Interviewer:
Herbert J. Hartsook

Date:
June 23, 2016

Location:
Ravenel Office, Charleston, SC

Synopsis:
Hal Ravenel (b. 1940), brother to 1974 gubernatorial candidate Charles D. “Pug” Ravenel, reflects on his brother’s life and his role in that campaign, which ultimately saw the election of Republican James B. Edwards. This is one of the most fascinating campaigns in South Carolina history. Political newcomer Ravenel won a hotly contested Democratic primary which featured a large field. The campaign of the charismatic Ravenel made superb use of television and particularly attracted young voters. In the end, the courts ruled that Ravenel was ineligible and runner-up Bryan Dorn lost to Edwards. Edwards had defeated the widely popular William Westmoreland in the Republican Party’s first statewide primary. Westmoreland had been heavily recruited and was considered to have a real chance at being elected governor.

This transcript also includes an appendix consisting of a comment from David L. Rawle.
(Dec. 28, 2016)

Transcriber:
Mae Bradford
Ravenel: Since 1974, I have felt for a long time that somebody needs to have this [information] because in my opinion we [the Ravenel team] changed politics in South Carolina. There’s never just] one incident, but if there was one that you could point to, I think the decision that Pug made changed the politics in South Carolina, possibly forever. Well, for a long time, because there hadn’t been a Republican governor since reconstruction and-- [interview interrupted by phone call]

Hartsook: I start off all of my interviews the same way, and I ask you to tell us a little bit about your upbringing. When and where you were born, and a little bit about your parents and family.

Ravenel: Okay. My name is Hal Ravenel. I was born on February 9, 1940, in Charleston. I have an older brother, Pug Ravenel, and a younger sister named Lynne Ravenel. My father [Charles F. Ravenel] worked for the government at the naval base in North Charleston and my mother [Yvonne Marie Michel Ravenel] was a stay-at-home mom until we all got into high school and then she became the secretary at an elementary school called Charleston Day School, which went from one to eighth and she had a wonderful time over there, I’ll tell you that. We were born and raised Catholic, went to Cathedral Grammar School and then went to Bishop England High School; and my brother Pug graduated from Bishop England High School and I quit Bishop England after three years—for reasons that don’t pertain to what we’re talking about—and went to Charleston High School and then went to the University of South Carolina, [and I later attended the Harvard Business School]. My sister went to Ashley Hall and then went to the College of Charleston. My mom and dad had gone to the College of Charleston. Pug got a newspaper scholarship to Exeter for a post-grad year and went up there. Then after Exeter went to Harvard College, and then went to Harvard Business School.
We had a great childhood, particularly me and Pug; that’s always what my mother used to say, [the two brothers were inseparable] me and Pug are going to do this because I just felt, loved him to death and he was always—not sometimes or most of the time, always—nice to me without exception. In any event, when we played at Moultrie Playground, which is on Ashley Avenue and was one block away from my house, and in-between us—our home and Moultrie Playground—was Baker Hospital. Baker Hospital had an emergency room on the ground floor, sort of in the basement around the side of the hospital. All of us boys at Moultrie Playground had a charge account at the emergency room there because we were in there, with somebody, at least once or twice a week—cut, broken their arm and everything, it’s amazing. And I had the best time at Moultrie Playground playing a sport every day. We played every single day. And if it was raining, we were in the clubhouse playing ping pong, which is a great hand-eye coordinated sport. So, really 365, we were doing something athletically. I probably should have been studying, but I didn’t and Pug didn’t need to study because he just had it. But we had a ball. And I think that is largely due to why he was so successful athletically was because we ran and played 365 days a year.

And Momma and Daddy made me and Pug work from the time we were twelve—old enough to get a newspaper route—and we saved our money. We would collect for the paper on Saturday morning and take the money and give it to Daddy and back then he would give us a dime. And it cost nine cents to get in to the movie and that left us both a penny to buy a Mary Jane or something like a Squirrel [Nut Zipper] or some [other] piece of candy like that. Every Saturday afternoon we’d ride our bikes and go to the movies. They had movies like “Captain Marvel” and “Superman,” “Roy Rogers,” all that sort of stuff, we had the best time. And we just had a, basically, an ideal growing up. We loved what we were doing. We had a good time. If I could do it again I would’ve been more inclusive of my sister than we were, but I was a young boy and we didn’t play with girls back then. So she got left out of the loop. Daddy was pretty strict in retrospect, I guess, on balance, it’s better to err that way than the other way because God knows what would’ve happened to us. We needed to be home when the streetlights came on in the summer and in those days you didn’t negotiate or plea bargain or plead or beg or cry or anything else. When my father said this is what you do, if you didn’t do it, something bad would happen to you. And I didn’t question whether or not it was going to happen, it’d happen every time.
So we lived one block from Colonial Lake and spent a lot of time fishing and crabbing and shrimping and everything on the lake, falling in, and swimming in the summertime a little bit. Went to Cathedral Grammar School, which we could ride our bikes to, which was about six blocks away. Went to a dancing school when we were about 8 or 9, I guess. We just had a great, great life.

Hartsook: That’s great. Now was the whole family politically aware or when did you become interested in politics?

