

Oral Memoirs
of
Calvert Conklin and Phyllis Conklin

An Interview Conducted by

Trish Thompson

June 24, 2011

Celery Soup

Creative Sanford, Inc.

Creative Sanford, Inc.

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Trish Thompson

Transcriber: Freddie Roman-Toro

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Creative Sanford, Inc., Sanford, Florida.

Project Detail

Creative Sanford, Inc. is a non-profit organization created to manage Celery Soup community theater productions. The original idea for the Celery Soup project came from Jeanine Taylor, the owner of a folk-art gallery on First Street in Sanford, Florida. The first production was *Touch and Go*, a play focusing on the people of Sanford and the town's determination to overcome various obstacles, including the Freeze of 1894-1895, the fall of Sanford's celery industry, and the closing of Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford in the 1960s. In the process of producing the show, Creative Sanford decided to rehabilitate an historic building, the Princess Theater, which is located on 115 West First Street and owned by Stephen Tibstra. The Creative Sanford offices are housed in the Historic Sanford Welcome Center, located at 203 East First Street.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Calvert Conklin and Phyllis Conklin is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 24, 2011.

Abstract

An oral history of Calvert and Phyllis Conklin. Cal moved from Baltimore, Maryland, to Florida in 1963 and Phyllis was born in Florida. The couple met each other at the University of Illinois, where Cal pursued his doctorate degree after returning from the Korean War. In the interview, Cal and Phyllis discuss their involvement in the development of the Historic Downtown section of Sanford. They also discuss their humanitarian experiences and awards. The couple then delves into the racial tensions within Sanford during integration, even going so far as to tell detailed stories of violence within the city and the alienation they experienced because they came from the North and openly mixed with African-Americans.

Calvert Conklin and Phyllis Conklin

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Trish Thompson

June 24, 2011

Sanford, Florida

Calvert My middle name is Calvert, which is my mother's last name, and she and I are related to the Virginia Calvert, and that goes all the way back to Lord Baltimore.¹ The first one was George [Calvert] and the second was Charles [Calvert]. Anyway, one of my crazy relatives tried to sue the City of Baltimore, claiming the land was his. Needless – he didn't get very far, and of course, there was a Calvert whiskey at one time, and they have one of these genealogy books – it's an advertisement – and they got up to my mother and me, and they didn't carry it on any further, so I stopped drinking their dang whiskey.

Phyllis You never did anyway.

Calvert But that's my story. I'm going to stick to it.

Thompson Well now, Lord Baltimore came from England, but Calvert whiskey – I thought that was scotch?

Calvert No, it was a blended one made by a Canadian.

Thompson So your family is English?

Calvert All English.

Thompson So how'd you get to Sanford?

Calvert I'm in the engineering business and we came down here. One of the senior partners, Just Deets[sp], visited a Northern client of ours in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, by the name of Cecil Osier, and we had done work for Cecil up there doing developments, and he was down here building a bunch of manufactured homes that don't look very nice, but they're over on Summerlin [Avenue] around there – those little box homes? And Deets stopped by to see him, and he told Deets that the city didn't have a sewage plant at the time, and he said that they were going to interview for an engineer to design the sewage plant and that we should apply, and so Deets went down and met old Leffler and Busch[sp] – two of the old families in Sanford – and they were in a partnership. Busch later became [inaudible] engineer.

¹ George Calvert.

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- Thompson** Leffler – was that the Judge [Kenneth Murrell] Leffler?
- Calvert** It was his brother. His older brother was an engineer. We formed a partnership with them, and I was sent down here to do the inspection. Decided I liked the place and came down and started an office. Over the years, that turned into what now is CPH – Conklin, Porter, [&] Holmes [Engineers, Inc.].
- Phyllis** And when he came down to inspect this sewage plant, we had gone down to my grandmother’s in Southern Florida...
- Calvert** I came in 1963.
- Phyllis** My son is fourth generation Floridian. I was born in Florida. My dad came down here to help build houses back up after the 1928 hurricane, so he met my mother and they got married and had me, and then I was only here six months, but I lived up North about 35-40 years.
- Thompson** Where was your home up North?
- Phyllis** In Southern Illinois.
- Thompson** And that’s where you came from too?
- Calvert** No, I came from Northern Illinois – outside Chicago.
- Phyllis** And we met at the University of Illinois.
- Calvert** I came home from [the] Korea[n War] and went back to school working on a Doctor’s degree, and went to a church service – a social event – and met her there, and that’s how...
- Phyllis** Immediately, we knew we were for each other [*laughs*].
- Calvert** That was a long time ago. We were married 55 years ago.
- Thompson** So how did you know right away that he was the one?
- Phyllis** Well, he looked good and he had a graduate degree, and I decided – and he was a Christian. I thought he was, and he was, because we met in a Presbyterian church there on campus, and I just thought, “That’s the right one.” I don’t know what he thought, but anyway, we got married.
- Calvert** The program that evening was on Korea, and of course, I knew much about that.
- Phyllis** So he was sitting there by me telling me all of this stuff about Korea and I thought, “Oh, this man sounds so fascinating.” [*laughs*] So we married and lived up there about seven or eight years, and then he came down and we said, “Let’s

