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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Sheila Daniel
Marion County, Arkansas
14 October 2005

Interviewer: Mel White

[00:00:09.03]

Mel White: My name is Mel White. I'm the interviewer today for this interview for the *Arkansas Democrat* Project. I'm sitting here with Sheila Daniel at her palatial estate on the White River in Marion County, Arkansas. Hi, Sheila.

Sheila Daniel: Hi.

MW: First of all, Sheila, before we get going, I have to tell you that this is for the [Pryor] Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History archives at the University of Arkansas, [Fayetteville], and it will be available there for people to look at and it will also be on the Internet for people to look at. Is that okay with you?

SD: Yes, it is.

MW: Good. Okay, let's get right to it then. Tell me when and where you were born and your parents' names and any siblings you have.

SD: I was born in Gassville, Arkansas, in 1951. At the time my parents were the publishers of the *Ozark County Times* in Gainesville, Missouri. I was born at Rollins

Hospital, which is now the Baxter County Historical Museum. I was born there because it was one of the two nearest hospitals to Gainesville—the other was in Mountain Home—and my parents were both natives of Baxter County.

MW: They were working in Missouri, but you were born in Arkansas because it was the nearest hospital?

SD: Yes. And my grandmother, my mother's mother, also lived in Cotter. My mother was Marjorie Flippin Daniel. My ancestors on my mother's side founded the town of Flippin.

MW: Which is only about ten miles from here, as we speak.

SD: Yes. So I really have moved back to my roots. At the time, my parents were the owners of the *Ozark County Times* weekly newspaper, and, true to form, I was born on deadline, Wednesday night. At that time our paper was published on Thursday, and my father had to be putting out the paper, so he missed my birth. I think I first realized that I wanted to go into journalism at the age of five when I went to kindergarten and dropped out because we didn't have chocolate milk. I couldn't see the rationale for kindergarten since I already knew how to read and write, so I informed my father I was dropping out after the first day, and he said, "Why? You have to grow up and make a living. What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I said, "A Linotype operator." And to his credit, he did not make fun of me. He took me seriously and said, "All right, if that's what you want to do and if you're determined not to go back to kindergarten, I'll teach you the Linotype." So he did; he taught me the Linotype before I went to grade school. So that was the beginning.

MW: Now, for the benefit of the people in the year 2186, a Linotype was the way they used to set type in newspapers before computers, right?

SD: Yes. It was a huge, huge machine with hot molten metal and you would type on the keyboard, which wasn't like a typewriter keyboard, it was its own special keyboard. The first thing I set was my name, and it came clanging down with this thunderous, wonderful, powerful sound—it came clanging down the line into the tray, this hot type. And there was my name in seventy-two point type.

MW: That's sort of World War II type, VJ Day.

SD: Yes, it's sort of like the Second Coming headline, which you may have to explain to people. People from the Bible Belt know what the Second Coming headline is, that's when you say, "Jesus Returns." And that's when you need pretty much the biggest type you can find. So we had a Second Coming headline. It was the first thing I ever set.

MW: With your name.

SD: In my name.

MW: So your father said, "Okay, you're dropping out of school." And he taught you how to work this big, big thing with hot molten lead in it.

SD: Today he would be put in jail for something like that, for child endangerment. But I started out right then, and he paid me ten cents an hour, and I even got a Social Security card when I was five because I started a savings account right away. And that's how I retired at age fifty, but that comes later.

MW: Yes, let's don't get ahead of ourselves here.

SD: All right. I had one sister, Glenda, who is eight years older than me.

MW: That's Glenda with a G.

SD: G-L-E-N-D-A, last name D-A-N-I-E-L. Both of us have kept our maiden names throughout our lives, even though we have both been married. My sister preceded me in the field of journalism. She was hired at the *Chicago American* in the 1960s, straight out of her experience on the *Baxter Bulletin* and a graduate degree at the University of Texas, Austin. So she was my immediate role model to know that I could go to work in the big time, even though I'd never been anywhere. I went to the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, which, at that time, was not accredited for a journalism degree.

MW: That's interesting, because they've had some fine journalists come out of there.

SD: Oh, yes, it was a wonderful—I had a bachelor's in English literature and also in journalism, and we had wonderful, wonderful teachers: Ernie Deane, especially, was a big supporter for many reasons and in many different ways. A man taught photography—his name was Dr. Good, I believe. And Jess Covington was the chairman. There was one other professor who taught typography and things like that, which was very dear to my heart since that's how I got my start, as a typographer. And we had four professors. They were all just wonderful, supportive, strong people. So even though, for academic reasons, they could not be accredited, it was, nevertheless, a wonderful place to study journalism.