Ravenel: All right. Let me just tell you that we went to church every Sunday—every Sunday and every holy day—and we went as a family, which is a good thing to do. And anyway I told you about the private schools, private Catholic schools were very tough. The nuns and the priest that taught there, they were tough. And I don’t think that’s all bad either, in hindsight. But they would wrap you on the knuckles if you would talk and do it in class. They’d come up behind you, and, with a ruler, “bang,” hit you on the knuckles and it hurt. Anyway, we had a reasonably strict home-life and school-life in terms of obeying the rules. The private school, the grammar school was good. Part of the problem—at least that I had and I think Pug did too a little bit—is that in the Catholic High School of Bishop England, back then, boys went to lunch in the back yard and girls went to lunch in the front yard. There was no co-mingling. And, when we changed classes, in between classes, the boys went up one set of stairs and the girls went up the other set of stairs. And there was no talking in the hall between classes. So I don’t know that all of that was necessarily a good thing, but it was what it was. I didn’t spend a whole lot of time particularly worrying about it because I wasn’t that much interested in girls anyway, so I was playing sports and trying to pass.

In high school at Bishop England, Pug was quarterback and he was two years ahead of me. And when I came, Pug was an absolutely remarkable athlete and football player. A combination of his athletic skill but also his intellect was smart. He was smart about the way he played football. And I’ll give you an example of why I am so endeared to him. And I might be taking a little too long, but I think on this subject it sets a background of what kind of child he was when he was young. The funny thing about him was he bought a [Ford] Model A with his money from carrying the papers and he’d take people, friends, and we’d all go ride around in the car and if anybody cussed he made them put a dime in a cup he had. And if you said a cuss word
you put a dime in or got kicked out of the car. And that was really sort of unusual back then. But he was a leader in school and everybody looked up to him everybody loved and admired him. And as a football player he was extremely good.

When I got there my sophomore year—his senior year—I was playing in a game—my first game—and I was a halfback and he was a quarterback and we ran what they call an option play, which the quarterback takes the ball. We ran a “T” formation, which meant two halfbacks were behind him and he would fake to the halfback coming in to the line and then he’d run down parallel to the line of scrimmage. And if the defensive end went for him he’d pitch the ball to the trailing [half]back. And if the defensive end went for the halfback, he’d keep it and cut inside. Well, he called that play and I was trailing him and the defensive end went for me so he cut inside and so I followed him and he’s running down the field—this is in the middle obviously, in the middle of the game—he’s running down the field. It’s my first game and I’m trailing him to make sure that no body catches him from behind and he looks back and sees me and sees nobody [else] and he turns around and laterals the ball to me so that I can score my first touchdown. Now who would have the presence of mind in the middle of a damn play, running for the touchdown, to turn around and lateral the ball to his younger brother? That is the kind of mind, in that kind of environment, to be able to think through and process that is just incredible. And so it’s stuff like that that made me say my God, the love that I have for him is just unusual.

Then he finished Bishop England, great career, and he played in what they call the North-South high school football game. He was a quarterback for the South and they beat the North,
which was favored, and Pug was the MVP of the game. He was All-State, MVP of the North-South football game, went to Exeter on a football scholarship—I mean, well they didn’t have athletic scholarships, it was a newspaper scholarship—and he goes up there and plays one year for Exeter as starting quarterback, they go undefeated, he is first-string all New England prep quarterback. Some of this stuff is basically irrelevant, but he probably had twenty-five college football offers and he ended up going to Harvard. And at Harvard he was All-Ivy League and honorable mention All-American quarterback. And what very few people know is that he was All-Ivy League in baseball. He was president of the senior class, dean’s list, had two jobs while he was at Harvard—he carried [delivered] the New York Times on Sunday morning after playing football Saturday afternoon and then he drove the boat for Harvard’s crew coach on the Charles River. He would drive the boat while the coach was coaching the kids. He had an incredible career at Harvard. [Recently, he was elected to the Harvard Varsity Club Hall of Fame.] Basically everybody knew him. So then when he got out of there, he had a fellowship to travel around the world for a year, which he did. And then, one of his friends at Harvard went halfway around with him — Peter Benchley, the guy that wrote Jaws. And he met Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India], he met all of these people. He did that and wrote back every month, he had to send back a paper to the school. Then he came back, went to the Harvard Business School, and finished there and went to Donaldson Lufkin [Donaldson, Lufkin, Jenrette, Inc.] in New York and worked there at the investment banking firm for about ten years. And it was during some time in there that he started to think about politics.
My family was not politically involved in any way, although my father followed politics through the paper and on TV a little bit. But my mother and me and my sister, we didn't really follow politics at all particularly.

I became politically active when Joe Riley, who was the Mayor of Charleston for forty years, ran for the [South Carolina] House when he was thirty-two years old. I delivered brochures for him around the neighborhood and stuff like that. I did that for him but I didn’t [really] get involved until Pug ran for governor. And he ran as a Democrat. I didn’t decide to become really politically involved until Pug decided to run for governor in 1974.

Hartsook: How did you first hear that he was going to run?

Ravenel: He called me. I used to go to New York and stay with him all the time up there and go out to South Port, Connecticut with him where his wife’s family had a home. So he and I were very close and stayed in touch all of our lives. I found out when he told me that he was thinking about moving back to Charleston and I was ecstatic and then he said because I think I want to run for Governor of South Carolina. And I remember saying to him that’s pretty risky, you’re skipping a lot of steps in-between. Why are you going to do that? And he said, “Well, I don’t particularly want to be in the [state] House or the Senate, I want to run for Governor.” The governor’s job is administrative more so than it is legislative. In the state of South Carolina the Governor doesn’t really have any political power other than the power of persuasion. And so the legislature back then were [Senators] Rembert Dennis [and Marion] Gressette, and those boys, they ran it. But in any event, he felt like he had the business background to be the governor and run the administrative office of running the state of South Carolina. And so he decided to come back here, and we were thrilled.