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go visit grandmother.” And he had never been to Florida and he said, “Oh, this weather is so nice down here. I wish we could start a branch office down here.” and that’s what he told the firm up North and they said, “Yes, go down and start it.” So he did.

Calvert I was general manager up there.

Phyllis Here, he was in business with William Leffler for a short period of time, and then William decided that he didn’t want to be in engineering. Very bright, bright man, but he decided he wanted to go back and farm or have his properties out near Osteen or something like that, but the amazing story is that we came here right about when integration was starting in the schools in the early Sixties and William...

Calvert I got somewhat discouraged by the situations and decided that even though I had a good client base, that I wanted to go back up North, and I went back to see if I could get my old job back and the company said “Yes.” But in the meantime, the city manager and Lee Moore called up there and said, “We don’t want you to leave.” And they said, “If you come back, we’ll let you design a marina for us.”

Phyllis So he designed the marina and it was built in ’67, and the amazing part about that was that, at that time, you could dredge part of the stuff up from the lake and make the 13 acres of ground that the hotels and stuff are sitting on. Today, you could not do that. They would not let you dredge up and put more land...

Thompson So you deepened the lake by taking the...

Calvert Dredged it up and built an isle, and then the roadway and all to it and I designed the dry storage building out there and the docks—the whole thing. That was a long time ago.

Thompson Well, we’ve had a lot of stories about what happened in integration and what the situation was with the blacks—what happened?

Calvert Well, I was with William Leffler, and we were going to Eustis and he had—well anyway, we got shot at by a bunch of black folks. He had a citizens’ white council...

Phyllis He belonged to the White Citizens’ Council, which is the KKK [Ku Klux Klan].

Calvert No, no. They are two different organizations. He belonged to both, and a car pulled alongside of us and somebody pulled out a gun and shot at us, and we chased them—of all things. I didn’t have any interest in that. I was in Jim Spencer’s—the bar—when the first blacks came in there, and that was something.

Thompson How did that happen?

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- Calvert** Many of the regular customers got up and left, and they were ignored for a considerable period of time, and they just sat there and waited, and finally the owner did go and asked them what they wanted. It was a very awkward situation, but they did get served. Most of the customers left.
- Phyllis** At that time they were trying to integrate the schools here and William Leffler had a...
- Calvert** Honey, let's not get into that.
- Phyllis** Well, anyway — it was in *Time* magazine.
- Thompson** It's history.
- Calvert** Well, first I had an experience. Our son was a gifted student up North and we got down here — that was one of the disappointments. The schools here weren't anywhere near as good as the Northern ones and he was in a gifted class up there, and I noticed that the textbooks said, "For average and below students." That bothered me badly, because he wasn't average or below. So I went in to see the superintendent of the schools and said, "How do you expect to raise that level if you keep teaching for average and below?" And it was Ray Milwee, and he said, "Well, that's what our students are — average and below." I said, "Don't you want to change that?" He said, "You can't change that." So I had absolutely no luck, but later William went in and his daughter had a black teacher — the first black teacher in the schools — and he didn't like that at all. Wouldn't accept it, so he went in and confronted Milwee with the same situation, and Milwee wouldn't change it so William hit him. Beat him up and it made *Time* magazine. It was quite a — and he pleaded — the funny thing is I got a jury summons to be a juror in his trial. I went over to the courthouse and I knew the prosecuting attorney well, and he said, "Cal, what are you here for?" I said, "I came to be a juror in William's trial." and he said, "Like hell you did." He went in and got the judge to dismiss me, and that's, of course, what I wanted, but it was funny.
- Phyllis** And at the same time, the neighbors we had up North where we lived — it was a mixed neighborhood. There was a Chinese family, a black family — and I will say, they were culturally put together. Well, we did have a man next door that drove a bread truck, but mostly — being a university town, they were mostly intellectuals. When I went to school, in Southern Illinois, I went to school with — with black children all the time and thought nothing of it.
- Calvert** And when we came down here, the only people that really were see[sic] was controlled by the old landowner families, and socially, we were not accepted. We were Yankees and not accepted, and our first friends here in town were Jewish people and some of the blacks. They're still friends of ours today.

