

Interview with Cecil Alexander, FAIA



Interviewed by:

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Transcription provided by Theodore Pound

[Interview begins as Cecil Alexander describes design of the Dinkler Plaza Hotel and Playboy Club in Downtown Atlanta. Interview begins at the Alexander Pound Residence, moving to Goldberg's Deli on Pharr Road in Buckhead]

CA: The old man objected to that. He said, we've got people bringing

girlfriends in here. And their wives will spot them going in here. And I said, well, Mr. Dinkler, you can just hang curtains in there, which he did.

TL: I see them.

CA: That was the first major building we did. Boy, it's hot.

TL: It is. It's awful out here. I thought we might walk around the house a little bit and chat. And then we will sit somewhere where it's air-conditioned.

CA: Okay. We could just sit in the car.

JB: Hello, Mr. Alexander.

CA: Hi.

JB: Jon Buono. Good to see you.

CA: Good to see you again. The best thing we have is over in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, strangely enough.

JB: This is where I got your --

CA: There's only two of us left out of the five. Rachaf and I. That's Finch. And Barnes, he died not long after we merged. He was in bad health. This is the youngest guy, Paschal.

TL: It's funny. Sometimes these books show up on the internet every once in a while. I found another one --

CA: I can tell you where I found one time was in that old New York bookstore. Is that -- that's gone, though.

TL: That's gone now.

CA: That was Thad Conroy's hangout.

TL: Well, before everyone breaks out into a sweat, you want to keep moving around here.

JB: Mosquitoes.

TL: Well, it's just hot.

JP: Hot and mosquitoes.

TL: It's just hot and mosquitoes. Actually, I hadn't noticed any mosquitoes this morning.

CA: Yeah. Those look familiar.

JP: I'm a mosquito man.

TL: Cecil, I'm going to put this back in your car.

CA: Okay. Thank you. Anybody want to buy a car? It's not comfortable.

TL: This is an interview with Cecil Alexander on the 20th of August 2005, 10:00, at his house at 2 Mt. Paran Road. Jon Buono, Tom Little, Jack Pyburn and Ted Pound and the owner of this is here as well. This is a tour of the house.

JB: Have you been in the house before?

TP: It's a wonderful place.

CA: What's coming off the roof?

TP: Looks like some wires from somewhere.

JB: Are there gutters back there?

CA: No, there are no gutters. Unless there has been some added that I don't know about.

JB: Cables?

TP: Are these going to be cables?

CA: Yeah. That's to hold angles in there. The engineer -- I need to sit down. The engineer I was working with -- I got something. He figured what the cable should be to hold

that in there. I said, well, I wanted twice the diameter and two of them. But there is a -- I don't know whether -- did any of you see the write up in Progressive Architecture?

JB: We did.

CA: Well, there are details of that roof in there. And they're -- it's a metal fastener at the bottom of each one of those that's anchored into the roof. So the cables may be overkill. They may not have been needed.

TL: Cecil, who was the structural engineer?

CA: His name was Jim Polychrome. And he went down to the University of Auburn to take over their architectural. And he had a hard time because he wasn't an architect. But he was a very creative designer.

CA: He got into a difficulty. He did something I -- I knew him from having been in the Marines you never do. You don't go in and upset everything the minute you hit. Well, he did. He fired two guys. And three more quit. So he didn't have a faculty.

TP: Tell him about the occasion when you-all were going to --

CA: About what?

TP: About the occasion when you were going to take the struts out, the supports after the ceiling fell.

CA: Oh, yeah. There were framing holding the roof up. And I called Jim, and I said, look, come on out

there. Let's be bold. Let's show them how good we are. Let's stand under that thing. He says, no way. I did. I trusted him more than he trusted himself. But I never used him again after that.

TL: Because he would stand under it?

CA: Yeah. Because he didn't have that much confidence in his own design. I decided I would try somebody else. I had a problem. I was on an accreditation panel just after he went to Auburn. And he went into a school. It wasn't in very good shape. But he had all these plans. And the administration said they were going to back him and make money available. So we gave him a pass. And it was maybe a week after he left that he fired these guys. I never got asked to be on an accreditation panel again, which suited me fine. I enjoy it.

TL: Cecil, how were you introduced to Bench Hill Structures? [Unclear, possibly "tensile"]

CA: How was I --

TL: How were you introduced to Bench Hill [Unclear, possibly "tensile"] Structures?

CA: I'm not quite sure. I went to a -- this isn't really a -- that's really not - - that's not concrete. I did design the thing in concrete first. But the contractors, they were all home contractors. And they were scared of it and the price. So I redesigned it in wood and steel. But there was a conference at MIT, I guess about the time I was doing this, on thin shells. You know, they had the -- incidentally, the thing was

suspended on three -- three points. And they had a rather embarrassing thing happen. One of the points settled and the thing was cracked. And that happened just before they had this conference in which they were going to tell everybody how great they were, you know. But I don't know the timing of them.

JB: Can you talk a little bit about how the design evolved?

CA: Well, it went through a good many stages. I had a -- I had a drawing. I don't know. Is that around that shows --

TP: It is. And I had shown it to -- I've shown one of them to Tom. But you've got all of those in that briefcase. Maybe you ought to look at them.

TL: We will look at them in a little while.

CA: They kept getting more and more compact. And I don't know why or when I came up with it. The most compact thing I can do is a circle. And my wife suffered through all this stuff. I would bring home a drawing. Let's build it. No, I've got some other ideas. And she suffered through that. One story I told her, it's pretty funny. These poles. My wife and I -- this is my first wife.

TP: Uh-huh.

CA: Got to where we couldn't make a decision. We were at each other's throats. We brought in an interior designer named Florence May. And she was damn good. And Hermie and I decided, okay, if she agrees with me, we'll go my way. If she agrees with you, we will go with

you. She took up a third position on everything. And I was talking to about enclosing these columns. And, oh, no, no. They should stay just the way they are. And if you look at them closely, you can see Bethlehem, which has nothing to do with Israel. It's Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. But I can't find it. I will look for it.

JB: I want this picture. I want this picture.

CA: Of Hartsfield? Yeah. I'm still looking. The mayor came out here to Hartsfield. And he climbed up under these poles. I have a picture of him somewhere hanging on up there. One of the things I labored and labored over was how to trim out this circle here. And finally came up with, more or less, thin planks. When the Hulls bought the house, they -- they were very reluctant to show me what they had done in the bedroom of putting a skylight in. And I said, you don't need to worry about my feelings about that because I had it on the drawings and we decided that it would be difficult to control the light. And so we didn't do it. But I think it's great that you've got it there.

TP: This is the mother of all skylights, too. This think is six-and-a-half feet across. It's a big issue to my wife.

CA: The other thing that I had that you liked was a penthouse, I guess you would call it. One part of the roof, you went upstairs, and there was -- that's where my drafting board was and so on.

TP: I saw the drawing.

CA: They got cut out because of cost. You were saying -- did you show the tree?

TP: I showed him the picture. I showed Tom the picture of the tree coming out of the design. But you need to tell them that story. That's fabulous to me.

CA: Well, originally, there was a huge tree right in the middle there. And it was -- this was the only site I really liked on the site. And I wanted to preserve that tree because it was open here in the middle. It would have been planted. And around where the columns are was glass. Well, one night my wife and I came up here. While we were just looking at the site. And it was a full moon. And the place was just bathed in moonlight. And I couldn't figure it out. Lightning had hit this huge and exploded it at the bottom. So I decided that President Bush Number One wanted me to have a roof over it. You know what I'm quoting, don't you?

TP: No, I don't.