He came back here and Dick Jenrette, one of the founders of Donaldson, Lufkin, Jenrette, agreed to let Pug open an office, a branch if you will, of DLJ which consists of just him in Charleston, to help him get started. So Pug came back here and I can’t remember how long it took him to literally start actively campaigning between when he came back here and when he started campaigning, but it wasn’t too long, maybe a year or so. He told me and my reaction was I had always been looking up to Pug and there was never, I mean literally never, anything that he wanted to do that he didn’t achieve. And so when he told me that he was going to run for
Governor it never dawned on me that he wouldn’t win. He won everything he ever tried to do. And so I said great because I thought that he would [win.]

In 1972, I went to work for Charles Frasier at the Sea Pines Company in Hilton Head. I was there. Charles had gone to Yale Law School and he loved my brother and so when Pug announced that he was going to run for Governor, Charles gave me a year off with pay and with access to the company plane any time I wanted to go or help Pug campaign. I went to USC and was always here [living in South Carolina] and I knew people all over the place. So I left Hilton Head and moved to Columbia and stayed there for a year. And mainly what I did was, I would speak. Pug, his wife Mollie, and I were campaigning most every day. When Pug could not go to something, Marvin Chernoff, his campaign manager, would send either Mollie or me. And I spoke all over the state at all kinds of rallies and tried to help Pug in that way. So my role was, I think advisor is too complementary of my intellect and political knowledge, but I was there to help campaign for Pug. And I knew all of these people so I would call if we were going to town and I knew somebody from the University that lived in that town, so I’d call them and get them to help us do whatever. But I was there twenty-four/seven. I was right with him.

Marvin Chernoff had just been the campaign manager for a guy named Howard Metzenbaum who won a [U.S.] Senate seat in Ohio. And Marvin had just finished that campaign. I don’t know how Pug found out about Marvin, but Marvin came down and interviewed him and said “Alright, could you come down and do that [for me]?’’ So Marvin moved to Columbia and then Pug had roomed at the Harvard Business School with a guy named David Rawle. And he was working in New York for Jock Whitney [John Hay Whitney] at Corinthian Broadcasting and Pug asked David to come down and try to help him with the media stuff and everything. And David ended up moving here and David is responsible, in my opinion, for the whole electronic media campaign that was the first time that the television and radio—particularly the TV—was really used in the state of South Carolina. So it was a brain thrust of
David Rawle, and maybe to a lesser degree Marvin Chernoff. Marvin was brilliant and so was David. So David brought this whole thing, just incredibly, into people’s homes. And because Pug was thirty-six, I think, at the time, he was young and had young children. . . . I still have people that I see that were at the University of South Carolina or Clemson or somewhere in college at that time, tell me that they remember working for him on the campus and they were just turned on by him. So, I think maybe somewhat like JFK and Jackie were, they really turned on younger people.

Hartsook: That’s actually the analogy I make every time I talk about that campaign [comparing the impact of the Ravenel campaign in energizing a new generation of political activists to that of John F. Kennedy].

Ravenel: He has the same charisma and educational background, and Mollie, his wife, was incredibly attractive and intelligent. She went to Smith College in Massachusetts, very bright, very smart, very pretty, had three children, young children, they were cute. I mean it was just a perfect package. And there was another guy named Peter Hart who was a Democratic pollster and Marvin or David knew Peter Hart. They called him and asked him if he’d come down and he did. And he came down and he met Pug and he just loved him. But everyone who ever met him [Pug] was inspired by him and admired him and all of that sort of stuff, because he never bragged. You know? He never talked about himself. I mean he never said, “you know, I was honorable mention All-American quarterback,” he never ever mentioned anything that he ever achieved to anybody, and I think that’s an endearing quality that people love. So I think it’s one
of the things that attracts people to him. So I would think that the overall campaign strategy was a new approach to politics in South Carolina. And a new approach to including all of the people in politics in South Carolina.

And Pug and Mollie and Marvin—probably—and David Rawle wrote this book, *Program for Excellence in South Carolina*. This book tells you what Pug wanted to do for the state of South Carolina. He was for education and cared about people and the racial situation and all of that. He was what I would consider a typical New England, New York, Northeastern, Ivy League educated, liberal—socially more of a liberal but fiscally conservative, from the Harvard Business School. This book tells you what Pug wanted to do for South Carolina. I think in terms of that, what his goals were you could get a better story out of that book than me trying to do that.

In terms of campaign strategy, Marvin Chernoff and David and Pug and I, we met all of the time, and Mollie. Every day, all the time. We were meeting about who do we go to see? Do we do this? Do we do that? And we were trying to play a game and go to see a lot of the big hitters in the state of South Carolina and we were able to convince some of them to support us even with the campaign opposition, including Bryan Dorn, who was a twenty-plus year congressman from Greenwood, Earle Morris, was the sitting Lieutenant Governor in the state of South Carolina, Jim Edwards was a seated senator in the Senate, and some of the, you know, Marvin Dukes and Nick Ziegler were, we didn’t really particularly focus on them. We felt that either Bryan Dorn—or at least I did, I can’t really speak for other people—so I felt like Bryan Dorn and Earle Morris were really where it was going to be. And John Bolt Culbertson and [Maurice] Bessinger, I just didn’t think that any of the other candidates other than Bryan Dorn or Earle Morris would play in to the thing at all.

**Hartsook:** Did you fear [Republican candidate and retired Army General William] Westmoreland at all? He had such name recognition.

**Ravenel:** I forgot about him, but we didn’t fear him, or I didn’t. He was a nice guy. I knew him later, but back then I was only thirty-two years old or something like that. He was the commanding general in Vietnam, you know. I didn’t have any contact particularly with him until later. General Westmoreland was a wonderful, patriotic guy, but I didn’t think that he was
a threat. My momma told me a long time ago that if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say
anything at all---

Hartsook: My mother said that all the time.