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- Phyllis** In 1985, when Mayor Bettye Smith started the Martin Luther King[, Jr.] choir²...
- Calvert** We both saw the Martin Luther King choir for 20-something years [inaudible], so we're culturally adept.
- Phyllis** But they weren't used to that, and I had a birthday party for my daughter, who was six at the time. So I told her, "You can invite six children from your class to come to the birthday party." and one was a little Stallworth girl – like Mill Stallworth's daughter – a black girl, and a lovely, lovely person, and when they went outside to play a while, and somebody – a passerby or neighbor, but I won't say who. It certainly wasn't Connie Williams, because she is very culturally non-prejudice[sic] at all, and it wasn't Rosita Jacobson, because she lived across the street and she was Jewish, so she wouldn't have said anything, but somebody else said, "I wanted to tell you that we don't mix socially with the blacks here." and I said, "But we do."
- So that set us back a couple of steps, but then one of our Jewish friends, the Tetenbaums, got us into a barbecue club, which was out in what is now in Hidden Lake, and they introduced us to some people out there, and we got in, not because we were trying to get in, but anything to have people be a little more friendly[sic] to us.
- Calvert** There's quite a story about the marina in some respects, because the [Sanford] City Council didn't have a tenant or anybody to rent or lease anything to when they started and decided to build that. That took a lot of guts.
- Phyllis** On whose part?
- Calvert** I'm the [Sanford] City Commissioner. The newspapers was urging them to – the Gilos, who were the publishers at that time – were urging them to and they had no tenant – nobody to lease or rent anything to, and here they were going to build an island, and during construction, they got a marina operator to do it, basically, with ash and oil.
- Phyllis** But he designed the marina with floating docks so the water [inaudible].
- Calvert** So I give the [Sanford] City Commission a lot of credit to have the nerve to do that and to proceed with the project, and it's been a huge success, and I never did a job where we got as much construction for – it was the whole thing, including some of the buildings – only cost a million dollars – building it all up from nothing.
- Phyllis** He designed that dry storage building – that big building that has the stripes on the side. At that time, some hotel came in and it's changed hands a lot.

² Correction: Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus.

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- Calvert** It's a motel now.
- Phyllis** We lived on the lakefront at that time. We just rented a house, because we weren't too sure if we were going to be able to stay or not. That's when we first came, and after the marina thing, he got some jobs for being city engineer for places like Eustis.
- Calvert** Well, I had those before I went up North—a whole bunch of the cities and counties around here.
- Phyllis** [inaudible] and gave us a base to stay, and I would've thought too that it would've been very courageous for that lady black teacher—whoever she was—to walk into that Sanford Middle School or Seminole High [School]...
- Thompson** Was she in it when it was Seminole High—as the first black teacher? Or was it...
- Phyllis** I don't know. William's daughter was not a little, tiny girl, because knowing William...
- Calvert** Other things that I thought were noteworthy is, for instance, the Central Florida Zoo [and Botanical Gardens].
- Phyllis** When we came, it was downtown.
- Calvert** One block right behind the [Sanford] City Hall. You could make quite a story about the moving of that and the...
- Thompson** I've never heard that story—how it happened.
- Calvert** Well, they had a zoo behind the City Hall, right down the lakefront there.
- Thompson** I saw an aerial picture of it and thought it was much larger than it was. It's very small.
- Calvert** And the woman's name was Hood—that was the curator there. He worked for the city and she did, and her whole job was to tend to the zoo, and they had one lion and you could hear him roar. You could hear him and then they decided—well, a bunch of businesspeople facilitated the Central Florida Zoological Society[, Inc.], and a number of us contributed money, so that we could relocate it. I put up several thousand dollars to the Sanford Atlantic Bank and so did others, and that served as seed money to borrow against to relocate and build the Central Florida Zoo. I had connections with contractors so I went to C. A. Meyer and Amick Construction[, Inc.] and leveraged them into building the roads in and doing all the earthwork for the original zoo. That was quite a contribution. It was all donation and the two of them—C. A. Meyer and Amick Construction—donated all the work to build the road and do the earth or the original zoo, and I was one of the founding directors of the Central Florida Zoo.

