

CARL SANDERS: A CONVERSATION

CLOSED CAPTIONING SCRIPT

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Hoffman: He was Georgia's new south governor and he guided the state through an era of great change. Carl Edward Sanders, Senior was born in Augusta in 1925. Smart and athletic he won a football scholarship to UGA. When World War II interrupted his studies, Sanders enlisted in the Army Air Force and he trained as a B-17 bomber pilot. After the War he returned to UGA and while in law school there he met Betty Bird Foy of Statesboro. They married in 1947 and settled in Augusta where Sanders entered politics. He was elected to the State House in 1954 and the State Senate in 1956. Only 6 years later at just 37 years old, the charismatic Sanders was elected Governor. A strong and progressive leader, Sanders focused first on education and reforming state government. He also supported civil rights. Sanders political career looked very promising, but a reelection defeat in 1970 turned him from public office to the law and other ventures. He established his own law practice, now a prestigious international law firm and threw himself into business and civil endeavors. Now in his 80's, Sanders is still active and engaged in the law and business, enjoying life in a modern Georgia, he helped create.

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Hoffman: Governor Sanders I'm so happy you're here for this Conversation. Please know how much I appreciate your time. You have had a very distinguished career as a politician and as a lawyer and as a business man. Which do you prefer, politics or law and business?

Sanders: Well politics is the most exciting thing you could be involved with. Law practice is the most satisfying thing that you could have. And business is good also. But I enjoyed my political years. I enjoyed my professional years as a lawyer. And I've enjoyed being involved in some businesses, real-estate, some other things with my son. So I think I'd put them in the order of politics, law, and business.

Hoffman: And business. You were born in May of 1925 in Augusta, Georgia. You were the oldest of two boys, and your Father was a meat salesman for Swift. He did not lose his job during the depression. So can you think back, being one of the fortunate ones during the depression? What was it like?

Sanders: Well I cannot think back that my father salary was cut half in two like everybody else at the meat plant. But I do remember that we had he had purchased a small brick bungalow on the corner of John's and

Wrightsboro Road in Augusta. And instead of being able to buy it they had to turn it back to the insurance company and rent it. Now I did not realize that as a youngster. My mother never let me know that they were struggling like everybody else was struggling. You know I had a good childhood. I walked to school. School was not too far from where we lived.

Hoffman: Were you a good student?

Sanders: I guess I was a good student but I didn't carry myself out as being an intellectual at that stage or even at this stage.

Hoffman: You were busy being a kid?

Sanders: I was busy being a kid.

Hoffman: And an athlete. You were a great athlete. In fact you spent a lot of time at the YMCA. Tell me about it.

Sanders: My mother was a smart woman. She enrolled me in this learn to swim class at the Augusta YMCA. Back in those days all of the athletic programs were put on by the Y. They were not in the public schools. So I went to the Y and learned how to swim. I played on the YMCA football team, basketball team, baseball team. And as a result when I got out of grammar school and went to high school I was able to play football in high school to the extent that I got a football scholarship to the University of Georgia to go to college.

Hoffman: Would you have gone to college if you didn't have that football scholarship?

Sanders: I doubt it, and not the fact that I probably would have wanted to go but the fact that my family was not in a position to send me. I don't think I would have gone to college if I had not gotten that football scholarship.

Hoffman: Unfortunately your college career early on was interrupted to serve in World War II. And you went and you trained to be a pilot, a bomber pilot.

Sanders: Everybody wanted to be a pilot. We took all these tests of dexterity and so forth, some written tests. And I knew I wasn't going to get to be a pilot when I got through with those exams. Some of my friends said oh I'm sure I'm going to be a pilot. Well I got selected as a pilot, they got selected as a bombardier and a navigator. I was 19 years old. I was the first pilot with a ten man crew. The B-17 Flying Fortress one of which just came through Atlanta just this last weekend on display was the largest plane at that time in World War II.

Hoffman: You never saw combat though. Were you somewhat relieved or disappointed?

Sanders: No I didn't. I was disappointed, so was my crew disappointed because we finished up combat training in Dyersburg, Tennessee. We were scheduled to embark from Savannah to the Eighth Air Force, the War, they dropped the bomb and Hydrogen Bomb in Japan and of course the War and Europe was coming to an end. And I said I'm going back to college.

Hoffman: Let me jump in quickly because you actually were able to test out of many classes because of your military training, almost fast forwarding your college career.