MW: So you knew from day one that you wanted to go into the journalism business—the newspaper business.

SD: I did.

MW: Your parents—the paper they had in Missouri was a weekly.

SD: It was a weekly.

MW: And then later they had the *Baxter Bulletin*?

SD: No, what happened was when we owned the *Ozark County Times*, it was during what I call the [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower depression of the late 1950s. We owned it throughout the decade of the 1950s, and we lived very well. But there was one problem in that no one really had money, especially not in Ozark County, which, at that time, was the most impoverished county in the United States. So everything was done with barter. People paid for their classifieds with produce, a side of beef, whatever they had. We had a new car every year; we had a whole new set of furniture every year; we had the first television in town. But we had no money. And in 1959 my father realized that my sister was a sophomore in high school and he had no money to send her to college, so we sold that paper. We moved to Branson, Missouri, briefly, where my father was co-editor of the *White River Leader*. That's when my first story was published. To my father's embarrassment, he had to publish my story because I won a writing contest in the third grade. Everyone thought, of course, that I won because my father was the editor. But, in fact, he had nothing to do with my story—which was about a pet squirrel named Oscar—being chosen. That was my first published writing. We moved back to Mountain Home, where my father had grown up, and my father went back to work for the *Baxter Bulletin*, which was, at the time, owned by the Shiras brothers' family.

MW: S-H-I . . .

SD: S-H-I-R-A-S. And one of the co-owners at that time was Pete Shiras, whose daughter Ginger also went into journalism, and to this day is a very, very fine writer. She currently works for the *Harrison Daily Times*, but she worked for the *Gazette* as well, as I did. The editor was Pete's cousin; his name was Tom Dearmore. He was a wonderful role model also. During my senior year in high school, they sold the paper and Tom went immediately to the *Washington Star* as an editorial writer. He was able to do this because he was already well known and had been a Nieman Fellow [reference to the Nieman Fellowship from Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts] earlier in the 1950s, He was an excellent journalist, and I kept up with him almost until his death in 2004. He eventually went to the San Francisco Examiner, where he was the choice of the Pulitzer jury for editorial writing one year. But, as often happens with the Pulitzer, the jury's choice was overruled by the board and the prize went to someone else. So, I had a very solid background. Never was discouraged except in one instance, when Dale Bumpers—bless his heart—when he was first running for governor, he was campaigning in Mountain Home one afternoon and walked me around the *Baxter Bulletin* back shop. And I was working there, as I had always from the earliest—I guess from that time in kindergarten, I had worked at the newspapers. I was working in the back shop, and Bumpers came up and struck up a conversation with me, even though I was too young to vote. I guess I had time on my hands, and so we talked. He asked me what I wanted to do, and I told him journalism. And he said, "Oh, you don't want to go into journalism, you should be a teacher." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Well, because I've known women

newspaperwomen, and they just become—well, they become, well, not what a woman should be." This angered me quite a bit because my mother was a newspaperwoman; my sister was already working in Chicago as a reporter. And I told him so. That was pretty much the end of that conversation. The ironic thing is that years later as I was finishing college, I was approached about being a member of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, which, of course, Dale Bumpers had set up. I did not take the offer because I was going to work at the *Gazette* momentarily, and I saw it as a potential conflict of interest, even though now I know it was not, or would not have been, probably. But in those days the women's lib movement was still controversial, as strange as it seems today.

[Tape Stopped]

MW: Okay. So we've got you up through high school, and with this exception of Dale Bumpers's one discouraging word, seldom were any other discouraging words heard. You went off to school knowing that you were going to be in journalism. You went to University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

SD: That's correct.

MW: And what happened when you get out of college?

SD: I had decided that . . .

MW: And this was—you're about my age. This was the era when we got out—well, actually, yours was a little before. When there was investigative reporting. Shortly after this, Watergate came along.

SD: Watergate had not happened.

MW: Hadn't happened then, but there was sort of rebirth in interest in journalism among people, I think.

SD: I don't know. I think I was a tad ahead of the current.

MW: Yes, you definitely were. If you were doing it at five years old, you were. [Laughter] Go ahead, I'm sorry. After college?