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- Phyllis** Both he and I had served on the zoo board at one time or another.
- Thompson** Did you all have anything to do with the actual moving of the animals?
- Calvert** No, my thing was contributing the money and doing the construction of the roads and all of the earthwork out there. There were many other people around town. Doug[las] Stenstrom did. Glenn McCall, the druggist, did. Dr. Hickman, the dentist from Maitland, was involved. I don't really remember all the other people. That was the way that the zoo got started.
- Thompson** What was the reasoning for moving the zoo? Did somebody donate the land?
- Calvert** I think it was bought. It was bought. Right along there was Leffler land and a bunch of it was Kirchhoff. Now, have you ever talked to Bill Kirchhoff?
- Thompson** No, I haven't.
- Calvert** Beside the stories of the marina and the zoo, the other one that I know a lot about is the historic trend or the beginning of the historic movement in Sanford.
- Thompson** The historic trust?
- Calvert** No, not the trust. The whole idea of historic preservation becoming a forefront program in Sanford, and Sarah Jacobson was the one that started that whole thing, and she got me again, Doug Stenstrom, Don Knight, Glenn McCall—a bunch of downtown businesspeople—and we applied and got money to do historical surveys, and the state sent a[sic] historical architect and a plain historian and they worked out of my office. They'd go looking at all the insurance records, titles, and deeds, and all the interesting things they could find out about the buildings. That went on for a couple of years, because they'd come back and they'd found out the railroad magnate [Henry Morrison] Flagler had owned this and that—it was an old train station, and that's the Piper Building, and they'd find all this interesting stuff about all of the other old buildings.
- The first thing we did was we got the whole downtown district on the Federal Register of Historic Places.³ It was first a downtown district—one of the few in the state for a whole downtown district, and we had to do all of these surveys and then we moved to the area behind it—the [Sanford] Historic Trust. We got that designated as a residential historic district. Now the people in the historic trust didn't have anything to do with that. They formed the historic trust after all this was done, and I, in my many travels, kept thinking about park benches, and I picked out a bench from various places that I'd gone, and bought one for 900-and-something dollars, and had it brought here, and the city liked it, and it's one of those—it's downtown. They use that on the waterfront and everywhere. Then we got grants and formed a Downtown Historic Development [inaudible], and

³ Correction: National Register of Historic Places.

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we got grants—the owners would apply, and we would sponsor them, and they got grants to fix up the facades of many of the buildings, and you'll also see then when we have a historic board later. I was chairman of the [Sanford] Historic Preservation Board that the city conceived, and we got plaques that were put on all of the buildings that you see downtown. Then the historic trust came into being. They came later and formed their historic trust for remodeling the buildings and all of the homes. Then we had a few—Bettye Smith and I did a local one for the St. James AME [African Methodist Episcopal] black Church. They've got a local historic designation. That whole thing started with Sarah[?] Jacobson and a bunch of us, and that's been very successful. Now the historic trust people kind of take the credit for the whole thing, but they didn't start it. They did a good job.

Thompson Well, I think they have done a good job, but the city—I don't know if you noticed, but the City of Sanford and the Sanford Historic Trust did the first Cultural Preservation Award and gave that to the City of Sanford for what we're doing today.

Phyllis I started in 1973. My mother and two other little ladies and I started the Meals on Wheels program. I have a newspaper clipping showing a picture of us...

Calvert We've done that longer than anybody in Seminole County—the two of us.

Phyllis I've done it ever since then—36-37 years, and I think, because of that, I got the Jefferson Award [for Public Service] for this area, but there were others in other areas and Orlando and everything that got it too, and so, when it went statewide, of course, it wasn't only that that got me the award.