CA: Well, he was asked if he had gotten any advice from his father about going into Iraq. And he said, not from that father, from that Father. I don't think that Father was listening. What a mess. Anyway, the brick was a matter of some discussion with my wife. She wanted to use used brick. And I didn't like it because you can't really control what you are going to get. This is St. Joe brick, which I like very much. One thing that's kind of funny. We had had on the -- as you came in the entrance on the

left side was a fence about six feet high, maybe, sitting on top of that low brick wall. And it curved around. And I put it there for two reasons. One was to show the -- give the entrance sort of a, you know, welcoming look. The other was to keep headlights out of the guest room. Well, Gary Hull took it down. And I asked him why he did that. He said, well, I want people to see this house as round. He brought an architect out here with him after he bought the place. He had been in it a while and took over things. And the architect, the first thing he said was, you know you need a fence here. Gary had the humility to tell me that. The other thing with him, there were two other things. One was a real estate agent said, you know, people see these columns and they think it looks like a basement. And you ought to enclose them. So I made a drawing, had it all ready to go, when Gary showed up. And he walked in, he says, oh, boy, there are those columns. I love those columns. So the other thing, we had a hanging refrigerator in the kitchen. And the people had stopped making it. And it wasn't working very well. And the agent said, you ought to take that down and just put a cloth board up there and put some copper fishes and that sort of thing on it. He walked in there and his face fell. He said, what happened to that refrigerator? He couldn't get a replacement either. He bought three small commercial refrigerators and hung them up there. But it made a good setup. In the middle of that kitchen was an island with a prep sink in it. My wife used to work there all the time. And she could almost reach this, the range, and

almost reach the refrigerator. There was a large refrigerator, you know, regular one further in. But, at one point, she was complaining at one end of this thing was a triangular space, maybe where the cabinets were. I guess it might have been four inches wide, the widest, then it narrowed down to nothing. And she says, you didn't put a door on that. I said, you couldn't use the space anyway. Well, I counted up the number of doors and the cabinets and so on. And there were 90 of them. When I told her that, that was the end of we need that.

TL: We talked to Ed Daugherty a couple of weeks ago about -- a little bit about the house.

CA: What's that?

TL: We talked to Ed Daugherty about the house, landscape architect.

CA: Yeah.

TL: When did you start working with him to lay out the site?

CA: You talking about Daugherty?

TL: Daugherty, yes.

CA: I can't remember. We were at Harvard at the same time. But I can't -- I think I brought him in very early. He and I, we've known each other a very long time. The one thing he does that I have problems with, he doesn't want people walking across the corner. He puts you up there. How to get impaled. Here's my wife. I lost my first wife in an auto wreck in '83. Hit by -- right in front of the house. Hit by a

drunk kid. We had been married years.

JB: Good morning. [Helen Alexander arrives]

CA: One thing that we looked into was whether to get twin panes, you know. But I found out over many years that Atlanta doesn't -- maybe what's going on now, I changed my mind. But Atlanta really doesn't -

HA: Thank you so much.

CA: -- need residential, doesn't need the twin. These, actually there's a lot of glass in this house. But because it is a circle, it's a minimum amount of external wall space. And the heating and air conditioning costs have been very low on the thing.

TP: The previous owners, the Hulls, told us at the closing that this was the most efficient house they had ever lived in, in terms of the heating and cooling expense. I will tell you another story about these windows, Cecil. They're quarter-inch glass.

CA: Yeah.

TP: Very difficult to locate in these dimensions today. Obviously, it no longer meets code by the fact that it's non-tempered glass.

CA: Oh, yeah.

TP: And I think you've met my two-year-old son. We are sure he is going to drive a tricycle right through one of your windows here. So we have been looking around to find tempered glass in this dimension. We have found one place in the United States that will

provide us with one-quarter tempered glass in these dimensions. They are going to ship it from a mill in Miami.

CA: It's going to cost you an arm and a leg.

TP: Well --

CA: One thought I had, and this just came to me, and I don't think it's -- I wouldn't recommend it until somebody else. But whether putting a plastic film, a plastic film would comply with the shatter proof.

TP: We looked into that. And I don't think that it does. I don't think that it does. We had talked about it, at least.

CA: One thing I don't like, over time it gets yellow.

TP: Right. Well, we have found -- we have found tempered glass.

CA: That's great. That's great.

TP: It's \$1300. Maybe not as bad as you might have expected.

CA: That's more than my first brand new 1940 Buick. This business about the tricycles, I was telling you about the -- my son, when we built this house, didn't have a son. And I really didn't plan to have one. He came years after his younger sister. There was a book came out about then called **My Brother Was An Only Child**. And I figured it out. Once he showed up, he was an only child with three mothers, his two sisters and his mother. But he got -- he would get on a tricycle and come around through the kitchen, through

the court, and head right for this glass and then do this, just before he got to the glass to go back into the kitchen. And we were concerned. Talking about a barrier of some kind. And then I had a stroke of genius. I said, Doug, you know, when pilots are circling to land on the field, they always go counter -- go clockwise. And why don't you, I mean, counterclockwise. Why don't you try that with your tricycle. So, okay. So he started doing it this way and he was no longer headed at the glass when he came out of the kitchen. So I feel that was my supreme moment in parenthood when I convinced him to reverse himself.

JB: Speaking of pilots, you use to be a member of the Atlanta Soaring Club?

CA: Of the what?

JB: The Soaring Club?

CA: Oh, yeah, a long time ago.

JB: How did you get into that?

CA: I was a Marine pilot in World War II. And I just -- the idea of sail planes. I just liked the idea. I went up the Elmira, where they have --

JB: In New York, yeah.

CA: And got checked out up there. We call that thing NOGAS, North Georgia Soaring Society. Why, have you done some of it?

JB: My father was a pilot. But when I was doing some of the research on you before last year, in October, I came across it. So I saw that.

CA: Was he in the Air Force?

JB: He was in the Air Force.

CA: I've heard of it.

JB: He was a flight doctor.

CA: They were very important.

JB: But did you ever make that connection between -- between aircrafts and design and architecture? Did that -- did the two ever kind of combine?

CA: Well, for my thesis at Harvard, I did an aircraft laboratory. I did that for two reasons. One, it was something I was very interested in and knew something about. But the real reason was, I figured none of the faculty would know what I was talking about.

TP: Well, this house has been compared to a spaceship in design, if that's what you are referring to.

CA: Well, I think I told you we used to put a sleeping bag on the floor there at night and lie down and look up. And it felt like a spaceship. One of the weirdest experiences, when the Federal troops came across the river, they had camped on this site. Have I told you that?

TP: No.

CA: Every now and then, I would see a guy out in the back with a metal detector. And I'd say, okay, I get half. But I don't know that he ever found anything. But one night, it was full moon night, and it was the anniversary of something to do with

the Civil War. I forgot. And we were playing Civil War songs here. And, boy, it made your hair stand up, thinking that this here was an encampment and so on.

TP: It would have been a good spot.

CA: What?

TP: It would have been a good spot. I mean, it's --

CA: Oh, yeah.

TP: It's high.

CA: When I was a kid, and that's been a while, there were actually remains of a pontoon bridge that Sherman's people put across the river. Just some canvas and poles and so forth. I have another interest in the bridge there, the old steel bridge. It's named for my first wife. She had been the first female jury commissioner in Fulton County. And when we were in the wreck, and I was still in the hospital, Michael Lomax, who was then chairman of the county commission, came to the hospital and says is there anything the county can do or I can do? I said, yeah, we saved that bridge. They were going to tear it down. And Milton Farris, Senior, I got to him, I convinced him it was cheaper to leave it up than it was to tear it down. I don't think he was motivated by history. And I said, you can name that bridge for her. There are wood plaques on either bridge that say Hermie's bridge on there. And those were carved by Sam Williams, who is the president of Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, just as a friend, carved those things. It's now being,

supposedly being checked out to see if it's safe. The county, Fulton County, has a got a grant of \$320,000 from the feds to work on it. But it has to be matched with 80,000 from some other source. And I'm -- we've been warned by -- I don't know if any of you know her -- Alicia Philips, she's the director, what is it, Metropolitan Foundation that was really works in City projects. And she warned the two of us not to go after money until we knew how much the thing was going to cost. The worst thing to do was to go back to somebody that had already given you some. It's been months. I can't get the -- there's a guy named Ron Morris, an engineer. Anybody ever -- he's with -- I can't think of the name of the engineering firm. It uses initials. Thank you. How did you know?