SD: My father was very fair all of his lifetime toward myself and my sister. He always gave equally to both of us. Not only love and encouragement, but money. My sister was, however, eight years old than I, and when she finished her degree in journalism at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, my father gave her $1,500, which enabled her to go to the University of Texas and get a graduate degree in journalism. From there she was able to land a job immediately at the *Chicago American*. Now, in 1973, $1,500 would not begin to buy a graduate degree, but it would buy an Opel car. So I decided I would—if there were any way possible—get a job at the *Arkansas Gazette* and spend two or three years in Little Rock and that would be my graduate school. So with references from Ernie Deane and everyone else at the university, and also armed with the fact that I was the University of Arkansas's *Gazette* Scholar my senior year . . .

MW: And Ernie . . .

SD: . . . there was a *Gazette* scholarship . . .

MW: . . . Deane had been a writer at the *Gazette*.

SD: A legendary writer.

MW: He wrote the "Arkansas Traveler" column for a long time.

SD: He *originated* the "Arkansas Traveler" column. Great ol' character. He taught PR [public relations] and he was eminently qualified for that because he had been public relations officer for General [George] Patton.

MW: Really?

SD: For General Patton, Third Army, in World War II—he was one of his public relations officers, and as he directly related to us, "If you can work for Patton, you can work for anybody." [Laughter]

MW: So you were the *Gazette* Scholar at journalism school—I mean, at Fayetteville.

SD: Right.

MW: Wow.

SD: So I had a four point [grade point average] in journalism; I think my overall grade point was about three point eight. But I was in *Who's Who [Among Students]*, and I was in Mortar Board [the national honor society that honors college seniors], and I was the *Gazette* Scholar. I had been on *The Traveler*, and I had been news director of the . . .

MW: *The Traveler* being the student newspaper.

SD: The student newspaper, as everyone in the university will know. And I was also news director of KHOG Radio, Fayetteville's commercial radio station. So in the spring of my senior year I went to Little Rock and interviewed with Bob Douglas.

MW: Who was the managing . . .?

SD: Bob Douglas was the managing editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*. He offered me a job in the women's section. And I went back to Fayetteville and told Ernie Deane I would rather go to work for Southwestern Bell, which had offered me a job that

paid twice as much as the *Gazette* would have paid me. Which was, by the way, $120 a week. When I went back to Fayetteville and told Ernie that Bob had offered me a job in the women's section, he blew his top—there's no other way to put it.

MW: Tell us what the women's section would have been like in those days? Parties, weddings, stuff like that?

SD: The front page of the women's section was always nothing but brides' pictures. I don't believe there was even a feature story at the bottom of the page; it was very much society, which was an important niche in Arkansas. Every bride lived for the day that she might see her picture on the front page of the *Sunday Gazette* women's section. But I was not one of those people. So as I understand it, Ernie called Bob Douglas and said, "Look, this woman is your *Gazette* scholar. She has every kind of credential you could possibly think of. She has even freelanced stories that have been published in the *Gazette*, and they've been sports stories." In fact, I had written sports features and sold them to the *Gazette* in my senior year. Some negotiations must have taken place, because Douglas called me back and we had another interview. And this time he offered me the job of crap man—that's what they actually called this job—crap man. It involved being the city desk assistant to Bill Shelton [William T. Shelton], who was the city editor. The person who was currently holding the job of crap man was Jonathan Portis, who, as we all know, is the younger brother of a famous novelist. Jonathan is a fine . . .

MW: Charles Portis, who wrote *True Grit*, among other things.

SD: Right. Jonathan was a fine journalist in his own right. Jonathan had held this job for at least two years. Bob Douglas touted it as a very important job, and told me that it would be at least two or three years before I could possibly move on from that job, because no one ever had been promoted sooner than that. In fact, he said, "I don't know what we're going to call you, because we've never had a girl do this job." So they thought about it a great deal and decided they would call me the crap lady instead of the crap man. I appreciated that they called me the crap lady; that showed some measure of respect. So I did; I took that job at $120 a week. My job was to write the city news column with just short items, do the weather, and sit next to Bill Shelton and type up his daily budget.

MW: Tell us what a budget was.

SD: A budget is a list of stories that's compiled shortly after noon when all the reporters call in and dictate about two or three sentences to summarize the stories that they are going to be writing that night.

MW: We're pausing here a second to look at a big black tarantula crawling on Sheila's wall over there. It's very interesting. I'm not sure that's a tarantula.