Cal and I had done so many things around town—you know, volunteer things—'cause that's really what we live for—is volunteering. He's done about a 150 pro-bono engineering jobs for little churches, or the crisis center, or the Salvation Army sign out front and things like that. At one time, they gave him the Topper Award and, at the same time, they gave me the Dr. Luis Perez Humanitarian Award the same night, and I didn't expect that. I knew he was to get the Topper Award, and so I didn't say anything to him about it and then when we got there, I knew. I had some relatives coming, because I knew he was going to get that award. Then they started out with the humanitarian award first, and they got up and started talking about this woman—who was me, you know, and I thought, "That sounds like me." And they were giving me this award and I said, "You've got this wrong. I'm not supposed to get this award." and I didn't want to say it and take all the—my husband, and they said, "Oh, but you are. This is the humanitarian award." And I felt so disheartened, because I thought, "Gee whiz. I thought they were going to give him the Topper Award and here they're just giving me an award," and it turned out later in the evening that he got the Topper Award.

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When we started this Meals on Wheels program—I don't remember which church, but I think it might've been the First Presbyterian [Church of Sanford] downtown, which we were members of—and they decided they wanted to start a Meals on Wheels program and there were only four of us ladies. You could only take about eight people yourself, so there must've been 35 people, and we got the meals from the hospital, and they had them in these big, green plastic containers, and so we'd have to collect those from the clients—we call them "clients." It was all-volunteer stuff. The next day and take those back—sometimes during, sometimes not, and then get the other meals. And, as the years went on, the mothers of these other ladies were 20 years older than I, so they're all dead now, but I have a newspaper clipping of when I started, but 10 years after I started it, he started it, 'cause he was retiring, but he's done it 10 years less than I have.

Calvert I still do pro-bono engineering. I've done over 200 projects. There's an awful lot. I'm still doing them.

Thompson We've known that you'd been doing those pro-bono when we had to have the engineers—pay an engineer to put up the risers for the theater.

Calvert Well, I did the first one for what they now call the Wayne-Densch Theater.⁴ I did the first structural study there that they used as a credit to the Federal Government to get their grants. Then I did structural inspections both on main theater and the building next door they later got.

Thompson Well, how did you get into this wonderful, giving spirit?

Calvert We both believe we were put here to help other people.

Phyllis Our mission is just to help other people. We get the fun out of it, because it's the one-on-one thing that's important.

Calvert It keeps us occupied. It's something worthwhile to do.

Phyllis We've been on lots of boards, but I say, "What you get on boards is a lot of splinters." We've been in the Martin Luther King choir for 25 years. Bettye Smith started that. She was the one that got the Sanford Woman's Club⁵ integrated, and that didn't go so well with many of the ladies that dropped out, when she brought in these lovely, fine four ladies. Because they were saying, "Well, you bring in one like that and who knows who they'll bring in." It's the fear thing, and then Rosita Jacobson was in the club at the time, and they had a time getting Rosita in, because she was Jewish. They asked me to join for many years and I knew they were so segregated. I just didn't want any part of that, but I used to

⁴ Correction: Wayne-Densch Performing Arts Center.

⁵ Correction: Woman's Club of Sanford.

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say, "That's the Sanford White Women's Club." but that changed over the years and these lovely black ladies are in and the Jewish ladies.

Calvert I have another story to tell and it's about the rescue mission.

Phyllis The Rescue Outreach Mission [of Central Florida] on Thirteenth Street.

Calvert They had kind of a ramshackle operation out there. Mother [Blanche Bell] Weaver was running it with the help of pop and it was really a rag-tag thing. She started out by being a cook and ran the restaurant on Thirteenth Street.

Thompson And everybody went there.

Calvert That's right, and one day she walked into our office downtown and said, "I understand there's a man here that likes to help people." [laughs] And I ended up helping her. I donated land. I bought some lots and donated the engineering, and we built the women's and children shelter, and I was, for 21 years, on the Board of Directors of the rescue mission. Mother Weaver founded that, and her church over there also founded it. That's quite a story too, because she started out by having children just come – she kind of adopted them and they moved into her house with her. She was preaching at this church, and then she got the idea of founding a homeless shelter and started it, and then she called on me and then together saw about building the women's and children's shelter. Much of the money came from one man, and he should be talked to if he will talk to you, but he's very, very generous.

Thompson And who is that?

Calvert Mike Good. Briar Construction.⁶ Every organization that I go to and am part of, such as the Children's Home Society [of Florida] – I've been on that board, and I look to see who the big givers are. Mike Good is at the top of the list.

Phyllis Soon after we first came here, Thelma Mike was, until just recently, administrator at the Good Samaritan Home [of Sanford]. That's just an assisted living center for people and they – somehow, the Good Samaritan Home hadn't noticed they hadn't paid their taxes for some time...