TL: Anybody else?

CA: The -- one story about the railing. It's all covered up with a beautiful laminated wood rail. And not long after we moved in here, Mr. Randall came in, Randall Brothers. He rang the doorbell one Sunday afternoon. And he and his wife were there. And he said, Cecil, do you mind if we come in, I want to show my wife where our vacation went. He pointed to that. They had taken it off as having just a simple curve. And, of course, it curves this way. But it also curves that way. And he built a jig for it just as a simple curve. So he had to go back and do a much more complicated jig. And that's where his vacation went. I didn't worry about him too much, though. The -- that rod iron railing was put in when our son showed up. It had been open. One night --

one night we had a full house. Fine place for entertaining. One of the guys had had a drink, at least a drink. And he stumbled backwards into the garden there and fell. And I had this Molcajete, they called it. And it came from Yucatan. It's a ceremonial one. But they use it. It's a curved stone to roll out flour. I don't know what they did with it exactly. But he broke the thing. And I don't know whether he didn't realize he had broken it or not. But I never invited him back. Got some questions? I've been rambling on here.

TL: Ted mentioned that you had quite a mechanical system for the house.

CA: I'm sorry. What?

TL: The air conditioning, you had a quite a system for the house.

CA: Let me put my hearing aid in, non aid.

TL: Let me talk a little bit louder.

CA: I have to use it to stay married. Okay. Try again.

TL: Ted said you had quite an air conditioning and heating system for the house when you built it.

TP: In fact, the house had quite an electrical system, quite a plumbing layout, quite a framing system, as well since the plaster has come off in the renovation. It is all, as my contractor tells me, it's all dreadfully over built.

CA: I tell you what happened there. I have forgotten how we got a hold of them. But there was two then

young contractors. The firm was Adams & Willis. Adams first name was Boyant [confirm name], as in Boynights [confirm name], I guess. And it was his job. He came out here and discovered that the man he had on the job didn't know how to measure angles. And he said one thing a contractor would need in laying out this house was measuring angles. So Boyant took him off this job and put him on a rectangular one, I guess, and took it over himself. So if it is over built, I guess I take some of the blame. But, also, Boyant made it his life ambition to do a perfect job. I think he did do a fine job. The floor under here is hardwood. And the word got around to the guys putting it in that we were going to cover it wall to wall with a carpet. So a delegation came to my wife and said, we have truly put out heart and soul into the floor. It would really break us up if you covered it with a carpet. And she said, I have no idea of doing that. But I've said that in all of my time as an architect, that's the one time I ever had a workman ever object to having his work covered over. They all want to have it covered.

TP: The comment about it being over built was not critical. Everybody that has been working on it so far has admired the sturdy construction, if you will. It's also been pointed out that it was very well built according to your original drawing. I think I told you that our architect on the renovation had 30 [?] to lay a house out on his CAD system --

CA: Yeah.

TP: -- to get started. And they spent three or four days, including the young fellow that worked in you-all's office, or used to, Mr. Drone, was over here. At any rate, they used the center point that you had left --

CA: Oh, yeah.

TP: -- in the middle of the court here, the atrium. They used that to measure all of the walls and checking it against your as built plans.

CA: Right.

TP: And I was told that the tolerance was amazing.

CA: That's Adam's boy. He just -- he would check and recheck. He wasn't taking anything on hearsay.

TP: And the only thing that suffered in 50 years, to my knowledge, is this one little corner of brickwork.

CA: Yeah. Yeah.

TP: It settled a little bit. Otherwise, the place has held up remarkably.

CA: Yeah. I don't know why that settled there. Has the contractor dug in there to find out?

TP: Not yet. But it's an easy thing to repair. It's a small -- a small item.

CA: I didn't realize it was as bad as it is until it was covered with plants. But the -- I left a pipe in the middle. That's where the contractor set up his changer (inaudible.)

TL: It's still here.

CA: And my idea was, I was going to put a time capsule in there, but I never got around to it. I did have a plaque made that the Hulls put up that said who lived here and who the architect was. I had -- I don't want to shake you up. I told you what this thing cost when I built it.

TP: Yes, you have. And you shook me up.

CA: Well, that was 1957. That's almost 50 years ago.

TP: Pretty good investment. Pretty good investment.

CA: Oh, yeah. I almost didn't build it because it was so expensive. \$94,000 is what it cost.

TP: Does that include the \$10,000 that the lot cost?

CA: No. So it was over 100,000. Make you feel a little bit better?

TP: No, not yet. Not yet.

CA: Well, the -- no. Houses were running around 50 or 60. This one, because it was round, is what ran the price up. It's about 5,000 square feet, what they call round feet.

TP: Well, you have to know the formula for the area of a circle to be able to make that calculation.

CA: Oh, yes.

TP: I've been given estimates that range from 4,000 to 6,000 square feet. I think it's closer to 6,000.

CA: Incidentally, I was reading in the New York Times that Google is going to sell -- what is it, billion in stock? And they use point pi. They're crazy like foxes. Anyway, this plaque was just knocking around and they put it up. They moved from this house to a Neal Reid house. The drive is off of Vernon Road and off Habersham. It's really a beautiful layout. That's what we did when we got married. We decided we needed to start over in our own nest. And we bought a Neal Reid house on Oakdale. Beautiful house. But something went wrong in the roof. It was almost as old as I am, so there's reason for it to go wrong.

TP: In 50 years, they will be complaining about this house.

CA: What's that?

TP: In 50 years, they will be complaining about this house.

CA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, when you get through with it, it may be 100 years before they complain. TP: Did you ever work with Adams again as a builder?

CA: No, never have. Maybe he did another house for us. I can't remember. I got a shock. We were doing some repairs on the house. And I think Boyant [name not confirmed] had died. I'm not sure. And I walked out of the bedroom one morning, and here was a guy looked like Boyant standing in the court. And I was so shocked. That was before cloning, too. It was his son. Did you ever --

TL: No, I never met him.

CA: But they really -- they were fine. I'm trying to think of the Spanish structural engineer. He did a roof over a grandstand. He did thin plate, so on and so forth. He was here in Atlanta and somebody told him he should come out and see this house. And was not impressed at all because it wasn't in concrete. I showed him the drawings that I had in concrete, but that didn't satisfy him.

TP: Our architect on the renovation, David Fowler, the first time he walked in here, he thought this was poured, the folded ceiling was poured. And we have since talked about what to do in there, whether to paint it or not. And he is very much opposed to anything that will disguise the fact that it is plywood. He thinks it's a really great thing.

CA: I like it.

TP: And we're working on that, how to freshen it up without concealing the fact that it is what it is.