SD: That's not a tarantula.

MW: It's not a tarantula; it's just some kind of big spider.

SD: I don't know what it is, but they're all over the place.

MW: Anyway, it's very interesting. Okay, let's go back to our job here, which is to—that's a big spider, though.

SD: I wish I knew what it was.

MW: Don't think about it tonight when you're trying to go to sleep, okay?

SD: Oh, they don't come inside. That's why I have cats.

MW: [Laughs] Okay. So a budget is sort of like telling what [the] stories are going to be and how important they are, right?

SD: It's circulated around the newsroom, and at some point in the afternoon editors meet and they review this list of stories, and that's how they determine what will run where. Bill Shelton seemed to like me quite a bit, and after a while, he showed a lot of faith in me because he began to take longer and longer lunch breaks, and pretty soon I was writing the budget and not Shelton. And when Jerry Jones would come in—he was the assistant city editor and worked the night shift—he would often find that I had done the budget. Or when Bill Shelton came back from lunch, I had already done the budget and pretty much put the stories in order of importance as I thought. For some reason, after only a year—no, no, I think it was more like six months, there was an opening on the copy desk, and Bob Douglas offered me a job on the copy desk. I said, "No, I want to be a writer." He said, "Oh, writers are a dime a dozen, but a copy editor can get a job anywhere." And, actually, he was dead right about that. So I moved to the copy desk. That would be—I went to work at the *Gazette* in the summer of 1973, so that would have been sometime in the fall or winter of 1973, or possibly January of 1974.

MW: Okay, we were in January of possibly early 1974 when you were given a position on the copy desk at the *Arkansas Gazette*. What was that like?

SD: It was a wonderful place to learn. And there were some excellent editors. Bill Rutherford was the copy desk chief, and his two deputies were Paul Johnson and

Gary Drury, both of them very, very fine journalists and excellent teachers. I can't say enough good things about Drury and Johnson. There were other people on the desk who were also wonderful. There was Julie Baldridge. Jonathan Portis was there. He had been there ever since I was hired as the crap lady to replace him as the crap man. I learned a great deal in a very short time. I learned how to write good, concise headlines, how to tighten copy but not be overbearing about it. I think the copy desk at the *Gazette* was as good a copy desk as I have ever worked on. There was a problem at the *Gazette* though; there was a lot of sexism, and I knew this going in, but I somehow didn't realize how it would continue once I got the job. During that time, a union movement was begun. I don't remember who started the movement, but the *Gazette* had never been unionized, save the typographers' union. And my father, even though he had never been a member of a union, had always been very pro-union. Having been raised by a grandfather who was German and who taught him read all the great socialist writers of the nineteenth century. I was very pro-union, and, naturally, I signed a union card. And at one point, I believe I had one copy messenger come over to my apartment and sign a union card. Well, this time coincided with a time that the *Gazette* had hired a number of women in the newsroom. There were just a handful of us, but there was a feeling—there were whispers around the newsroom that some people in management seemed to think that women had something to do with the union movement, more than just participating. Perhaps this was just because a number of women had been hired and then a union movement was started. Those kinds of connections were often made in those days when women came

into the newsroom. It was a time of great change in the early 1970s, and sometimes sociological change in the workplace was attributed to women being there, which was certainly true in many ways, but it was not always specifically true in every case. And I don't know this for a fact, I only know that I had heard that an inordinate amount of responsibility was being placed on women as fomenting this union movement. I have no proof for that. None whatsoever. All I know is that in the summer of 1974, my friend Julie Baldridge had already left the copy desk and had gone to the *Arkansas Democrat* as the help columnist—she wrote a column called "Answer Please." Julie had gone to the *Democrat* and was very happy there. She had been hired by Jerry McConnell, the managing editor, and one day Julie called me and said that she had been told by another good friend of ours on the copy desk . . .

MW: The copy desk at the *Gazette*?

SD: At the *Gazette*. That Bill Rutherford, the news editor and copy desk chief, was going to fire me. This caused me no great—this caused me a lot of concern because another woman, Tex Hodgekiss, who was a fairly able copy editor, had been fired. In those days, you really didn't have to give much of a reason for why you fired anyone. And when I heard that people were talking about firing me, it scared me because I realized this was my first job, and if you're fired from your first job, then you have to do a lot of backtracking. This was not a good thing. Fortunately, another one of my supervisors from the *Gazette* copy desk had telegraphed this concern to Julie who said, "Sheila, you're going to be fired. You need to come over to the *Democrat* right away." So I took a week off and went

on vacation with my parents, which was a very strange thing to do, but I couldn't afford to do anything else. We went to California. I realized I ultimately wanted to work in Los Angeles, but first I had to get out of the *Gazette* before I got fired. So I went back. I talked to Jerry McConnell; he hired me.