Calvert They hadn't paid their withholding and their unemployment and that stuff. They were in big trouble and the whole city got together and bailed her out.

Phyllis They owed the government about \$100,000. The whole city – respecting her so much – came forth and got people here and there to raise money, and they let her off.

⁶ Correction: The Briar Team.

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- Calvert** They raised considerable money.
- Thompson** My first employee stole a lawnmower from the Good Samaritan Home. He started working for me after he got out of jail. He had to pay restitution to the Good Samaritan Home, and I told Thelma that story and she laughed and laughed. She said, "If he needed a lawnmower, I would have given him that lawnmower."
- Phyllis** We both started out in a choir when we first came here, because both of us had sung for years and years, and we have been singing in the First [Presbyterian] Church [of Sanford] downtown, and then about 1991 it had a split over a pastor and it...
- Thompson** They moved over to Markham Woods Road.
- Phyllis** No. That one's a great one. That's where most of these people downtown went. We went to another church for a year.
- Calvert** We didn't originally. We went to Oakland, followed our choir director.
- Phyllis** We didn't want to make an exodus—Markham Woods, because Markham Woods was started by Dr. [inaudible] and in 1985, they were—when did you join?
- Thompson** That would've been years ago. We lived just a block down from the church.
- Phyllis** We came there in 1991, and been in that choir for all those years too. We're about at the place where we don't do solos anymore.
- Thompson** Well, what about your children growing up here, and do you have any family stories of the kids?
- Phyllis** Well, our kids stayed out of trouble, so I guess we don't have any stories. Our daughter is almost 48 now. She's in California and she's a veterinarian. We're in the process of getting a home for her. She has MS [multiple sclerosis] and she's partially disabled, but you wouldn't know it by looking at her. She swims a lot, but she can't work full-time now. She's moving back here after 20 years to live with us. She's single. We have a son in Orlando who works for the city at [Orlando] City Hall.
- Calvert** It's a funny thing about him. He played guitar for years and he had a rock band in high school and before, and he and Ricky Bowing—they used to—that room up there that's now our music room was open—it was a breezeway, and they used to practice there and I remember getting out of the car way over at her mother's house and I said, "Oh, there's somebody playing 'Proud Mary,' just like Charles and his band did." And all of a sudden I realized it was them. I decided right then that we had to enclose that breezeway and make a room out of it

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[laughs], and we've had all kinds of animals in our backyard. We've had horses there.

Phyllis Well, the horse would only stay overnight one night, but she had [inaudible] brought it in – brought it right down 46. At that time there wasn't that much traffic, and then she got ready to take it back out and it was starting to storm and I said, "You better not go now." so she left the horse in the backyard.

Calvert There was a pig back there for a while, when Robert [Conklin] had his heart surgery. She sent him a piglet from Tennessee and the pig grew up in the backyard and got huge in three months, and we had a judge there and the head of the code enforcement next door, and we had a pig in the backyard, but only for three months. Voley was sitting there on the couch talking to us one day and we were talking about Robert having to have a new valve. He needed to have heart surgery for a valve, and we were talking about the possibility of them using a pig valve, and right at the minute we said "pig," the pig went, "Oi" right behind – and he turned around and looked, but he didn't get it. He didn't understand.

Phyllis A pig valve only lasts about eight or nine years, because that's all...

Calvert They use them on older people. Now they use cowbells[?].

Phyllis He had a metal valve at the age of 17. Now he's the one that lives here in town and he works for NAPA Auto Parts, and he's a manager of parts at OIA [Orlando International Airport], the big airport down there, for the ground vehicles, not the airplanes. He's certified as an ASE [Automatic Service Excellence] mechanic, which he did for a few years, but the heart thing was too much for him.

Calvert We always said, "We have one that can fix your car and one that can fix your cat." [laughs].

Phyllis So that's the three kids, and the one in Orlando is project manager in the engineering department for the City of Orlando, and then the veterinarian daughter is going to move back here.

Calvert The story there is he wanted to be a sound engineer and he had gone to Stetson [University]. Then he kind of went to music, and he went to Denver[, Colorado] to take recording engineering. Then he decided to go to – he got accepted to go to Berkeley College for Music⁷ in Boston[, Massachusetts], and he went up there and he called me on the phone and said, "Dad, you won't believe this, but they said I have to start over as a freshman. They won't give me credits for the other stuff." And I said, "Charles, go back inside and ask a different person the same question." And he did and we just held the line open and he came back after a

⁷ Correction: Berkeley College of Music.