CA: Good. That dome was special. And it came quickly. I had some other skylights around. And I finally had to call up the CEO of the company to get them and they were in stock. That one came first. The fireplace here, it was my design. I don't that it was original or not. There was a guy named Tom Leher who was a Harvard math professor, and he wrote satirical songs. And one of them was Plagiarize, Plagiarize, Let Nothing Escape Your Eyes but call it Research. This may have been Research. I don't remember. But it had a bowl for the fire is the end of a steel boiler. And it's on a piano

stool screw so it could be raised or lowered if I didn't guess right. But the draft in here is terrific and it doesn't matter what height it is. I can't take a lot of credit for it. Another good story about this place is the acoustics, which were accidental. The -- I got two stories about that. It was after a University of Alabama-Tech game. My brother-in-law lived in Montgomery. He was here. And there was an evangelical singer. I don't know what you call them. Anyway, he came in here. Great big laboring guy. And I saw him looking around. The place was full. He got up on this raised porch in here. And all of a sudden in this tremendous voice, he started singing Without a Song, is what he sang. It stopped everything. And he said, I just had to sing in here. This place has wonderful acoustics. The other was, there was a friend of mine named Dan Hodson, who -- any of you heard of the Whiffinpoofs? You have, I'm sure. I was wearing my Pierson tie last night.

JB: Were you?

CA: Yeah. He started a group he called the Huff 'n Puffs. And his wife had a concert quality voice. And for one of our anniversaries, he had the Huff 'n Puffs and his wife up there singing. And it sounded just --

TP: Well, we had confirmation of that Thursday, when Tom and I were at this class at Emory, talking about [inaudible] in the house. A fellow in the audience in his 70s named Yeo, Mr. Yeo [Confirm name].

CA: Yeah. He was a Huff 'n Puff.

TP: He approached me to tell me that he had sung in your house before.

CA: Yeah. Well, that's....

TP: And he verified that the acoustics were excellent.

CA: Yeah. He was one of the group. Dan's story was they were short on tenors, so they opened it up to Princeton people.

TP: Brutal. I'm interested in your -- [Tape 1, Side ends.]

CA: Because I was going to flunk chemistry anyway. I had a year there at Tech. And that was in the [inaudible] position. And then I transferred to Yale. And I majored in architecture there. And then I wanted to be an industrial designer as an architect. And they had a course at MIT. So I went to MIT. That was the year '40, '41 And it was a terrible course. The guy came in the first day, said I want each of you to pick out a project. My office is in New York, but I will be back. He came back the last day of the semester. And I was learning to fly at that time under what they call the civilian pilot training which Roosevelt had set up to get a backlog of pilot for the war he thought was coming. And I -- I went down. Somebody invited me down to New York for dinner. And there was a Jewish couple -- we are Jewish -- who had escaped from Germany. And they were telling it like it was. And from that moment, on I lost all interest in architecture and interior design. I wanted to go to war. It seems strange now. But, anyway, on the way home from MIT, I stopped by the recruiting,

Royal Air Force recruiting office, which was at LaGuardia. And when they found out I was a Yale graduate and one year at MIT and had a commercial pilot's license, they said, you're not leaving here until you sign up. And one guy actually got in front of the door. Oh, yeah, I am. I'm going back to Atlanta and see whether I want to go in the U. S. Air Force or the Navy. So I went in the Navy and had volunteered to go in the Marines, naval aviator. I'm a retired Lieutenant Colonel. My next door neighbor insists on calling me Colonel. I can't -- can't get him to quit. But I think anybody in the South, if they are old enough, are just called Colonel anyway.

TL: Well, we're kind of about Harvard.

CA: Oh, yeah. That was the question, wasn't it? I'm sorry. I'm not a lawyer. After the war, we went to Cambridge. And I didn't like what had happened at MIT. I didn't like it much anyway, to begin with. So I said to Hermie, you know, there's another institution down the river I've heard of called Harvard. So I went down there. And I was interviewed by Marcel Breuer, who was the finest critic I ever had. He -- he would work with what you were trying to do and try to get the best out of it with you. Hugh Stubbins was on the faculty. He wasn't a Bauhauser. But if you didn't do it the way he wanted it. So I liked Stubbins, and I got him on the development board at Georgia Tech. So we are still friends, even so I didn't think he was the right guy to be critic. Anyway, we were all inducted into the Bauhaus. Of course, form follows function. And

that you should use manufactured materials and that decoration was out. And there was one guy in the house that did all of his design, Frank Lloyd Wright. Incidentally, I had a meeting with Wright. He was speaking at Tech. And when he heard my name, Alexander, he says, Alexander, that's a difficult name to live up to, see that you do. And he turned and he walked off. But we all came out of there, thinking that because we had, you know, been under the influence of the form-giving geniuses, that we were form-giving geniuses. And I started teaching at Tech when I got back at design. And, I guess it was 1953, I went to Europe. And I saw the great cathedrals, and it suddenly occurred to me, you know, maybe those guys had something. And I still think they are a supreme example of architecture, the great cathedrals. Because they combine structure, sculpture, glass and all in such a wonderfully integrated structure when you get through with it. Anyway, I came back and eased off of my feeling that I was genius. After a while, I quit. I was working in the office of Henry Toombs. And there were night classes at Tech. They were not night school. There were so many students that they had to have night schools. And I was teaching one of those. My partner, Bill Finch, had been there. And to show what salaries were like when we started out, I guess it was in '58, Bill almost quit because he could make more -- more assured anyway, salary at Tech than he could at the office. It was \$16,000, is what it was. So things have changed. We did a number of houses. But we would go through this with everybody, that you set up

a program, and they want six bathrooms and eight bedrooms -- I'm exaggerating a little bit. And you keep saying, well, look, this is going over your budget. Well, this is our one big investment, so we want it that way. So we would do that plans and the bids would come in and they would start screaming they had to cut it. And they cut out all the good things. And then as the building got built, they would put them back. And, of course, the contractor doubled his price as each thing went back in, you know. When I decided that we should stop doing houses, is when I went through the same process myself. So --

TP: How many houses did you do, Cecil?

CA: I don't know. Maybe four or five. There's one of them that's over on...

TL: Ridgewood.

CA: What?

TL: Ridgewood?

CA: Ridgewood out at the -- I did it for Bud Weiss, who was CEO of Montag's at the time. And we ran into a woman the other night at, was it Chops?

HA: Chopsticks.

CA: Chopsticks. Who had been living it in for some years. She likes it. Very difficult site.

HA: That's not on Ridgewood.

CA: What?

HA: I don't know the name of the street. But that house is not on Ridgewood. It's another one you did.

TL: Where is Lucinda Bannen?

HA: Randall Mill.

TL: On Randall Mill?

JB: Which was the originally Phillip Hammer?

HA: Yeah, that's on Ridgewood.

TL: That's on Ridgewood. Where is Lucinda Bannen?

HA: Randall Mill.

CA: Do you know where the creek -- Randall Mill Creek goes under -- under the Randall Mill? It's just beyond that, up on the hill. That house was a compromise. Of course, every house is, every building is. But that one particularly. I had a plan I liked very much, which she said she wanted the house centered around the living -- living and kitchen. Well, mother got involved. And since she was paying for most of it, she got to listen to her. I think it's a nice house. But there's nothing unusual house.

TP: I've been told it's interesting, but I have not seen it. I'm trying to place where it is. But I will find it.

CA: If you're coming off of West Paces Ferry, it's probably a couple of miles. And you go down a hill, curving around. But the creek, Randall Mill Creek runs under there. That has an interesting history.

Randall, back, I don't know when, discovered there was gold in that creek. And he started panning it. So I don't know. It's nothing like there was up at Dahlongega.

TL: Should we move to a cooler location?

CA: I'm comfortable. But you guys are standing. Sure. Why not. What time is it, by the way?

TL: Right at 11:00.

CA: Oh, we've got the time. Where shall we go? Do you want to go to the deli down here?

TL: That's a grand spot. The little deli at my apartments. You are talking about Goldberg's?

CA: Yeah.

TL: Goldberg's is great. It's probably not too crowded right now.

CA: It shouldn't be at 11:00. (Break.)

CA: It was on Broadway in a play. Julia.

HA: William.