MW: Can we just interject here? This has come up in other interviews that I've done. Let's put this in context. In those days the *Gazette* was the big liberal paper, and the *Democrat* was the conservative paper. And yet I've heard over and over that there was this sexism in the *Gazette*'s newsroom. The women felt like they were not being treated equally, which was ironic because the *Gazette* was the Pulitzer Prize-winning liberal Arkansas voice. The *Democrat* had more women, and it had more black people in the news staff than the *Gazette* had earlier. I just want to interject that because it's come up in other conversations, too.

SD: Yes, it was very strange.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

SD: . . . between what the two papers did on their editorial page and how they actually ran their company. I believe when Jerry McConnell gives his interview, he will go into the politics of this from a management standpoint. He mentioned to me recently that—first of all, he did not know that I was threatened with firing when I came to him. Number two, he did tell me that originally both papers had the same lawyer. And Jerry had gone to Mr. [Walter] Hussman, [Jr.] and asked him permission to change lawyers because the *Gazette* lawyer was known for very heavy-handed tactics. And as Jerry put it to me, he told Mr. Hussman, "You can't use

these kinds of tactics on journalists because they're too smart, and they won't put up with heavy-handed tactics," which is what the *Gazette* was trying to do. So I went to the *Democrat*, and to my delight, it was an equally wonderful place to work. And the atmosphere was far more liberal and enjoyable than it had been at the *Gazette*. There was camaraderie at both papers. I have to say I've never had as good a teacher as Paul Johnson, and I should say Gary Drury, as well. Both of those men were, and are, outstanding people and I can never say enough good things about them, because they gave me a foundation to build on. But at the *Democrat* I had the opportunity to build on that foundation and to practice my craft and to expand it beyond simple copy editing and headline writing into lay-out, wire editing, working in the composing room, and basically doing every type of job that was available to a desk person. I found Jerry McConnell had hired some other very wonderful people, who all went on to distinction afterward. At the time, there was a news editor who did not interact a great deal with the desk because he sat at a separate desk from the rim around which all the copy editors sat. But the assistant news editor was Mike Kirkendall, my longtime friend who is now at the *Los Angeles Times* and has been for many years. Mel White, who's interviewing me, sat to my right. To my left was Carol Gordon, who is now Carol Stogsdill—her maiden name was Stogsdill, so Carol Stogsdill Gordon sat next to me. And Amanda Singleton and a man named Collins Hemingway. All of these people were about my age. We were all young. In fact, the *Democrat* staff was much younger than the *Gazette's*. We were hungrier, too. I think there was a more dynamic atmosphere because it was a younger staff in many ways, so there

was a lot of enthusiasm, there was a lot of good feeling. There was a lot of effort that went into the paper every day, and that perfectly complemented the experience I had had at the *Gazette*, which was my primary learning experience. The *Democrat*, thanks to Jerry McConnell, who hired such wonderful people and believed so strongly in a good, strong copy desk, that he hired good people and encouraged us to take an active role. And we were all able to practice our craft and hone our skills in a way that I really, at that time, could not have done at any other paper that I can think of.

MW: Let's talk about what the actual physical layout of the copy desk was at the *Democrat* when you and I were both there. We both came about the same time, which was the summer of 1974, I believe you figured out. Talk about the actual—there was a U-shaped desk, and then the head of the copy desk sat in the middle, which was called the slot, and he was called the slot man, which was indicative of the sexual roles in those days. But talk about that a little bit, about the actual physical flow of copy and how it went from the reporters and the wire machines to the composing room.

SD: The copy desk was on the far side of the room against the wall.

MW: Second floor of the *Democrat* building.

SD: Second floor of the *Democrat* building. And I believe it's still where the newsroom is today.

MW: I think so.

SD: So we were against a wall toward the back of the room. In those days, there were actually Teletype machines, and I believe there were four or five. They were very

loud, so loud that they were encased in cabinets with glass tops that you had to open.

MW: And when somebody opened the glass top, suddenly the noise level in the newsroom went up about two times because suddenly you could hear the clicking, clacking of the Teletype machines.