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little while and he said, "Yes, they said I have to start over as a freshman. I want to come home." and I said, "Okay. Come on. Under that circumstance." Anyway, then he came back and he served as a soundman for a local band that played all over the United States that went by the name of Root Boy Slim. They were really quite good.

Phyllis And [Root Boy Slim and] the Sex Change Band.

Calvert Yeah. Well, they called it that. He traveled to New York City, [New York] and Baltimore and all those places as their soundman, and he got hit on the head with a beer bottle and it was a tough, tough life, because those people live on the thin edge of everything. After that, he called up and said, "Dad, I decided I want to go back to school and be an engineer like you." [*laughs*] So he moved back.

Phyllis And of course, they accepted all his LAS [Legal Assistant Studies] stuff at University of Florida. So he got a Master's Degree and got really good grades. His sister got her veterinary medicine thing from there in 1991 too, but she wanted to go to California, because they were paying a little bit more at that time, but she didn't realize how much more expensive everything was. Having been there, the climate is good for her, because it's not as humid as here. After 20 years, and now that she's partially disabled, she feels she ought to be a little nearer her aging parents, since we're over 80 and we just think it's time to—she said one time, "Well, I think within the next five years, I want to move back to Florida for sure." I said, "Ruth Ann [Conklin], if you want us to help you move, in five years, we're going to be about 87 years old." She said, "I'd better move now, hadn't I?" I said, "Yes. I think so."

You want to tell her the story about you, Gino [Pelucci], and the fundraising?

Calvert Well, I—he doesn't even remember who I am, and I worked with him and for him for years. Even before Heathrow—way back—I did a bunch of factories for them up in other states and my cousin, Bob B.B., was the general manager for Chung[?] King, when he decided that he shouldn't be running it anymore, and he hired my cousin, who was a board member of Campbell Soups,⁸ and he was high help in things. He ran Chung[?] King, because Gino was very volatile. He would run around handing out 100 dollar bills or swearing loudly at people and stuff, and he wasn't what you would call a "consistent" manager. My cousin used to tell me that Gino had hundreds of ideas that would come into his mind all the time, and he would write my cousin notes about, "This is an idea." and at the end of the day he'd send another note: "Forget all those ideas."

Phyllis When Gino was featured at one of these Boy Scout[s of America] dinners, and he was a speaker—and this was maybe three years ago or something—Cal said he

⁸ Correction: Campbell Soup Company.

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needed to go over and say hello to Gino. He went over to say something to Gino and Gino acted like he didn't even know who he was, and then he said...

Calvert And Brenda [inaudible] was sitting there and she said, "Gino, this is Cal Conklin. He was your engineer for Heathrow. He did all the engineering in Heathrow for you." And Gino looked up at me and still no recognition. I said, "How about— you remember Bob B.B.?" And he just lit up, because he remembered that. I don't think he remembered me, but he remembered the guy who had run Chung[?] King for him.

Two stories about him that I think are kind of funny: I would attend many of his board meetings at his request. Most of them there was an accountant and a lawyer and so forth, and there were all kind of "yes-men" with him. We were having a meeting, and a young man came to make a presentation, and it wasn't long, and I knew he wouldn't be interested, but he said, "Young man, does foul language offend you?" And the young man said, "No." He said, "Why you dumb son of a bitch." He just lit into him and cussed him out up and down and back and forth. Every foul word you could think of.

When the Presbyterian Church downtown was having a building program— when they put the Fellowship Hall and they redid the sanctuary—I was the special gifts chairman. General Hutchinson was the overall chairman, and one of the people I had to call on, besides Warren Patrick and a bunch of other, was Gino Pelucci, and the only reason we did was his daughter would come to Sunday school once in a while, and the preacher was with me,⁹ and I walked in and Gino said, "Hey. I'm glad to see you." We shook hands and he said, "You've got a rendering of what you're going to do. That's good." And he got down on his hands and knees and began pointing to the rendering and telling me all of the things I should say to anyone I was presenting to. He was going to teach me how to make a presentation. "You should point out all the good features that you're going to be in this program." And then I got down on my hands and knees right there alongside him, and the preacher's standing there and they're just incredulous. You can just imagine the scene. When we got ready to finish up he said, "And now the most important thing, Cal. You must remember that when you call on people—you've got to ask for enough. Remember." And he didn't seem to realize that I was going to do it to him. I stood up and tried to recall all of the things he had said, and I went through it as well as I could, and I asked him for \$40,000, and his jaw dropped about a foot, and he said, "Cal, you asked for enough." When we bought this house, his pilot was also trying to buy it. Gino didn't really want him this close. He used to stop and talk to me all the time.