CA: Anyway, I got out at the Arthur House and took one look and said, I'm going to marry you now. She and I have different versions. Hers must be accurate because she was there. But said, I'm going to marry you know. She said, I've got to go back to New York. No, you do that, you are going to find out things about me I don't want you to know. That should have been a red flag, baby.

HA: That's right.

CA: But two-and-a-half weeks later, they were married. But she's still acting. And a couple of years ago, she did a commercial that got a lot of notoriety. It's for the Georgia Lottery. She's a teller in the bank, very friendly, proper high neck, hair pulled back. And this attractive young guy comes in with a \$ million check. He's won the lottery. And she sort of goes back, just a minute, please. She goes out. You saw it? Comes back in, hair's down, low-cut dress. She says my name is Edna, but my friends call me Sparkles. And then she says, I have a hot tub. And so many people still remember that thing.

HA: That's been two years.

CA: But she's also an entrepreneur. I'll break this up. When she's 18, her father told her she needed to take a backup something skills if she was going to be an actress. So she took typing and shorthand. And shorthand bored her and all the squiggles, she turned those into little water color critters. And I saw them, and I said, we ought to have those made into stuff. And she calls them squiggles. We've got a garage full of squiggles. We had them made. We are still marketing. [Break.]

CA: And I got a call one day. Said this is Red [Paul] Rudolph calling. He's coming to Atlanta.

TL: His mother was calling you to find out what her son was doing now?

CA: Yeah.

TL: Was that even during Auburn that he had kind of broken off with his parents?

CA: This was long after. He had done the Chapel out at Emory and was coming down. The meeting with Prince Charles, he came over here before he became notorious. He had just gotten his Royal Air Force Wings. And there was a reception for him at the Governor's Mansion. And my wife and I somehow had gotten to be friends with the Consulate General. And he invited us to come. And I was standing there in the middle of the room, you know, just standing around. And the Consulate asked me, I came over, and he said, see that guy that's got the Prince cornered there? Literally, he had him cornered. I need you to break that up. So we went over there. The Consulate introduced me, not by name, he said, Your Majesty, I would like you to meet a prominent Atlanta architect. And the Prince looks at me and says, oh, yes, Mr. Portman, I've read a great deal about you. That's in my book. And I was being called on every now and then to introduce John. And I would always start with this story. And I always get a big laugh. Well, the last time John said [inaudible.] I said, well, I'm the goat man. It makes you look good. I'm going to keep telling it because I get a laugh. If you don't want to you tell me, no, you don't want me to introduce you. I've never been asked since. The other thing I told a friend, you know the South and Great Britain have something very much in common. What's that? We both lost a war to the United States of America. He laughed. He spoke in Charleston the next day, and he

used that. Didn't give me credit.
[Inaudible.]

TL: Well, I have to ask. Talking about famous people interviewed. You talked about working with Boyant. Was Walter [inaudible, Gropius?] a real figure in the program [inaudible]?

CA: No, he was more than a figurehead. He gave lectures. And he was a tremendous influence. You felt his presence. He didn't go around critiquing drawings. I can't remember whether he was on my jury on my thesis or not. And I told you I selected what I did. Oh, I know one thing he said to me. I think we should have -- we should have an aeronautical engineer on the jury. And I said, Dr. Roper [inaudible], I don't think that would be a good idea because you will be approaching it strictly from an engineering viewpoint. And while I've done a lot of research on this thing, I'm certainly not an aeronautical engineer. And I feel it should be judged architecturally. He bought that. It was about to kill my [inaudible]. When our first daughter was born, while I was at Harvard, and I went to him and asked for an extension on a project I was working on. He said, you're having a baby? Now, already I've heard everything. Everything I have heard. You know, Mark Twain said a gentleman dives into a sentence, he don't see anything until he comes up [inaudible].

JB: In your thesis, in your project, were you aware of Nervi's work on early airport buildings, was that something you were aware of? You know Nervi?

CA: Yeah.

JB: He did a hangar, an early concrete hangar. I was just curious. And was Siegfried Gideon around when you -

CA: What?

TL: Sigfred Gideon, the historian, was he around when you --

CA: No. They had run his story, and I've had a lot of contact over the years because we were classmates. Will Scully.

JB: Scully was my favorite. So you were classmates?

CA: Yeah. The two most friendly classmates I had were Henry Ford, II and George Nunnally. Nunnally was the security advisor to Kennedy and Johnson [?].

TP: Were there other Georgians or Atlantans?

CA: Very few. I'm trying to think. Dan Hodson, I mentioned. He was in the class of '41, the year after I was. You know, Yale has this college system that's more or less patterned on Emory's and Oxford's. And we happen to have been in the same college.

TL: How was -- when you came back to Atlanta after college, what was the architectural community like in terms of who was doing what and what influences there were?

CA: Well, I think there was one contemporary building. I can't remember. A house. It was the

outstanding architect here was -- certainly was Judson [?], Phil Judson, who I worked for in 1936. He paid me everything I was worth. All of this stuff is coming out because of the writing I have been doing for the last six months. I apologize.

TP: That's all right.

CA: The office at that point -- it was in the middle of the depression. And I think there were only two of us in the drafting room. It was in the Candler Building downtown. No air conditioning, just windows. It was North [inaudible]. I said, Phil, I want to build my house out on Paces Ferry Road. And I've been collecting articles and photographs for the last three or four years. And before we get started, I want to sit down with you and go through these right now. Well, I was where I could hear all of this, page after page after page. Finally, and he said whatever her name was, is that all? Yeah, that's all. Just a minute. Picks up this book. Goes over to the window. I think it was on the 6th Floor. Looks down the side street and sees that nobody is there. Then he comes back and he says, shall we begin? The old book [inaudible] talking about his sexual problems. And the last line this guy said, Mr. Poytner, shall we begin?

TP: I tell people this is one of the first modern houses in Atlanta.

CA: I think it is. We were a little bit on other parts of the country. They wanted traditional. They wanted to be assimilated. And it was only Atlantans who were willing to experiment.

TL: It was only who?

CA: Atlantans.

TL: Oh.

CA: Didn't have anything to do with being a southerner.

TL: It's interesting to me that other architects seem to kind of move out towards that part of town. I think that's, you know, the pattern as we go a little bit further out. Did you have an idea that this was the place to start or to go build? It certainly wasn't like a [inaudible].

CA: I think they would go to where the land was available. At Harvard they went out the Lincoln, Massachusetts. They put copper coils [inaudible]. Ohio is the best place I ever had being up there in Harvard.

TL: How big is your class?

CA: I'm not sure. Maybe 30.

TL: Ed Daugherty was telling us when he started there, there was only seven students in the landscape.

CA: One of the best problems I had there was [inaudible] was in charge of [inaudible]. But he divided the school up into five, what, teams. They were architect, landscape and city planners. We were all -- each group was given a satellite area around Boston. And we designed new towns. And that was a hell of an experience. And later the architects went back and did some of the buildings they had laid out.

TL: Ed mentioned that. He didn't know of anybody else who was doing that, landscape folks and architects and planners all together on one team.

CA: Yeah. That was sort of --

JP: Was Jared Agbo [?]?

CA: I don't know anybody.

JP: He was there when you were there.

CA: He wasn't .

JB: I think he said that.

JP: You know, he is the dean (inaudible.)

TP: You said you had a bad experience at MIT?

CA: I told you, didn't I? They later had a top notch team from Seattle. What was their name?

TL: Did you get out to California much during the '50s?

CA: I was stationed out there during the war.

TL: During the war.

CA: I was stationed at a place in Santa Barber. We didn't get the airplanes when we were suppose to get them. And I got transferred to the [inaudible]. It's down [inaudible] Laguna Beach. We thought about going back there, but I was married by that time. We decided we had too much family here.