Sanders: That's correct. I really actually had a year of undergraduate work before going into the service. When I came out of the service, they said to me and all other Veterans who returned, we will give you examinations and everything that you can pass we'll give you college credit. I was able to take enough exams and lucked up and passed enough of them that I qualified for law school by having one more quarter in undergraduate school. I went to Law school and again they told me something that they don't do now. They said Law school is a three year course. But since you've Veterans have come back from the War if you want to we will allow you to go two years around the clock, twelve months each year and complete the three year course. I completed the three year Law school course in two years. I took the bar exam which you can't do now you have to wait until you graduate, technically at the end of my second year and I looked up and passed the bar exam. I knew then that I was able to practice law so I proposed to my wife who I had met when I returned from the service.

Hoffman: Tell me about meeting Betty. This is a cute story.

Sanders: Well I was dating a girl from Atlanta. She was a Chi Omega, that's a sorority. And we had a date and for some reason we disagreed on something and I left the Chi Omega house. And said what am I going to do. And I thought well my friend who I played football house dates a girl at the Tri Delt house which is about a block down Milledge Street in Athens. So I went down to the Tri Delt house. Mike Cooley was there with his girlfriend. And he said what are you doing? I said I'm not doing anything, I've just left the Chi Omega house and I came down here to see what was going on. And I said to Nan who was Mike's girlfriend, do you think there's anybody upstairs that might come down and talk with me at this time. She went upstairs and she brought down this long legged beautiful girl from Statesboro, Betty Bird Foy. And I took one look at her and thought well this is this is the luckiest day of my life. And so I started

dating her. And as I said, we got married in September of 1947 and I picked up my degree in June of '48. Right after we got married, she got very sick.

Hoffman: Very sick for a number of years.

Sanders: Yea, and we struggled. I practiced law during the day and because Betty was sick and she take these expensive drugs that they prescribed.

Hoffman: Very expensive antibiotics. Uh huh.

Sanders: I taught law school at night, taught law school at the Augusta Law School three nights a week from 9 until 10 o'clock.

Hoffman: That was to make ends meat, wasn't it.

Sanders: That was to make ends meat. And of course fortunately she got better and she recovered. And we were living in Augusta. And Augusta of course at that time was I had no political ambition.

Hoffman: Not one you said. Well you quickly found out that the Cracker Party was in control in Augusta.

Sanders: Well I knew that to a certain extent but I didn't realize that they were so controlling that if you wanted to get a job with the city or the county you had to go through the Cracker Party. So a group of young World War II Veterans said you know we don't think that's right. Let's start an Independent Party. So there was an Independent Party created mostly made up of World War II Veterans. And they asked me to be a part of that. And they asked me to run for the House of Representatives.

Hoffman: The head of the Party, an attorney in the State House in 1954.

Sanders: Oh, I was received as probably one who was going to go along with the administration that at that time was Marvin Griffin was a Governor who I later ran against. And I was perceived as one who would not follow the line that they might always want you to vote. And I didn't.

Hoffman: Well you spent one term, two years in the State House and then you decided to run for the Senate. Now this is interesting.

Sanders: For the State Senate, yes.

Hoffman: You were out of District 18, Senate District 18, and at the time, the seat basically rotated between three counties in that District. So after your first

term it looked like you would have to give up that seat but something unique happened. Explain.

Sanders: You're pretty good.

Hoffman: I'm working.

Sanders: You've got a good history. The 18th Senatorial District was made up of Richmond, Jefferson and Glascock County. As you said they all rotated in the State except one and that was Fulton County. I ran for the seat from Richmond County, had opposition, won the, Senate seat, took my seat in the Senate, served those two years. The next county came was Jefferson County. I asked the Jefferson County Democratic committee if they would allow me to represent them and run for the Senate. They passed a resolution allowing me to become the Senator representing them. I did the same thing when the Glascock County came up. That gave me six years in the Senate.

Hoffman: Which was an enormous amount of seniority...

Sanders: That's right.

Hoffman: That others didn't enjoy like you did.

Sanders: That's right. The average Senator rotated out. The last two years I was elected President Pro Tem of the Senate. And that's when I began to think about I either need to get into this political business or get out because what I was doing while I was in the Senate is going home on the weekend, trying to practice law during the weekend, going back to Atlanta during the Senate. And I knew I couldn't keep that up. I was either going to lose my law practice or I was going to get out of politics or get into politics.

Hoffman: Well did it dawn on you in your mid thirties that you were one of the most powerful men in Georgia, clearly one of the most powerful men in the State Senate?

Sanders: I didn't realize that. I thought I was up here doing a job that the people had sent me up here to do.

Hoffman: Let me ask you this, during your time in the Senate you served as Governor Ernest Vandiver's Floor Leader, as well as President Pro Tem. But it was during that time that Governor Ernest Vandiver had to decide whether he was going to admit two African Americans to UGA or close the school. And he called a meeting at the mansion and you were there. Tell me what happened.