SD: Yes. And it's a very exciting way to work.

MW: Yes, it was.

SD: There was clacking of typewriters and the Teletype and things coming in. It was just . . .

MW: It was a noisy place.

SD: It was a noisy place. It was an exciting and invigorating place. For lots of reasons. Because we were able to practice our skills. All of us who were at the *Democrat* at that time were young, hungry people. We were so energized and excited about journalism, that it was a very different atmosphere from the *Gazette*, which sort of thought it was *The New York Times*, in a way. And, in a way, it was—I mean, the standards were as high at the *Gazette* as they were at *The New York Times*. I do think that. And many people went on to *The New York Times* from the *Gazette*. In fact, I worked for *The New York Times* just three or four years ago, but that's coming later. The *Gazette* was a little bit more stodgy; they were certainly a lot more sexist. When I went to work on the copy desk at the *Gazette*, I must have worked there two months before I got to write a large headline. Anything larger than fourteen- or eighteen-point. I was only entrusted with the stories that were so short that the headline was almost longer than the story.

But at the *Democrat*, the first day I was writing front-page headlines. We all worked very hard. It was—we were energized. The person who stripped—we called it stripping the wires, because, literally, you would tear off these long sheets of—the news came out in long rolls of paper that was automatically typed from Associated Press and United Press International.

MW: Associated Press, from Reuters, from whatever.

SD: I know that we had Associated Press. We had United Press International, and we had the *Times-Post* News Service, which was the *Los Angeles Times-Washington Post* News Service. And . . .

MW: Did we have *Agence France-Presse*, too?

SD: I believe we had Agence France-Presse because *Times-Post* carried it. [Editor's note: *Agence France-Presse* is a French newswire service that distributes news feeds in multiple languages.]

MW: It was part of it. Okay.

SD: Now, something else that Jerry McConnell encouraged us to do was that when we saw things on the wire that didn't seem to gibe or we had a question about it, he encouraged us to call the home office of the wire service and ask questions, which I did on numerous occasions. And Carol Stogsdill did this as well. Both of us were sort of notorious for calling and asking questions. So much so that they remembered us from our accent. And years later—well, it wasn't that many years later, five or six—five years later when I went to the *L.A. Times*, ultimately, to work, John Dix, the head of *Times-Post* News Service, said, "I remember you, you're that girl from Arkansas who used to drive us crazy." And I said, "No, that

wasn't me, that was Carol Stogsdill." But he said, "No, I think it's you; I think I remember your voice." And they did. Because we called, and sometimes we made some good calls. But in those years, that was an interesting time because I remember reading several writers from the *Los Angeles Times* whose writing I very much admired [and] only five years later I became good friends with some of those people. The telegraph editor, as we called her, would come in at 3:00 in the morning, because we had an afternoon newspaper, so our deadline was—what time was our first deadline in the afternoon? That we went to press?

MW: Well, there were different editions. The state edition seems like the deadline was something like 11:00 [a.m.] or so.

SD: So we showed up—the—Patsy . . .

MW: Shoot. Patsy McKown.

SD: Patsy McKown was the telegraph editor; she came in around 3:00, 3:30, or 4:00 a.m. And most of the copy desk showed up at . . .

MW: 6:30 or 7:30 a.m.

SD: 6:30 or 7:00 or 7:30 a.m. I believe that the news editor and the assistant news editor—that would be . . .

MW: S-I Dunn. S-I D-U-N-N.

SD: S-I D-U-N-N. And Mike Kirkendall—K-I-R-K-E-N-D-A-L-L—came in at 6:30 generally and the rest of us would come in at 7:00. A couple of people would come in an hour or so later because they would work on the very latest edition of the day. The telegraph editor came in early, stripped the wires, and organized the budget, so that from overnight all the copy that had been churning out of these

machines all night long had been read by the telegraph editor and she had, in turn, made her own preliminary wire budget. When we came in in the morning, the first thing we went to work on were the wire stories because we already had them in hand, many of them having come from morning newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

MW: And these would be national and world stories.

SD: These would be national and world stories.

MW: Yes. Not local things.