Ravenel: Right, so all of these guys as far as I know—John Bolt [Culbertson], Bessinger—all of those guys, nice guys; I just didn’t feel like. . . . I thought it [Pug’s challenge] was going to come from Dorn or Morris. The most compelling issues, again, are in my opinion, education—and you’ll get it out of that book. Herb, one day, Mollie is in bed over in Mount Pleasant—prolific reader and all—she’s reading her League of Women Voters’ handbook. And, at like midnight, she sits straight up in the bed and wakes Pug up and says, “My gosh! You aren’t going to believe this. There’s a residency requirement in the state of South Carolina that says not for the U.S. Senate or for Congress or for Lt.—I don’t know about Lt. Governor—but Governor is the only elective office that you have to be a resident of the state of South Carolina five years prior to.” And they’d already announced by that time, you know, the campaign had a headquarters, had Marvin and all of them, and nobody even thought about it. And I’ll tell you, Herb, in my opinion, back then the answer to a lot of questions about why didn’t the establishment do this or do that to Pug—you know, attack him or what have you—they discounted him just the way I discounted all of these guys. They didn’t think he had a chance. They didn’t even consider that he could possibly beat the establishment. So they left him alone basically.
And so the most compelling issue, then, became getting legally cleared to be the governor of South Carolina. You can run, I guess, all you want to, but you’re not going to get elected if you can’t serve. So they went and hired Columbia lawyer Heyward Belser [Duncan Clinch Heyward Belser] who was supposed to be one of the very best constitutional lawyers in the state of South Carolina. So we went to Heyward Belser and he said he’d take the job.

And, long story short, we got the case heard before Judge [John Berkley] Grimball in the Circuit Court. And Heyward Belser, being as bright as he was, tried to get the state Supreme Court to inherit it [claim original jurisdiction] so that it couldn’t be appealed later. And the Supreme Court, said “we’re not going to do that.” That’s how little they regarded Pug at the time. Because they could’ve pulled him in there and ruled that he was ineligible and that was the end of that. Right? They didn’t do it. So that shows they didn’t give [Pug] any consideration or hope of winning.

And so that was a mistake that they made in terms of not—I think they called it claiming original jurisdiction—and pulling that case into the Supreme Court. They could’ve ended Pug’s life right there. So they didn’t. Judge Grimball ruled that he was eligible although he had left South Carolina when he graduated from high school at, say, eighteen and went to Exeter for a year, Harvard for four years, around the world for a year, Harvard Business School for two years—that’s eight—and Wall Street for seven or eight years, so he’s gone fifteen years plus or minus. He was appointed by Lyndon Johnson to be a White House Fellow, went to Washington as a White House Fellow for a year. So he was gone for fifteen years plus or minus, but what Belser argued was that it was all educational. That his heart was in South Carolina the whole time. He was born and raised here and that was a learning experience. Albeit that it was not always been in the classroom, it was an educational experience. And so he ruled that Pug was eligible to run in the Democratic primary. And it’s very critical that this point be made that Judge Grimball allowed him to run in the Democratic primary. And I’ll tell you why in a second.

So, everybody says, “Phew! Man, was that great?” I’ll digress just a second, when Peter Hart, the pollster, came down to Columbia to interview Pug about doing polls for them and stuff like that, he was told Pug’s background and knew all about him—knew where he came from, grew up in public schools in the South, going up North, going to school, working on Wall Street,
doing all of these things he was able to do. Peter Hart made the statement to us that Pug was one of maybe eight or ten people in the world who had all of the qualifications and the stars aligned in the right way, to be elected the President of the United States. And I believe that, still, today. I believe that. If all of that stuff hadn’t happened. . . . Pug believed it; I believed it; everybody believed it. And everybody that worked on his campaign was happy and enthusiastic and young and just excited and [had] energy and just absolutely loved the process.

So we get the approval from Judge Grimball, and we go about the campaign. . . . Mollie and Pug, and I went all over the state. I’d ride with Pug in the car in parades on the Fourth of July in these little towns and we’d be waving and all of this other stuff. . . .

Hartsook: How often would the three of you be all together as opposed to splitting up so that you could do three events?

Ravenel: Almost never. I mean we were together when we were strategizing, but very seldom. Mollie and Pug and I were in three different places most of the time until we’d meet with Marvin and David to plan something.

So we’re at the point where he is able to run. The interaction among the candidates during the primary was very cordial. All of these guys were nice and polite and they were all old—not Jim Edwards as much because he was a dentist—was my dentist—Jim Edwards pulled three of my four wisdom teeth and I knew him until he died. Loved him, respected him, nice guy, love his wife.
When Pug and I were growing up, when we went to the playground, from the first day we ever went to the playground to play whatever it was—baseball, basketball, football, hockey on skates, you name it—it never ever entered our mind that we would lose. And so that’s why that feeling—going into this race—there wasn’t any question in my mind that we were going to win. I didn’t care who these guys were, I didn’t know them, I didn’t care about them, I mean, not that I didn’t care, they were opponents, I just knew that we’d win. We always won. So that’s the way the whole campaign was. We knew we were going to win this thing. And Pug made you feel that way. And his history reinforced that because he always won.