Sanders: That was a very significant meeting. He called a meeting at the mansion and there were fifty political leaders from around the state. And he said I've got to decide whether to shut down the University of Georgia or allow these students to be enrolled. The federal judge had mandated that they be allowed to enroll. He went around the room, took a vote from every individual as to whether they would oppose closing the University or agree to close the University. 48 out of 50 said shut the University down. Two of us, my vote and the vote of Frank Twitty of Camilla, Georgia said you can't shut the University of Georgia down. Vandiver said I'll think about it. Called me up a day later and said I've thought about it and I realize that I am not going to shut the University down. That was a very significant vote in the history of Georgia and I give Ernest Vandiver credit for saying that he was not going to shut it down because he had run a political campaign in which he had said that no not one not everyone. But he took...

Hoffman: Meaning no African American's in White schools.

Sanders: That's right. But he took the advice. I told him if he shut the University of Georgia down we'd have a generation of illiterates in this state and we couldn't afford to have that. So he did not shut it down. And then I of course was elected the year after that.

Hoffman: Alright, let's talk about that. You just kind of brushed over that. You started out running for Lieutenant Governor but you switched and ran for Governor. Why?

Sanders: Well it was a very practical reason. I started out running for Lieutenant Governor because I thought that was the race that I probably had the best chance to win.

Hoffman: Because Marvin Griffin a very popular Governor who had been in office before and sat out and came back...

Sanders: And the Lieutenant Governor Garland Bird were already announced candidates for Governor. I was campaigning for Lieutenant Governor down in middle Georgia and one of the newspaper publishers who came to me and said did you hear what happened in Atlanta today? And I said no, what happened? They said Carl F. Sanders a former Atlanta policeman who's now a lawyer has announced that he's going to enter the race for Lieutenant Governor. Well I said well that's funny that means that a voter would have to go in the polls and decide whether he's going to vote for Carl E. or Carl F. It was a political trick which of course my opposition was playing. But it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me because I realized I couldn't run for Lieutenant Governor with another Carl Sanders in the same race. So I thought about it and I said well if

they're going to play the game that way I'll just get in the Governor's race.

Hoffman: So September of 1962, just a couple of weeks before the primary, CBS reporter Harry Reasoner shows up in Georgia and he looks at you and he says I'm doing a documentary because you're going to be the next Governor.

Sanders: I...

Hoffman: That's what the polls say. And you were stunned.

Sanders: I said you got to be crazy. I don't have any idea who's going to win the race but I, why do you say that? He said because we've had Art, Lou Harris do a political poll and he says you're going to win. I said well you go back to Lou Harris and tell him he must know something that I don't know because I'm going to keep on campaigning because I don't know who's going to win this race.

Hoffman: But he did. And candidly, he came up with numbers.

Sanders: The race came out almost identical with the numbers that Lou Harris had predicted.

Hoffman: So you win. And here you are 37 years old, youngest Governor in the country, handsome, successful, charismatic, did you have any idea. You didn't even know. You didn't even know how charismatic you were but did you have any idea at 37 you would be Governor of the New South.

Sanders: No I didn't. I happened to be at the right place at the right time when Georgia needed a candidate who represented the future and who believed in the opportunity for this state to grow and prosper. And I knew at that time that I was in a very fortunate position because there were so many other Governor's in the South that were doing things that were contrary to what I wanted to see done in Georgia. And they were going down roads that appeared to me to be self destructive. And I did not want to be a part of that.

Hoffman: You immediately went to work trying to remodel education particularly higher education. You spent sixty cents on every dollar on education. Why was that so important to you?

Sanders: Education is important to me because I think education equates with freedom. I think that anybody that becomes educated has more freedom than somebody who has not had education as their bases of their life. I knew that the more people we could educate in Georgia, the better off the

state would be in every capacity, politic wise, business wise, otherwise. So I had gone to California when I was in the Senate on one of these trips and I studied the community college program in California where anybody in California could go to a two year community college, tuition free if they wanted to. That was one of the main programs that I wanted to see put into place in Georgia. So we put it in place and built some twelve or fifteen junior colleges and elevated four or five junior colleges to senior colleges and of course in addition to these community colleges we built these vocational technical schools close by where a kid could either stay home and go to the junior college or go to the technical school. And that's a very that was very important to me and I think important to the people in the state of Georgia. And it's paid off. The schools that we created, most all of them have grown and prospered. Many boys and girls because of those community colleges that we created stayed here in Georgia and returned great benefits to their state where before they had to leave Georgia and go somewhere else in order to either get an education or get a job.