Phyllis Within the last year, when they go by—they aren't usually driving—they have a driver or something. They often wave while[?] we're out in the yard.

⁹ Virgil Bryan.

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- Calvert** He used to stop and talk, but now he's lost his recollection of what my part and background was.
- Phyllis** He had Hubert Humphrey come to his home, when Hubert was running for vice president.
- Calvert** Even when he was vice president, he was down here.
- Phyllis** They'd come from the airport and go by here, and our son had one of those etch-a-sketch things, where you put the little dots – and he hung it in the window.
- Calvert** Little Gina [Pelucci] came here to play with Ruth Ann.
- Phyllis** Gina Pelucci came over here to play with Ruth Ann, and brought her pet mouse – a little black and white thing. Of course, our daughter loved animals, and we did too, and it didn't frighten me or anything, but when she got ready to go home, she couldn't find the mouse, and we never did find that mouse. I'm sure it's hiding around here somewhere. *[laughs]*.
- Calvert** Well, one thing that is funny is that everywhere I go people tell me I look like Jimmy Carter. Well there's a picture of Jimmy Carter right up there, and when we went to Panama, we were going through customs, and as I approached the customs thing. The guy hollered out, "¡Jimmy Carter ahí!" All these people came running around, and I thought, "I'm just going to go along with it." A woman wanted to have her picture taken with me, so I put my arm around her, smiled, and took a picture with her.
- Phyllis** 'Cause he didn't know any Spanish, he couldn't say, "No, I'm not Jimmy Carter." It would sound like – it happened at the resort...
- Calvert** It happened six times on one trip. I got invited into the bar for a drink and all sorts. He's a big hero, 'cause he's the one who turned the [Panama] Canal over to them.
- Phyllis** He thought if he said no when they wanted their picture taken, and he didn't speak English, it would sound like, "I'm Mr. Big and you're paparazzi. Get away from me." So he'd just smile and let them take his picture.
- Calvert** One lady – I never did understand that. Well, I'd go shopping in Wal-Mart, and very often somebody will tap me on the shoulder and say, "Here, I'm going to go home and tell my folks that I went shopping with Jimmy Carter."
- The City of Sanford does a great deal. The county does not. The county feels they have to go to Orlando to get the big engineering firms, and it's very strange, and of course there's competition between cities and the counties, and there always has been. We started out doing both, but in your local area, you usually end up doing one or the other and we've ended up doing all the cities essentially.

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- Phyllis** We bought it out. Us[sic] and the porters and the homes bought it out and...
- Calvert** We bought it from CRS and a national firm. Clark Deets[sp] was sold to Richardson and then to CRS – Rawlins and then CRS.
- Thompson** So there were several owners before you?
- Calvert** Clark Deets was the original one I went to work for in Urbana, and my professors were the ones that started it. They resigned from the college and hired their better students, and there were three of them. A structural man, a civil man, and an environmental or sanitary man, and I was actually one of the very first ones they hired, and we made a big business out of that and got into the 200 range in the country, and then I came down here and saw it and thought it'd be good to make a branch, and then the company got sold and ended up with CRS [inaudible]. They did the big arenas. The big one in Gainesville, and they were mainly doing things in the Middle East in the [United] Arab Emirates. All of that fancy stuff there, and they had no idea what our business was here. I mean, it was all local. They just didn't understand. It wasn't the kind of business that they did, and when we decided to go into business for ourselves, I said, "We may be able to get this for a song." And the other two just wanted to leave and I said, "No. Let me have a try at it." So I went down there, and we paid \$35,000, and we got all of the new business, and they even paid us 5 percent of the collections for three years, and so they ended up – we were roughly 10 percent of their organization and they ended up paying us to take it away from them.
- Phyllis** And this was 1981, when it first became Conklin Corps.
- Calvert** And the other two worked for me.
- Thompson** And I opened up the Rib Ranch in 1981 and I retired in 2008. My husband was ill and he died last year. I was lucky to be with him at that time.

End of Interview