So the interaction among the candidates was great. I’ll tell you a funny story. I remember talking at a black church in Florence, South Carolina and I was on the stage, I’m thirty-two years old, and all of the candidates were there but Pug. And I was sitting between General Westmoreland and Earle Morris and everybody got ten minutes or whatever it was to talk. It was hot in the church and I’ll never forget—still remember today—I’m sitting there next to Earle and he was nice—all of these guys were nice to me. I mean they knew that I was just Pug’s brother and they were all very polite to me. I was sitting there listening to the other guy, but I’d heard him so many times that I didn’t really focus on it, but I just sort of glanced to the left and looked at Earle, and Earle had a toupee on. And the pad that you had to glue or what have you to keep the toupee on his bald head had slipped down under the toupee on his forehead and was sticking out about an inch or an inch and a half like a little triangle. And I’ll never forget the whole rest of the night until I spoke—and then when I sat down, I kept looking at that pad wondering whether that thing was going to keep on sliding. And then, I said to myself, “Should I tell Earle right now?” Just elbow him. . .? Because I assumed he’d want to know, and just to be nice. But I decided I can’t do that while we’re all on the stage. And then I said, “When we finish, then I’m going to tell him.” And then I thought, no, I can’t do that either. I didn’t want to embarrass him. But that was one of the funnier little things that happened. And these funny things happened all of the time.

The most critical part of this thing is coming—I hope I’m not taking too long. . . So the debates were all over the. . . I don’t remember them, Herb, as being a debate as much as I do being a meeting—meeting the candidates. They didn’t debate each other particularly, they made their speech to the audience to pitch themselves. And, for the most part, left everyone else alone
to do their pitch. And then, if there were any questions from the floor for anybody, they would answer them, but there wasn’t any of this attacking each other on stage the way it is today, in my opinion. All of those guys were gentlemen—they were polite and nice to me. Anyway, so those meetings that we had were in practically every city in the state over the year or two.

Was I surprised by the impact [reading my question]? I don’t know why I wasn’t, but I wasn’t surprised by it. Probably to a fault because I never expected anything different. I never thought that when we came to a town that people wouldn’t turn up. I mean, I knew people in all of these towns—Pug didn’t—but I’d call my friends and they’d get their friends and everybody would come out. People that I didn’t even know would come out because Pug was so dynamic and they wanted to hear what he had to say and I think that in a weird sort of way it reminds me of today and why [Republican presidential nominee] Donald Trump is where he is when he shouldn’t be where he is. But the people had had it and I think that the people in South Carolina were ready for change. The old politics, they were tired of it. And the younger generation was coming along and Pug had a group in the House and in the Senate that they called the “Young Turks.” And the Young Turks were Senator Dewey Wise, Senator Isadore Lourie, and Senator Dick Riley, House member Joe Riley, House member Jean Toal…. Well, anyway, you know who all of them are. [This term has been applied to many over the years. The Young Turks were led by Dick Riley and are typically considered to include Harry A. Chapman, Jr. (b. 1936), William W. Doar (b. 1935); Isadore E. Lourie (1932-2003); Travis Medlock (b. 1934); Richard W. Riley (b. 1933); Alexander M. Sanders, Jr. (b. 1939); Thomas E. Smith, Jr., (b. 1938); and Thomas Dewey Wise (b. 1939).] And look at what they ended up doing. You can imagine that they were smart and on the verge themselves of doing what they did in politics in the state of South Carolina. And they all loved Pug and were very faithful to him and they didn’t care what the establishment said. You know what I mean? They were going for it and they believed in it. So we had a tremendous amount of help from some of the political guys, but they were the Young Turks, they weren’t necessarily meeting with Marion Gressette every day, you know, to plan today’s strategy.

So, they have the election and he wins the damn Democratic primary. Excuse my cuss word. We were just euphoric. And what happened. . . . I’m trying to make sure that I chronologically get [everything] in the right place. . . . The hierarchy in a group, the real political
power in the political Democratic Party, somewhere in there, when Pug won, they . . . The week when Mollie read that we had the residency problem, Heyward Belser got somebody to file a friendly suit in the circuit court, tried to get it in the Supreme Court but they wouldn’t do it, to show cause of why Pug should be able to run [for Governor in the Democratic Primary] and Judge Grimball ruled that he could run. So now, after Pug won the primary, [Governor] John West called Marvin Chernoff and said, “I am having a reception at the Governor’s Mansion from 6 to 8, Monday through Friday, to thank all of my political friends and everybody, and we want Pug to stand in the reception line and meet all of these people that he doesn’t know.”

And Marvin asked Pug, and Pug said, “I’ve been running for two years, and I can’t do it. The election is over and I’ve just got to have a break.” So, he tried to talk him into it and Pug just said, “I just can’t help it, I can’t do it.”

So Marvin called John West back and said that Mollie was going with Pug somewhere [to take a break from the campaign]. So Marvin says to John West, “How about Hal, Pug’s brother?”

And I had met the governor a couple of times but not really. And he said, “Okay, That’ll be good. That’ll serve somewhat the same purpose.” So they told me to be over at the Governor’s Mansion at quarter to six every night for five nights. So I went over there and in the receiving line was Lois, John’s wife, John, and then me. And the people were coming in there—a couple of hundred every night—and when they’d shake hands and come down the line they’d say, “This is Hal Ravenel, Pug’s brother,” and delighted to meet you and all of that kind of stuff. So we did that, and then every night. John would ask me to stay and have dinner. So I did. And two nights we went out to restaurants and the rest of the nights we ate right there. Me, John, and Lois. So I got to be good
friends with them [chuckling]. They knew I wasn’t a political animal or anything like that, they weren’t mad at me or anything.

So, anyway that’s over. And then, the strategy comes into play. Which is . . . . somebody in the hierarchy somewhere, wasn’t a guy on the street, gets Ben Dekle [Ben H. “Friendly Ben” Dekle, SC radio personality] to file suit against Pug to show cause as to why he should be allowed to run [for governor] in the general election. That avoids the double jeopardy because he had already had a friendly suit as to why he should be able to run in the primary. So they, very astutely, decided, “We’ll file a separate suit about the general election—since it’s a different election.” And this time, [the Supreme Court] claims original jurisdiction and pulls the damn thing and rules that Pug is ineligible. The Court wouldn’t do that the first time because they didn’t think he’d ever get there. But this time, a regular suit ended Pug’s ability to run in the general election and represent the Democratic Party.

