

W. George Allen is a 'Florida Icon'

by Art Levy

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» **I was born in Sanford, Florida**, which used to be a totally segregated community. When I was in college, I was home for a visit and went to the public library to do some research for a project, and I was told that I couldn't come into the white library. I just walked past the lady and found the books I needed and sat down. They whispered and pointed, but nobody beat me up, so I did my research.

» **It was an injustice** that the Florida Supreme Court — all those white justices — kept denying Virgil Hawkins the right to go to the University of Florida. Virgil kind of made a deal that he would give up his right to go if they would admit other blacks, so Virgil sacrificed for me.

» **I started working in the fields** when I was about 10 years old. The white farmers would close down the black schools in the winter because Sanford was a farming area, mostly celery at the time, and all of us blacks who were able-bodied had to work in the fields. People were arrested for not working.

» **When I arrived at the University of Florida**, they wouldn't let me live at married student housing because we were black. I would receive telephone calls, saying, 'nigger, nigger we're going to kill you,' and I'd tell them to go hell. My dad gave me a rifle and said, 'if they come to your house, shoot them.' I had young kids, so I taught them how to shoot. I made it known that I don't believe in non-violence like Martin Luther King. You bother me, I'm violent.

» **I fish** the St. Johns River and Everglades City on the west coast. I like to fish in Martha's Vineyard, too. My wife and I have a house there. We've been going to Martha's Vineyard longer than Barack Obama.

» **A friend of mine**, Percy Lee, we were working in the fields cutting celery, along with other youngsters. The overseer, the straw boss, his name was Red Tile. He had a bad attitude and hated black folk. He and Percy got into an argument about how Percy was packing the celery. He said Percy sassed him and that 'no nigger could talk to a white person this way.' So, he got a machete knife and he said he was going to kill Percy. Percy's mother and my mother and father and a lot of the other grown-ups told him, 'no you won't.' They circled Percy, and I was in there with them. We had to get Percy out of the field because the guy was really going to kill him.

» **I was admitted to Harvard** and the University of California at Berkeley, but I'm a native Floridian, and I felt that somebody had to integrate the University of Florida. The racists told me I didn't belong there and I'd never graduate. I got into one or two fights with students who were disrespectful, but I never considered quitting. I made it known that you're not going to run me away. You're not going to scare me. I'm going to outstudy all of you, and I'm going to graduate.

» **In law school**, one of the guys asked me if I would be offended if someone used the 'n' word and I said yes. It's offensive. It's denigrating. The people who try to popularize that word today are wrong.

» **The first time I was offered a judgeship**, they weren't making a lot of money back then. Nixon was president. I think they were making \$36,000 a year, and frankly I was making more. Also, judges have to be impartial, like referees, and I have an opinion about every damn thing.

» **Our educational system in Florida** is in shambles. This Jeb Bush crap of rating schools and letting all the students who want to leave their school get vouchers to go to good schools just leaves all the schools in the poor communities as F schools. What we've done is we've reverted back to segregated schools in poor communities. Jeb Bush screwed up our educational system. It was never about anything but privatizing education and making money for his friends.

» **My father instilled in me** the attitude that you don't accept injustice. If you have to fight, fight. He was that way. He didn't take any crap.

» **I was 36 and I saw this yellow Rolls-Royce** and the wife allowed me to buy it. I got stopped a lot by cops, so I got rid of that one and bought a gray one. At the time, I was doing a lot of civil rights work, and the IRS audited me for 15 straight years. My accountant, who formerly worked for the IRS, told me in order to stop the audits, get rid of the Rolls-Royce. I said fine. I bought a brand-new Checker, and the audits stopped.

» **The Supreme Court of the United States** is now killing voting rights. They're trying to undo all the civil rights gains. The fight continues.

» **I did a lot of civil rights work.** Discrimination cases. Housing. Education. I helped integrate the public schools in Hendry County and Broward County. The good thing about being a lawyer is you can work in so many different areas. I was also involved in criminal law. I had some great first-degree murder cases. I did drug cases early. Where ever the money was, I tried to get there. That 's what you have to do when you're in private practice.