Hoffman: You also set about to put airfields throughout the state because while you were traversing the state during your campaign.

Sanders: That was sort of an interesting program. I went to the federal government when I got elected Governor and asked them if they had funds available for community airports. They told me they had some money in Washington for that type of program. I went to the county commission association and said to the county commissioners how about participating in building some community airports. They said no, we're more interested in roads, not airports. I said let me tell you something, I'll get the state to put up half the money and get the feds to put up the other half of the money and all you've got to provide is a strip of land that will accommodate 3,000 foot runway. Will you do that? Oh yea we'll do that.

Hoffman: We'll do that.

Sanders: We had the number one airport community airport development program for four solid years in the entire country. Instead of thirty paved airports, when I left office we had over one hundred paved airports in Georgia. And we brought in enough industry that it was unbelievable the amount of industry we created because we had these community airports all over Georgia.

Hoffman: You also brought in sports teams, professional sports teams.

Sanders: Well that's an interesting story. I had something to do with every sports, major league sport that came to Georgia. Then I'm out of politics and I'm practicing law.

Hoffman: Hold on I want to talk about your relationship with John F. Kennedy. There was rumor at some point that you may be even a running mate for him. Is there any truth to that?

Sanders: Well not to my knowledge, I had a lot of people tell me that but Jack Kennedy didn't sit me down and tell me that he wanted me to consider running for Vice President. I did know at that time that there was a lot of movement against Lyndon Johnson. The one who really didn't like Johnson was Bobby Kennedy. Jack Kennedy got along pretty much with everybody. But on the other hand, Bobby Kennedy never did anything that Jack Kennedy didn't know what he was doing.

Hoffman: But you also established a very good relationship with Lyndon Johnson as well when Lyndon took over as President, had you out to the ranch in Texas. And he actually had you sit next to his wife when he gave his first major address to Congress.

Sanders: I got acquainted with Lyndon Johnson for a lot of reasons. One of the reasons I got acquainted with him was when he ran for President in 1964, I was head of the Democratic Party, I was Governor of the State. I thought of course that our Senators and then our Congressmen and then anybody else who was high up in the Democratic Party would support the Democratic nominee. Well much to my surprise Senator Russell went to Spain and spent the summer over in Spain inspecting military bases. Senator Talmedge went underground and disappeared from the political scene. That left me alone to either continue to support the Democratic Party or to turn my back on it. The Democratic Party had been good to Georgia. Lyndon Johnson had been good to Georgia. The Appalachians Governor's Commission, he made me chairman of that. I got oodles of money for hospitals and schools for North Georgia and other things. And when he came to Georgia I was not going to turn my back on him and say I don't want to see you, I don't want to have anything to do with you. Barry Goldwater was running as the candidate against him. So when I did that, I knew in my heart that I was doing something that might not please everybody in the state. But I was doing something. I was repaying a debt that I felt like that the state owed to the candidate for president at that time.

Hoffman: Let's talk about why you felt like you may have paid a price there. You had again at the time that you were running or you were in politics you could not serve two consecutive terms as Governor. So you served from '63 to '67 by many standards very successful. You sat out for four years and then you decided to come back in 1970 and you were running against Jimmy Carter at the time who ultimately painted you as a liberal, much more liberal than he and essentially played the race card for you.

Sanders: At the time I felt disappointed but what happened was that I said to myself I've been looking after the people's business for low many years. I've now lost the only election that I've ever run in. I'm going to build a law firm.

Hoffman: And you did.

Sanders: And I founded a law firm here in Atlanta. I hired two lawyers to start out with and that's been that was 1967. today there's 650 lawyers in that firm and we are all over the country and all around the world.

Hoffman: Do you have any regrets about your career, politically or otherwise?

Sanders: No I don't have any regrets about my career politically or otherwise. The only disappointment in my life that I really feel strongly about is I lost my twenty five year old grandson a year ago to cancer. And the thing that I admired about him, he never complained about it.

Hoffman: Are you satisfied with the state of Georgia today?

Sanders: I'm satisfied that Georgia and Atlanta stands heads above the rest of the Southern states in so many ways. I'm not satisfied with the educational opportunity. I still think that there's room in Georgia to educate more of our young people than we do. I think that there's room in Georgia to develop more industry than we have. I think there's room in Georgia to develop more industry than we have. I think there's room in Georgia to have a better transportation system than we have.

Hoffman: And with that Governor Carl Sanders I need to say thank you so much for this conversation.

Sanders: Well thank you, I don't know how much good it's going to do but I've enjoyed it.

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