So then, they have a mini-convention and when we go to the mini-convention, they vote for the runner-up. And the guy who got the next votes next to Pug was Bryan Dorn. So they had all of this fussing and fighting about who is going to be the candidate and Bryan ends up being the candidate. And Bryan, again, all of these guys treated me very nicely. I don’t know that they might have said when I wasn’t around, but they were all wonderful gentlemen. Bryan Dorn was wonderful. In fact, his daughter, Debbie Dorn, worked for Pug when he ran again against [incumbent U.S. Senator] Strom Thurmond. So we are sitting there, David, Marvin, Pug, and I, and they elect Bryan Dorn. And so we go home and I said, “Well, I guess that’s it.”

And so we’re sort of shutting things down and I’m going back to Hilton Head to work at Sea Pines. I don’t exactly know how it came up, but Pug decided with the help, I guess, of maybe David and Marvin—I don’t know if they were there with him to make this decision or not, I wasn’t—but Pug made the decision that he was not going to support Bryan Dorn. And so I was already sort of out of there going back to Hilton Head because I had to work, and I’m thinking, I don’t know about that, but I’ve got to get out of here. The thing is over and I have got to get back to work.

But I’m there a day and a half or so later packing up my stuff and the phone rings and it’s John West. And John says, “Hal, it’s John West.” I said, “Hey Governor, good to hear from you.” He said, “Would you mind coming over to my office?” And I said, “Certainly.” So I get
in my car and I go over there. This is really the heart of the story that I wanted to try and get to people. When I get there, the secretary says that he’s waiting for me and I walk in the office there and I look over to the sofa and there’s [Senate leaders] Marion Gressette and Rembert Dennis sitting on the sofa. And I said to John, “Whatever it is that I did, I didn’t do it on purpose.” [laughing] And he laughed and he said, “You know the senators.” And I said, “Yes I do, it’s nice to see you.” And I went over there and shook their hands. And we said a few little pleasantries and John says, “Hal, word has reached us that your brother is not going to support Bryan Dorn.” And I said, “I think that’s right, but I also think it’s a mistake.” And he said, “Why?” I said, “Well, because he has run on the Democratic ticket and the Democratic nominee—regardless of why—is Bryan Dorn. And if you’re a Democrat you need to support the Democratic candidate. It’s just simple—to me.” And he said, “Well we happen to agree with you.”

Then we talked for a while and he said, “Let me tell you this, we need you to go back and convince your brother to stump the state with Bob McNair [former governor Robert E. McNair]. We’ve got a plane already lined up. We need your brother and Bob McNair.” He might have said himself, but I don’t think so because he was the governor and I don’t think that he can particularly do it. But he said, “We want your brother and Bob McNair to stump the state—every city for Bryan. If he does that, and asks his people to vote for him, Bryan will win. If he doesn’t, there’s a chance he won’t win because of the backlash.” And he said, “The three of us tell you right now, I give you my word, that four years from now,” — because that was before Dick Riley became the governor, you couldn’t succeed yourself — “when Bryan is out, we promise you that Pug will be the governor of South Carolina.” He said, “Do you believe that we can deliver on that promise?” And I looked at the three of them and I said, “Yup, I honestly do.” And I said, “I’ll tell you John, I don’t know the senators, but I know you and Lois, and I don’t believe you’d lie to me.” And they all three said, “We won’t.”

I said, “You know, this makes me feel really great because if Pug is going to do all of the things that he says he wants to do for the state of South Carolina,” meaning in that book, “he’d have the platform from which to launch it. I think that he’d win the governorship four years from now. I don’t think that the people will go away.” So they said, “Go back and talk to him.”
So I went back to the headquarters in Columbia, and they were there, David, Marvin Chernoff, and Pug, and I said, “I need to talk to y’all. Can we ride around?” So we all get in the car and I told them where I had been and what the offer was and there was all of this talk about, well, you know they can change their mind, they could do this, they could do that, and all. And I said, “Sure, I mean anything can happen.” I mean I was just so much less sophisticated, if you will, to them. I was more black and white. If you want to do these things for the state of South Carolina, you’ve got to have a platform. You can’t have that platform for four years because the courts ruled that you couldn’t and so if these guys tell you that you can have it four years from now, you’re off and running. And four years from now, you’ll only be forty years old.

And they went back and forth, then Pug said, “You know, I spent two years telling the people in the state of South Carolina why Bryan Dorn wasn’t the best guy for the job.” And I said, “Pug, I was there with you. What we did was tell people in the State of South Carolina why you were the best guy for the job. That’s what I told them. I didn’t tell them that Bryan Dorn was the worst or a bad guy, or any of the rest of them. And so I think that you ought to do this for those reasons. You’re a Democrat, you lost, I can’t help how it happened but it’s a fact, and four years from now, you’ll be the Governor, and you’re only forty years old. So it’s just as black and white, to me, as that.”

Round and around and around we go. And at the end of the damn hour or whatever it was, it was me against the three of them. So we finally said, well, we aren’t getting anywhere. Now, Marvin Chernoff is dead, but I suggest that you talk to David Rawle to make sure that he concurs. [see appendix] My memory could have been off or something. I don’t think so, but it
could. And, I don’t want to say anything that isn’t true. If it can be verified, that’s great. John West is dead, Marvin is dead, Pug can’t remember anything, so David and I were the only other two in the meeting. Anyway, so I said, “Okay. I just am so sad and disappointed.”