JB: Have you been out there much?

CA: Where?

JB: The Palm Springs area, looking at the modern architecture, a little bit in Los Angeles and then San Francisco. But I was wondering if while you were out there if there was a sense that they were doing things differently. There was kind of a new movement [inaudible].

CA: Several houses \$50 a month. Should have bought it. Where are you-all from? I know where you're from.

JP: I'm from Louisiana. I grew up in Shreveport, Louisiana. In fact, there was a fellow at Harvard, Weiner, who may have been familiar --

CA: Fred Weiner.

JP: Weiner, right.

CA: He and I were partners at [inaudible].

JP: Is that right?

CA: Yeah.

JP: From Shreveport, Louisiana?

CA: No. He was from Brooklyn.

JP: Well, I think -- the one I'm thinking about was Shreveport. But he did modern work in Shreveport.

CA: No, that's somebody else.

TL: I'm from Mississippi. And I was curious if Chris Risher [inaudible] was at Harvard when you were there.

CA: Was there anybody?

TL: Chris Risher, I think he was at Harvard.

CA: Who was that?

TL: From Meridian, Mississippi.

CA: You don't know his name?

TL: Chris Risher. I guess he would have gone then. He was one of the -- I think one of the greatest architects from Mississippi in that area. And not much of his work is around anymore.

CA: Barry was up there when I was there. He was over at MIT when I was there. And he was studying city planning at MIT. And I said, Bean, what the hell are you doing? Oh, the city is all good [inaudible].

JP: Cecil, I grew up in Kentucky. But I went to school in the northeast.

CA: Where?

JP: I went to high school outside of Boston.

CA: Where?

JP: Andover.

CA: Oh, yeah.

JP: And then I went to architectural school at Cornell.

CA: Helen, two of her sons -- well, they went to Andover.

JP: Oh, did they?

CA: One of them, Art Harris, who is on TV. He is with CNN.

JP: I've met Art before. That's one of her sons?

CA: I'm sorry, what?

JP: Art is one of her sons?

CA: Yeah.

JP: I've met Art before. And we talked about high school, actually.

CA: Yeah.

JP: He used to go to the gym, the gymnasium.

CA: He lost his [inaudible].

JP: Okay.

CA: He was in Iraq, embedded with the Marines over there when they invaded -- when they accomplished their mission, ha, ha, ha. This is in my book. Gretchen White, really a beautiful woman called [inaudible] a beautiful place. She's as nice as she is beautiful, which is unusual. But Art was in Iraq. And Helen had agreed to take her daughter and granddaughter to the opening -- not the opening -- the Lion King. And a friend of mine who had association with the FBI, he told me that he had been forbidden to fly that week the war started. And I tried my best to talk Helen out of it. I didn't. So both of them were out of town. And I called Carol -- have I told you this?

TP: I've heard this story. But keep going.

CA: Okay.

TP: There's not a man in the room that won't appreciate it.

CA: Okay. Anyway, I called up Carol, and I said both of our spouses are out of town. I said, let's have dinner together Saturday night. She said, where are we going so I will know how to dress? I said, it was a special occasion, we will go to Chops. I will pick you up, she says. Convertible, pops down. Drop dead dress on. We pull up at Chops with this beautiful young woman. But the real payoff was when we went in and this guy was seating us, and he couldn't take his eyes off Carol, all foot of her. Then he says to me, I want you to come in here one day by yourself and tell me how you do it.

JB: Cecil, did you know of the firms like Brewton Morgan, that group, that generation of friends in Atlanta?

CA: Oh, yeah, Morgan.

JB: Morgan was still an influence?

CA: The guy that got us started on big projects was Ben Massell. And his nephew was a contractor. We had grown up together. We knew each other. Charles convinced his uncle that I had graduated from Harvard so I knew everything. And he gave us the Peachtree 7th building, you know, the cream-colored that's been converted successfully into condos.

TP: It's a great building.

CA: He built it for under \$ a square foot. Milton and Boyd were the mechanical engineers. And I think Charles just avoided something that

was expensive. Ben's solution to the complaint was to go around putting in dummy thermostats.

JB: So Morgan was still around?

CA: Morgan and Childers, I think.

JB: Do you know a guy named Parkins?

CA: Perkins, yeah.

TL: He was from New York, I think, if I remember.

CA: Yeah.

JB: He did a courthouse, county courthouse --

CA: That's right.

JB: -- down in Randolph County. And some of the earliest steel I've seen in a building. This is an 1895 building, and it had some steel in it, it was an eye catcher to me. [Phone call.]

JB: There is the First National Bank Tower downtown, do you remember?

CA: The original, I think -- I'm off on my timing. But there was only one architectural firm in the country that had an in-house interior.

TL: But it wasn't Emery Roth?

CA: Emery Roth was the architect [inaudible]. Incidentally, they were the associate architects on the World --

TL: Right.

CA: Anyway, we started our own interior. [inaudible]. He spread everything out for me. And I got Jim [inaudible]. He was a hard sale. He thought interiors was beneath him. I started out ahead of him and then he was No. 2. And later we turned it over to him.

TP: And then you did ASV?

CA: Yeah. One job I do remember doing in there was for a famous lawyer named Mike Gambrell. He was arguing a case down in Savannah. And he was presenting himself just as a good 'ol country boy. And the attorney on the other side, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Gambrell can be just a devilish country boy. But how many devilish country boys have you met who first name is Smythe? He called me up and Pullium was born in Vienna and he escaped the Nazi's and came to Atlanta. He got a job a tailor. Then he went to Tech. He still had some of his Vienna accent. So Gambrell calls me up, Cecil, I want you to take over this job. You're the only one in the office who understands the basis of the U. S. common law. So that's how I took over that. That was an experience.

TL: Well, I was asking because they have really redone the whole lobby, fortunately. It was a really great interior. The woodwork was beautiful.

CA: Oh, it was. I wanted to use tile on the ceiling.

TL: Yes.

CA: And it was being made down in Macon, Georgia. And I went down

there to look at it. It had all been handmade and prepared. So you had variations. But they had started sanding it out. And I talked to Joe Hutcheson who was with Beck. That was a [inaudible]. Tennessee Beck owned half the building and First National owned it. So whenever there was something that he would bring up the contractor was messing up, Joe would put on their owner. It was bad.

TL: Did you deal with Beck at all?

CA: Huh?

TL: Did you deal with Beck himself?

CA: Yeah, I liked him.

TL: You know, Philip Johnson did Beck's house.

CA: Yeah.

TL: In Dallas. And Beck did a lot of development in Shreveport, Louisiana. In fact, my father's office was in a Beck building in Shreveport. It's a modern building in Shreveport.

JB: Beck was the developer?

TL: Yeah. Henry C. Beck. Well, he was a contractor, too, wasn't he?

JB: I think they may.

CA: They're still around, the company is. Joe and I -- Joe Hutcheson and I had a love-hate relationship. I -- the water, the spring that feeds the Flint River is under the First National Bank. And we didn't have a problem with the tower. But the low portion -- [Tape 1, Side ends.]

CA: I complained to the CEO, Jim Robinson. And Joe came in and said, look, the man they have got on that job is a [inaudible]. He couldn't run his own business and he's telling me how to build a building. And it wasn't long after that, I was at a party. And Helen's first husband, Arthur Harris. And I walked in and Hutcheson was sitting on the floor. And he had a few. And they seated me and ah, here comes the all American boy. And I said, all right, Joe. And he said I've got the goods on you. I've got the toughest lawyer in town and he'll eat you alive. And I know that brick is falling off that building you did on Peachtree and Baker. The reason it was falling was that Charles Massell did that one, too, wasn't following our plan. So Joe says, you keep this up, I am going to ruin your career. I said you keep doing me a favor if you did that because I wouldn't have to deal with people like you. He got up on stage, and he balled up his fist. And [inaudible]. And we needed people to pull us apart. Everybody left the room. And I finally said, oh, shit, and I turned and walked away. He called me the next morning in the office about 8:00, said, I want to come over and see you. And he was all full of apologies. When my daughter got engaged, he married her [inaudible]. But he and his wife gave them a party out at Norcross, somewhere out there. So that's why I say I have a love-hate relationship.