SD: So we would work on those stories first. They went into pages that were farther back. This was Watergate at this time—Woodward and Bernstein [Reference to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *Washington Post* reporters who broke the news on the Watergate scandal in 1972] were writing the early part of their Watergate stories. We were running a lot of those stories, whereas many subscribers to the *Times-Post* News Service were not yet trusting Woodward and Bernstein. But the *Democrat*, for all its editorial conservatism, trusted Woodward and Bernstein early on. And if you were to go back and look at the microfilm, I think you'd find that we ran a great deal of Watergate coverage from Woodward-Bernstein. And from the *Los Angeles Times*.

MW: For those people in the year 2184 [laughter], Watergate was the big scandal involving President Richard Nixon and a break-in at the Democratic party's headquarters, which was the—it's the biggest political scandal in American history, just about, and eventually ended up [with] President Richard Nixon resigning.

And it was a huge, huge—one of the hugest stories in the history of American journalism. Anyway, so that was just FYI.

SD: When it started, Woodward and Bernstein were young reporters like us. They were young kids. They were four or five years older than Mel and I, maybe they were six years older. But they were young kids, too, and a lot of people did not put any credence in what they were writing. We did—in many cases. And we ran a lot of early stories. So we would work pretty much continuously from the time we got there, writing stories—I mean, reading stories and writing headlines. Mike Kirkendall and Si Dunn would lay out the pages—would design the pages, as they would say today, and give us the headline orders. We would write a headline, shoot it back to Mike, who sat—we sat in a semicircle and the slot man sat in, literally, an elevated position in the center of the semicircle.

MW: Of a horseshoe-shaped desk, like a U-shaped desk.

SD: A horseshoe-shaped desk.

MW: And the slot person sat in the middle of it.

SD: In the middle, so that he could swivel around in his chair and talk to all of his people, who were all literally seated in a horseshoe around him. We would throw him the headline and the story, because this was pre-computer, and he would throw it back to us with a suggestion, or he would rewrite it himself, or he would accept it as the case may be. And this was basically what we did all day long. All during the day we would have live copy coming in from our own reporters, and when we had questions, we would go to the city desk and ask the city editor, who at the time was Larry Gordon, or one of his deputies. We would work faster and

faster up to the deadline, which was pretty much absolute down to the minute. That's something that's very different from any other job that I can think of, apart from daily newspapers. Where you still have very much a deadline that is really not flexible, because if you don't meet a certain time, a certain schedule, that gives you adequate amount of time to process the paper and get it onto the press and get it to your vendors who are driving the trucks who will take it out and put it on the streets at the time people expect it, or deliver it to your home at the time you expect it, then advertisers are not happy and neither are your subscribers. So it's all a matter of very tight production. And the copy desk is the last gap. Reporters can be a little bit late with their story sometimes; you can push that envelope for a story that's breaking and still developing. The copy desk people are always the people who make up the difference in the time, because when you get into the production side, you're working with machines and there's really no give on making a press run faster or slower. Presses pretty much run at capacity. And they run on a schedule. The copy desk is the last chain in the human thought process that goes into a newspaper, so we were the ones who made up the difference.

[00:47:09.12]

[Tape Stopped]

MW: We took a little break there. We were talking about the physical layout of the copy desk and the slot man—slot person—who, when you and I were there, was often Si Dunn, sometimes Mike Kirkendall. Later, Carol Gordon was the slot person sometimes. And Patsy was the slot person sometimes, I think.

SD: I don't recall that. I do recall the first morning that I was going to go solo on being the 3:00 a.m. person—to do Patsy's job when she was on a vacation. And Patsy always told everyone to come in at 3:00. Carol told me to come in at 4:00, 4:30, because she thought—well, Carol was very fast, and she thought I could probably do it fast, too. And for all we knew—no one knew when Patsy came in [laughs]. So I came in at 3:00 when I—because it was my first night. To my shock and horror, I was locked out of the building, and I couldn't get into the building. And this was downtown Little Rock, which was at that time quite a dangerous place to be—perhaps it even is now. I was in front of the *Democrat* building at 3:00 in the morning, twenty-three years old, nothing around, nobody around except shadowy figures who looked very scary. So I walked a block east, and I believe there was some kind of all-night diner. I mean, there was an all-night diner—I don't remember the brand of the diner, but I walked to that diner and I called Jerry McConnell at home and said, "I'm locked out of the building. What am I supposed to do?" Well apparently, the night watchman had fallen asleep inside. So someone called him—woke him up. I went back down the street—terrified. Even to be out on the street at that hour of night was a big deal in Little Rock, and the night watchman let me in. But they had a very hard time ever persuading me to do that job again.