So I called John on the phone and said, “John, can I come see you?” He said sure. So I went over there and when I go in the room there’s Marion and Rembert sitting on the sofa again. And I said, “Guys, I want you to know that I did everything I could to convince Pug to stump [with] Bob McNair for the Democratic candidate for governor, and I couldn’t make him do it.” And they looked at me and they said, “Hal, I believe you did the best you could.” I said, “I did. I did everything I could. Because I think that it was the best thing for him [Pug] and it was the best thing for the people in the state of South Carolina. That’s what I thought.” And they said, “Well, you’re probably right, but it is what it is.”

After that meeting, he never won any office in South Carolina. And you know all of the stuff about talking about the Senate and them [members of the Senate] saying that the Senate was mad at him because he thought they were the den of thieves and all of that. I remember some of that, but at that time I believed that it was probably true. So I didn’t focus on it particularly. You know what I mean? In hindsight I probably wouldn’t have said those things. I’d do what Strom Thurmond did. When Pug ran against Strom Thurmond, Strom Thurmond never brought Pug’s name up. He said, “I’m not going to give him any more exposure.” He never mentioned Pug. [In 1978, Ravenel ran for the US Senate, easily winning the Democratic primary, but losing to SC’s incumbent senior senator, Strom Thurmond, 44.4% to 55.6%] And so, I think that Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are making [a mistake] by not telling the people in this country what they want to do for America. Forget telling them what the other guy is or isn’t. People aren’t stupid, they can find out for themselves what the other guy is. Don’t tell me how I should think the other guy is. Tell me about you.

Anyway, I just couldn’t make it happen. And I came back, and packed up and went back to Hilton Head. And when Pug ran later against Strom Thurmond, I remember saying to myself, in the midst of really working, I’m not doing this again the way I did it. I can’t take off for a year and deal with everything. I’ll go to a few things here and there the best I can. But I’ll tell you the honest truth, Herb, I think, in retrospect, my heart wasn’t in it because I thought he should’ve been the governor. I thought we had it there and we had a chance to be the governor.
And I don’t know, I don’t want this to come out because it sounds wrong, but I think he blew it. You know what I’m saying? I don’t know, but in my mind, just between me and you, I thought he made a huge mistake. I thought that Strom Thurmond had been in there for ninety years and I thought, you can’t beat that guy. It was crazy. Pug gets a call, [and I go with Pug to meet President Carter in the White House] to talk to the President about running against Strom Thurmond. Pug always asked me to go. It was just remarkable.

So I went up [to Washington] with Pug, and Pug and Jimmy Carter and I sat in the Oval Office for about an hour and I can’t even hardly remember what was going on. I was sitting there in that chair looking at the president of the United States in the Oval Office. My favorite saying about anything like that—like when we went to play Augusta National, or we’d go meet the president of the United States—Pug and I would look at each other and say, “This is a long way from Moultrie playground.” And that was our favorite saying to each other when we were in such a place, “It’s a long way from Moultrie playground.” [President Carter asked Pug to run for the United States Senate.]

The other favorite thing that we had, Herb, some people back in the old days, if you did something wrong they’d call you a jackass. And so we used to call each other jackasses. And so Pug and I have shortened it to Jack. So we call each other Jack. And some friends of mine ask, “What the hell is Jack?” So we told them and now they call me Jack Junior. [Laughing].

But I think that to run against Thurmond was a bad call because Thurmond was an icon. He had been in there for years, it just couldn’t be done. And so Carter asks us up there and he says, “Well Pug, you need to know what’s going on in the Middle East. I want you to take a
There’s a man named Hamilton Jordan who was his White House Chief of Staff from Georgia. “I’m going to get Hamilton to set you up on a UJA [United Jewish Appeal] mission to Israel to find out what’s going on over there.” And he set up a meeting and Pug asked, “Do you mind if Hal goes with me?” And he said, “No.”

I mean, again, it’s unbelievable. [The President of the United States arranged our trip. Pug and I] fly with the UJA mission over to Tel Aviv and we meet with the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Just Pug, me and him. We go to Jordan and meet the U.S. Ambassador to Jordan. We go to Egypt and meet the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt. And we find out all of this stuff. Go up into the Golan Heights. They arranged for us to meet with the tank commander who commanded the battle [called] the Six Days War and kicked the Syrians back down into Syria. They took us to the air base where they had F-4 Phantom jets, they souped them up and they had them in a hanger and the hanger had an elevator where they took them underground so they couldn’t be blown up at all. It’s unbelievable all of the stuff that I was able to be a part of.

But anyway, Pug didn’t win [the governor’s race] and later he decided to run for Congress. [In 1980, Ravenel lost against Thomas F. Hartnett (b. 1941) in the race to succeed retiring 1st District congressman Mendel Davis, 48.3% to 51.7%. Hartnett had served in the SC House from 1965 to 1973; the S.C. Senate from 1973 to 1981, and went on to serve in Congress from 1981 to 1987.] Well, Tommy Hartnett, who we went to Bishop England with, beat him. Tommy ran as a Republican and he beat Pug and Pug never ran again.

Pug lost and everything in Pug’s life from that point on went south. He had an incredible life [up to that point]. And from [age] forty-five to seventy-eight, it’s been an almost literally vertical up and then vertical down. [Most tragically, in 1995, Ravenel pled guilty to bank fraud conspiracy and served eleven months in federal prison.] It’s the saddest thing in the world for me after loving him all my life.