TL: Were cocktail parties always that dramatic back then?

CA: No. That's the most dramatic one I ever went to.

TL: Well, it was interesting talking to Ed, trying to figure out the architect and design. He lives outside of Atlanta. He's been exposed to other things. It sounded like it was a pretty small circle.

CA: It was. One of the most interesting guys was at Harvard when I was there, Manuel Harold Coolidge. I don't know whether he's still alive. I got a phone call from him over a year ago. He said, I just called you up to tell you good-bye. And he wouldn't say anything, what the trouble was or anything. But foreign people renaissance man fight. He was. He studied engineering. I don't know what type. But he was out in Texas on a tower and there was an explosion and knocked him down. He almost fell off the tower. He studied landscape architecture. And then he studied architecture at Harvard when I went there. He was a first player, played the piano beautifully. He danced professionally at a nightclub in Miami. He didn't [inaudible]. He claimed to have delivered a baby on an airline. And I've written him up in this book. I didn't know whether to believe him or not. But I'm quite sure had the opportunity presented itself, he would have and could have. But he rented a space from us in our office. He built a neat little house up in [inaudible]. You know, the clip that see, he built the house for that. Harold's mother [inaudible]. Harold's father was in the feed business. He found out I was going to Harvard, that I was going -- I had forgotten whether it was Norway or Sweden where there was a paint

factory turning out paint. And he asked me if I would go and check and see how it would have been. They were very dubious about me. But they finally let me open it. Everything was automated. [inaudible]. You know you're automated everything but that, how are doing it? I don't think I found out anything that helped me make those.

TP: Cecil, do we need to let you eat? We've been making you talk this whole time.

CA: I had a late breakfast.

TP: And, guys, I'm afraid I'm going to have to run. And I'm going to need to make a phone call. And I'm going to need to get back to the house and help with the kids. Good to see you again.

CA: Give my best to the lady in your life. I will tell you something that you will be interested in. There's a bunch of retired architects, we meet once at the Colonnade, once a month at the Colonnade.

TP: Really?

CA: We call ourselves SORTAA. And that doesn't mean anything. When we all got together for the first time and went around the room and asked what are you doing, what are you doing? Well, I'm sort of retired.

TP: Sort of. When do you-all meet?

CA: Usually the first Monday. But I will check it out for you. If you will give me his address, I will have it put on the list.

TP: I'll e-mail it to Helen, okay?

TL: I want to talk about the house [inaudible]

CA: I think I have to thank you for lunch.

TL: Hold on. He and I need to figure all that. [inaudible].

CA: Did you see the article in the paper about six to eight months ago? I encouraged an article about the house because I was so afraid it was going to get --

TL: It was a woman who wrote it, wasn't it?

CA: I tried to get the New York Times. And you know about the garden that went up and down in front of the house?

TL: No.

CA: Well, I sold --

TL: Gary?

CA: Hull, Gary. He was an inventor. He didn't like the open so he planted a garden in front of it. He took it out going around. One was they had adopted a little girl and they were afraid she would get sick, which is a good reason. The other was it was white, push a button and it came down on the roof of the car.

TL: We had heard about that invention and we didn't know who it belonged to, whether it was that you had done or.

CA: They were going to use the house, their thinking. [Inaudible]

TL: Cecil, I wanted to ask you in terms of your career, what you oriented to, I mean, steel and concrete were fairly major material.

CA: Oh, yeah.

TL: Was there anything that was a preference to you, or was it economic driven?

CA: It was economic. Almost every building we did, the engineer would do it both ways. Then they would sell like concrete. Southern GS, they had the only pans in town. You could use them over and over again. They had gotten all beat up. And we finally said, you know, you ought to be doing some comparison shopping. He did on [inaudible]. Andy Gino worked with us.

TL: From Alabama?

CA: No. Here. He did the -- he did the sculpture on the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. But.

TL: So he was a structural engineer here in town?

CA: Yeah.

TL: What was his name again?

CA: Gino [inaudible]. May be the biggest one around now.

TL: Bruson and Case. I think they're fairly new. Probably seven or eight years ago.

CA: Incidentally, have you been following this mess out at the airport?

TL: Did you hear what Cappa [?] said in the paper? Did you hear it this morning?

CA: No.

TL: The guy, Cappa. Apparently they had a sewer line going up hill.

CA: Yeah.

TL: He said, oh, this didn't -- this is the engineer now. He said, this didn't meet our standards. He said, we look like a bunch of idiots. That's why you were quoted in the paper.

CA: Oh, boy.

TL: And so Leo Daly, he said, oh, that was a very small part of the project.

CA: Oh, boy. You know, I tried to run Daly's office for two years. I ran me, boy. I finally said, I shouldn't have come here.

TL: I don't think we know the whole story about that. I wouldn't put it on Leo Bailey.

JB: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's tough for any Atlanta organization to challenge somebody else's credibility.

CA: Gary [inaudible] who was the project manager, he worked for us. He is a very good guy.

TL: Well, I just have one other concrete question I wanted to ask you.

CA: [inaudible].

JP: I've never had a seal question. Did you ever use or have contact with a group called Shokbeton?

CA: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

JP: Did you use them?

CA: Yeah. We did it on the location of the columns of the First National Bank.

JP: From Lithonia? Were they in Lithonia at the time, up in north Georgia?

CA: I think they were in Macon.

JP: In Macon, uh-huh. And what about Mozet [?] or does that ring a bell?

CA: Hu-huh. [inaudible].

TL: Well, there was another group. In fact, Portman used a group called Navy Bell from -- I think Charlotte or somewhere to do the precast work for Peachtree Center. And he used a heating system that, you know, that looked like [inaudible] precast concrete. I just was curious.

CA: We had a guy overseeing the construction on that building. He was a real character. And we took pictures of everything. One of the columns, by the way, its point is off center. He couldn't get [inaudible]. It doesn't make any difference. And he discovered this bird's nest up in this sculpture. And he said take some pictures. Six were born. And that's part of his report. Any of you bird watchers?

JB: Not actively.

TL: Casual. I had a bird feeder on the back porch.

CA: There was a dead bird outside the [inaudible]. I just wanted to -- I had never seen anything like it. It had

black wings with like bright polka dots all over it. My son-in-law had just gotten a [inaudible] bird. I looked it up, couldn't find it. It was a beautiful bird.

TL: The old briefcase with some drawings?

CA: What's that?

TL: Some drawings of the house. Do you want to look at these while we are here?

CA: Yeah. What time is it, by the way?

TL: 12:30.

CA: [inaudible]. It's like a briefcase. [inaudible].

CA: But that's the one that the birds took down.

TL: The place is so fragile.

JB: Yeah.

TL: Is this in your house?

CA: Yeah.

TL: That was before you [inaudible] all the circular?

CA: Yeah.

JP: Is it the same site?

CA: Huh?

JP: Is it the same site?

CA: Yeah.

JB: Were you saying site?

JP: Same site.

TL: These are the photographs. So that didn't matter.

JB: Didn't somebody roll it down on their car or something? Wasn't that the reason it got taken out? Didn't it lower down on top of somebody's car?

CA: Well, there's two stories. One is they took it out because they adopted a little girl. But the other one was had let it down on her car. I don't know whether that's true or not.

