of Police?

K: Leo Brooker.

D: And the Sheriff would have been Pat Gordon?

K: Well, Pat Gordon or Hagen Parish. They were in and out of there. They ran in two or three races, and one won one time and one won the next. In fact, Gordon had to go to prison.

D: Did he actually go to prison for corruption?

K: Well really it was for perjury. I set my goal to run for state senator, even when I was P D \ R U V R , Z D V Q ¶ W W D N L Q J V L G H V L Q D Q \ E R G \ ¶ V U D F H V ,

D: What about roads or internal

. , J X H V because all the pulpwood mills in Jacksonville, and up in Port St. Joe, and several in west Florida, the pork choppers ±they fought me like hell. But we finally got it through.

D: What were some of the coalitions you had to put together to get that through?

K: Well, I had all the senators I had been voting with on reapportionment, because they came from urba Q D U H D V D Q G L W Z D V Q ¶ W K X U W L Q J W K H P $ Q G , M D Q G W K H U H W K D W G L G Q ¶ W K D Y H S X O S P L O O V L Q W K H L U D U H others until it got through.

D: So would you say that was the first air pollution law passed in the state of Florida?

K: Yes.

' 7 R P H W K D W ¶ V D V W R Q L V K L Q J W K D W W K H U H Z D V R Q H W K D V election 1959, 1963, In 1959, another surprise election occurred in this county. Somebody unseated the incumbent Surles. Lawton Chiles. Can you talk a little bit about Surles, what kind of man was he and about that campaign?

K: Roy Surles had been there, maybe as long as King, a long time. And he was brilliant, he really was. But he was hard to get along with people. By all rights he should K D Y H E H H Q H O H F W H G V S H D N H U R I W K H K R X V H D Q G K H P D G H get it off the ground because you had to work hard to be his friend.

D: He probably thought you were a young whippersnapper.

. + H G L G Q ¶ W S D W W R P H Q \ H D U W K D W W R J H W K H U on some things. We got the district Court of Appeals here in Lakeland. We flat did that. We whipped all around in Tampa and that District Court of Appeals. That was the first major coup I pulled. And Bill Shands showed me how to do it. I got in my car and went to every senator in the state. I had me a bill made out that they designate that the Second District would be in Lakeland, Florida. And the day I put it in the hopper when the Senate opened, I did it like very s W H D O W K L O \ , G L G Q ¶ W O H W L W R X W Q R Q H R I W K H S D None of my dear friends knew I was working on it. When the Senate opened we had 38 senators and I had 31 on my bill. I mean it stunned them, especially there in Orlando.

D: So Orlando was contending for it too?

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K: Yes, citrus and all, we worked together on that. And higher education matters. Carlton and Price and all - our counties were alike. Bradenton was about the size of Lakeland. They had the same concerns, citrus and cattle and general farming. 3K R V S K D W H Z D V Q ¶W L Q 0 D Q D W H H & R X Q W \ W K H Q

D: One of the things that everybody says is that Rhea was involved in his campaign. Do you remember her being involved, campaigning with him and going around with him?

K: Yessir.

D: What about his family?

K: Well, they were too young. As soon as they were able to, when they were old enough they did. Rhea had a big thing the other night for Senator Graham at her house, June the 24th.

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Can you walk me through your decision-making process in that regard, why you decided to do that?

K: In 1959 I was chairman of the Senate Roads Committee. And I got a bill passed creating an investigating committee with subpoena powers because there were a lot of shenanigans going on that Collins had. He was a good man himself but he had some bad eggs out there somewhere. And his road contractors were running rampant. But I got the bill through but it was tough sliding. It was the last day of the legislature but Collins finally agreed he would sign it. The bill he wanted passed created a six-man road board. ....

D: You were talking about how your investigators were tipped off.

K: My chief investigator Elmer Rounds was tipped off that there were some shenanigans going on at Cone Brothers in Tampa. This tipster had worked there one summer and had seen what they were doing. They were regularly paying off on Friday some of our state engineers putting cash money in envelopes and mailing it to them. Well, Elmer ± L W Q H Y H U F D P H R X W E H F D X V H ± but We Gonna Come H Y H Q J H
Brothers and applied for a job, and where he was sitting he could see them stuffing those envelopes because his tipster had told him right where to go. And he was able to come out of there and sign an affidavit what he had seen. When he got through with the mail thing, they put it all in a mailbag and took it out back to put it in the truck to carry to the post office. When they got out back, the postal authorities as well as the authorities in Hillsborough County, deputies, and the states attorneys, they followed them to the post office. When they got there, there were other postal authorities who dumped the bags and picked out those letters and then the next day those letters were mailed out ± some here in Polk County, some in Pasco and around. There was a Deputy Sheriff V W D Q G L Q J U L J K W W K H U H D Q G V D L G 3 / H W ¶ V J R ´ D Q G W K H \ E
cash money.

D: Were they paying them off to make certain reports?

K: Come to find out, Paul Johnson the states attorney in Tampa, he set out to indict