We’ve had some things go on that had to do with money that Pug owed me and some stuff like that and I finally—through prayer and help and time—got over that and took the note and marked it paid-in-full, notarized it and gave it to him because it only brought unhappiness and divided us. So we’ve had a couple of ups and downs, not much. I used to go visit him when he was in prison and, you know, he’s my brother—always was and always will be—and I love him to death because of the way he treated me all of our lives. I believe that God controls
everything and he made Pug the way he is and he had a path for Pug and a plan for Pug and this is the plan. And so the only thing that I can do at this point in time, with Pug having been diagnosed with cancer, is to love him. To live with what could have happened just doesn’t do you any good. It serves no purpose except to destroy you. If you hate, that destroys you, not the other person, because they don’t care whether you hate them or not, it just eats you alive. After his loss in the Democratic primary, his failure to believe that John West and Marion and Rembert would’ve kept their word, those two decisions, to not back Dorn and then to not believe what [would have and] could’ve happened in four years, killed him. [Those two decisions ended his political career and helped turn the state from a Democratic to a Republican state.] Pug is academically and street-wise smart as he can be, it just didn’t work. But I’m happy and I want him to be happy for the rest of the time God gives him on this earth and I’ll do anything for him.

[Recording continues through a side conversation, then interview resumes]

I’ll tell you, it’s a funny thing that I look at Pug and everybody and what you could do or not do and at the end of the day, Herb, in my opinion, it’s a fact that we crucified the only perfect guy who ever came here, so we all make mistakes and God knows I’ve made many, many more than Pug, so I’m not saying this to criticize anybody or hurt anybody’s feelings, I’m trying to just be historically factual. In hindsight, Pug should’ve taken John West’s offer. But, you know, it is what it is.

Hartsook: It must just be gut wrenching though when you think what should’ve been and what could’ve been.

Ravenel: When I listen to [Democratic pollster] Peter Hart and I see Pug for what he is and what he was, I believe he would’ve been the President of the United States. He had it all, [raised in the South, New England, Harvard, Ivy Leagues, all of it, everything. He had it all. He lost a lot, but never my love and respect.

[Interview ends]
Appendix: Comment of David L. Rawle, Dec. 28, 2016

Dear Hal,

Thank you very much for sharing this transcript with me. You have expressed yourself with great candor, clearly driven by your enormous affection for Pug.

I think the question you’re asking me is about Pug’s decision not to fully endorse Bryan Dorn. That decision is a matter of public record, and my guess is that newspaper articles of the time include quotes from Pug as to his position on the matter. I don’t know what I could add to that.

You have made two very important suppositions with which I very respectfully disagree: (1) that Pug’s full-on endorsement of Bryan Dorn – along the lines you say Governor West proposed – would result in Dorn’s election; and (2) that West, Dennis and Gressette could have delivered on their promise that Pug would become governor in four years.

In 1974, above all else, South Carolinians wanted a change. That was the mood of the state, and it was the mood of the nation (a mood Jimmy Carter successfully tapped into). Bryan Dorn was ‘more of the same.’ Jim Edwards was ‘change.’ In fact, Jim Edwards frequently espoused positions originally articulated in Pug’s book “Program for Excellence in South Carolina.”

I do not believe that any level of endorsement from Pug or anyone else would have enabled Bryan Dorn to win.

Generally speaking, endorsements have minimal impact on a campaign’s outcome. The most recent example of that is the extent to which President and Mrs. Obama enthusiastically campaigned for Hillary Clinton. President Obama’s favorability ratings were higher than any president in (research-measured) history during their final year in office. Mrs. Obama was also extremely popular. But did their seemingly tireless efforts motivate the Obama base to the polls for Hillary Clinton? The statistics clearly show that they did not.

President Obama was quoted yesterday as saying he could have won this November. He’s probably correct. Because he could get the Obama base out for Obama… but not for Clinton. That’s simply the political reality. Endorsements rarely make any measurable difference.
We all believe what we want to believe. If I had run a hard-fought campaign for Governor and come up short….and the Governor of the State and the two most important members of the State Legislature promised me that if I fully endorsed their candidate this time, I would become Governor in four years….I’d want to believe them.

But, think about it, Hal. How could they possibly deliver on that promise? Do you suppose they made a similar promise to Earle Morris or Bryan Dorn in 1970? And then along came Watergate and Pug Ravenel! Political climates change frequently, and on-a-dime.

Can anyone possibly predict—not to mention control—the outcome of any statewide election four years hence?

They might want to. They might think they can. But they cannot.

Pug’s campaign was explicitly directed against the status quo that Dennis and Gressette represented. They were the gods of the state legislature, which Pug had called ‘a den of thieves.’ I cannot imagine a set of circumstances under which those two guys would have lifted a finger to help Pug get elected to anything. As for John West, after he left office, he had plenty of other fish to fry as our Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. His influence on a 1978 election would have been negligible at best.

The bottom line is, I think it’s wholly unrealistic to assume those three guys could have had any measurable influence on the 1978 race, even if they wanted to do so.

You conclude that Pug was politically ‘dead’ after the ’74 race and that the race against Thurmond was a mistake. Yes, it was a long shot. But so was the gubernatorial race. Peter Hart’s poll showed that Pug could beat Thurmond. The Thurmond campaign – through Lee
Atwater – effectively turned Pug’s ‘third senator from New York’ line against him with a major negative media campaign that made it very difficult to recover. And, of course, that was heartbreaking.

Pug never held elective office. But I think there are many, many positive legacies to his candidacy:

- He brought fresh ideas and energy to a state and its political process.
- He engaged new people in the political process.
- He raised aspirations, expectations and pride.
- He articulated a program for excellence for South Carolina, and much of it was adopted by other leaders.

I see parts of Pug in every governor who has served since 1974, and I expect pieces of his positive influence to exist here for many years to come.

Hal, I’ve rambled a bit. I hope you’ll forgive me for that. Again, I appreciate your sharing your transcript with me. Your dear brother has been a very important part of my life, and I am forever grateful for his friendship.

Happy New Year to you and your family.

David L. Rawle, Charleston, SC