TL: Cecil, did you use Robert McGinnis as a photographer quite a bit?

CA: Yeah. He was damn good. He quit. Did you know him?

TL: No. We have been trying to figure out who was doing the best architectural photography at that time.

CA: Well, there were two guys. I can't remember the names. This fellow was from [inaudible]. The other one was --

TL: Who was it, Gabriel Benson? [inaudible].

TL: Does he still photograph?

JP: Oh, yeah. I love the furniture. Where did you -- was there a local outlet for old furniture then?

CA: No. I can't remember now where I got it.

JP: Uh-huh. I have a chair like that.

CA: I've got two of them.

JP: Uh-huh.

CA: I don't know where I got them. [inaudible].

TL: Was it a table?

CA: Well, it was just a shelf space. One thing I didn't do, and I wish I had, make it a wet bar. Save some money.

JB: Have you been an art collector?

CA: Not really. I've got some stuff.

JB: I was just noticing -- I'm not sure if it's a painting or what that was in the living room on the wall.

CA: Yeah. I've still got that. That's by some local artist.

TL: Ted shared the magazine you gave him with me. [inaudible]. Do you recognize that?

CA: Yeah, I recognize that. I sold a lot back here. You notice [inaudible].

TL: I think this is -- I'm not sure -- South Hills, the South Hills; is that correct?

CA: Yeah. That may be it. I don't know.

TL: And it looks like '97.

CA: Yeah.

TL: I guess that's [inaudible]. This was before it came around, I guess?

CA: Yes. The interesting thing about that was I wanted to raise the

porch. My wife didn't want it. Not knowing how [inaudible].

JB: So they are going to build something like this?

CA: Yeah.

TL: Well, it sounds like your wife was a great collaborator.

CA: She was. She and Helen were close friends.

TL: Yeah.

CA: The building I like most in America is the Dulles [inaudible].

JB: Would you think of that as a concrete roof?

CA: Uh-huh.

JB: When will your book be finished?

CA: Oh, oh. I've been working on it six months.

JB: Shenandoah was the name that you gave to it?

CA: Yeah. You know Shenandoah Valley. And that was him looking up through that dome.

TL: [inaudible]. I think this is a copy of the article. And I think the architect. [inaudible].

CA: I'm sorry?

TL: Your comment.

CA: The guy that took that picture of the light, he was a world-class photographer. He spent the whole day in there taking his shots. And

he had a cardboard box. It must have been foot square and feet deep and a drawer full of bulbs. [inaudible].

CA: They've got some on the building.

TL: [inaudible].

CA: Is there a date on there?

TL: No.

JB: So the sliding glass door that's right there you always intended it to be open?

CA: No. I think at one point [inaudible].

JB: The depth of the [inaudible] worked very well.

CA: That was one thing they emphasized over and over again at Harvard was sun control.

JB: Were these taken after construction -- I'm sorry. Were these presentations done after construction was done?

CA: I don't remember.

TL: Is this center flag stand? Is that what --

CA: Yeah.

TL: That's all a flag stand?

CA: Yeah. One of the things was an influence to the house was an article I read saying that the entry to a house should be something that's memorable because that's where the emotional feelings take place. You can tell when somebody [inaudible]. You walk in there

[inaudible]. One thing I regret is [inaudible].

TL: Uh-huh.

CA: But knowing [inaudible].

TL: Well, you need to go ahead and finish your book so we can help you promote it.

CA: Okay. One of the -- I am writing one on politics. My excuse for writing the book is that I grew up in Atlanta [inaudible], white supremacy. Certain things in my life changed me. And I became very much involved and a strong advocate in the civil rights. I've got two chapters on race. [inaudible]. But Pat Conroy, he's agreed to review what I'm doing. And then there was an editor at the Atlanta Constitution, Gene Patterson, Ralph McGill. I just saw Dan yesterday. [inaudible]. I've got a guy who is a freelance writer who is working, Randy Sullivan, who is a damn good reporter. But memoirs go a lot beyond facts, you know. So I've been writing a lot of it myself. One thing I find very refreshing is that so many people that I'm writing about are dead.

TL: Cecil, who else do you think we ought to be talking to doing this kind of thing, from this SORTAA group?

CA: Well, Steven Preston [inaudible] he's a member of the SORTAA group. He's retired really. If you could get ahold of Henry [inaudible]. He doesn't live here any more.

TL: We think we can get in touch with Henry. But David is working on his memoirs.

CA: I think the guy that designed my house was a real -- I'm talking about the one I live in now. What's his name? [inaudible].

CA: I'm having a senior moment.

TL: Well, I have them myself. Do you know anything worse than a senior moment is a premature senior moment? This is what I have.

CA: I have those, too. I had them. I have found that one thing that's really amazing writing this book is how much I remember. I wanted to work, this fellow is not charging me anything. And I said, how are you going to get compensated? This isn't Gone with the Wind. I think it did get published is this [inaudible] situation. Incidentally, one of the big factors in changing me was a man who was at Harvard, Conrad Johnson. And Conrad is the [inaudible] for the air fighters in Italy. [inaudible]. And it's not [inaudible] this small southern town but about the military itself. And the white guys tried [inaudible].

TL: A great story. I worked the [inaudible]. I worked there for a while.

CA: Oh, really?

TL: And the story about Eleanor coming down to visit the facility by herself. And one of the pilots offering to take her up for a ride.

CA: Right.

TL: And, of course, [inaudible]. I think the service was scared to death, even though she is so forthright. So they pulled up the [inaudible] and they talked to her husband, FDR. He said, if she wants to fly, just go where you're going to fly her.

CA: No. That was a great story. But the fact that we had been pilots overrode any racial problems we had at all. And, you know, after that, I never was able to think of white as being supreme or anything. One of the most poignant encounters I have had. When I was mixed up with the civil rights, I met with the black priests. And I was sort of giving him a going over about why didn't you people let Whitey know that you didn't like lynching and you didn't like bad schools, you didn't like being called boy or nigger? And he didn't answer me directly. He just said when I was years old, I hid in the woods and watched a mob lynch my uncle. So I apologized for my statement. But the other thing that changed me was being in service and I didn't have any direct contact with black combat. So the Marines were all white. And the Navy was all white except the Filipinos and the mess men. But at some point, it occurred to me that there were guys, black guys coming back to the country who had really been in combat and was coming back to entirely difference country than what I was coming back to. And I remember saying that I think we got a democracy here...hypocrisy. So that had something to do with it. And then my first wife was from New Orleans. She and my sister both went the Smith College. My wife was a classmate of Nancy Regan,

by the way. She was always proud of the fact that she had known. I've got another story. I've got a lot of respect for that woman now. But she came back from Smith telling that race, color was absolutely no way to judge a person and that the character and whether you like them, you know?

TL: Yes.

CA: So we had mixed meetings at my house back before it was. Anyway, except for the fact that I am writing about are dead, I've gotten a lot out of going over this race thing.

TL: Well, people have said before that supremacists drew a line in Atlanta during that time period at your house. [inaudible].

CA: One of the most interesting incidents, Ben West was the mayor of Nashville. And there was a lawsuit here in Atlanta that was assigned to [inaudible]. And West was faced with something similar up in Nashville. And I had been working with him [inaudible]. And he was at our house. When he started talking about this lawsuit, I said, well -- incidentally, the plaintiff was Henry James, the architect. So West said Jim Hartsfield, our mayor over here. And let's talk about this thing. So he went back to Nashville. He got his [inaudible]. And I didn't consider it quite a compliment. But he called me one night to tell me what had happened about the meeting at that house. And he said I tried to get Mayor Hartsfield, but I couldn't get him, so I called you. He was right, though. I was just the catalyst. [Tape 2, Side ends, end of interview]