MW: [Laughs]

SD: I just couldn't see—I was willing to do a lot for that paper, but not to be locked out in downtown Little Rock in the middle of the night. I was not—I didn't feel appreciated at that point.

MW: So this was—we are still talking about probably late 1974 here or 1975-ish or so. You hadn't been there very long when that happened, probably.

SD: That would have been sometime in the winter of—the early months of 1975.

MW: Yes.

SD: When I was—see, but I was learning things that I would not have learned at the *Gazette* at that point. I was already given the responsibility of being the telegraph editor. There's no way I could have done that at the *Gazette*. David Petty had been doing that job for years, and he was very experienced, and other people who did that job did not go to that job until they had been working at the *Gazette* for years and years and years. So this is another example of how the *Democrat* gave you on-the-job training in a lot of ways.

MW: Right. Even though it was a fairly big city paper. I mean, we're talking about Little Rock, the capital of the state, and it was a very widely distributed paper. Those of us who were young and inexperienced got a chance to do different things that we wouldn't have done on a bigger—shall we say, regimented paper.

SD: But it had the feel of a big paper, and it worked like a big paper.

MW: Yes, yes.

SD: Both the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* essentially worked like every big city newspaper that I have ever been with. So it was the experience of a big city paper because, even recently when I worked for six months at the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris, I found the size of the staff and the atmosphere very similar to the *Democrat*. With the exception that, of course, the caliber at the *International Herald Tribune* was without par. But other than that, the routine, the demands of

the job, if not the standard—everything at the *Democrat* had the feel of a large metropolitan daily. And that's the way you had to do your job—to the best of your ability. But as far as the routine and what you were aspiring to, all of that was professional. And it was comparable to any big city paper that I've ever encountered.

MW: How long were you—we pretty much covered what happened. You were at the copy desk at the *Democrat* with people like Si Dunn, Mike Kirkendall, Patsy McKown, Carol Gordon, me, Collins Hemingway, Amanda Singleton—who was Amanda Husted later, right?

SD: I don't know if she changed her name, but she was at the time dating Bill Husted, who was the deputy city editor, or something. I don't know his title, but he was Larry Gordon's chief assistant.

MW: Right. Larry Gordon was the city editor. Ralph Patrick was the—something.

SD: He was something between Larry Gordon and Jerry McConnell. I didn't have a lot of interaction with Ralph Patrick. Not that he was a standoffish type of guy, but Larry Gordon was the person we usually—he was the point person with the copy desk. He and Bill Husted.

MW: Yes. They were the interface between us and the reporters.

SD: Yes. Except for the fact that we would never have used the word interface because I don't think we had heard of it at the time.

MW: [Laughs] Good point. They were the people in between us and the reporters.

SD: Yes [laughter].

MW: Good point. Yes. So how long were you at the *Democrat* then? When did you leave, and under what circumstances?

SD: I left the *Democrat* in the fall of 1975. For a couple of reasons. It had—my goal, as I mentioned early in this interview, was to use Little Rock sort of as a graduate school. I knew I was sort of coming to the end of that time when I would have been in graduate school had I been able to afford it. And things were changing at the *Democrat* inasmuch as quite a few of us were getting restless. Perhaps for no particular reason, because Jerry was certainly a great boss; he was a great guy to work for. But I think a number of us who were all good friends on the copy desk were just feeling the need to move on. And my sister had since left the paper which she worked for—she worked for the *Chicago American*, which had later changed its name to *Chicago Today*. *Chicago Today* folded and then was bought by the *Chicago Tribune*. It was bought by the *Tribune* and then folded into the *Tribune*, and it totally lost its identity, unlike the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* merger. My sister had then become—at that time was a freelance writer, but she still knew a lot of people at the *Tribune* and also at the [*Chicago*] *Sun-Times*, so I decided it was time to move on. I wrote letters to the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* and told them I was going to be in Chicago on a certain date to visit my sister, and I would like to come in and talk with them and perhaps try out on their copy desk. So I did. I worked for each paper for two days. Normally, in those days, the procedure was that you would apply to a paper. If they were interested in having a look at you, you would go and generally work for them for one week. They would pay you the going rate for that one week, and

they would evaluate you at the end of the week. It was very rare to do less than a week of a tryout at large papers, but I talked to these two papers, and I frankly told them that I wanted to try out at both papers and I only had a week to do it, so I could only give each paper two-and-a-half days. Miraculously, they agreed to this. And I was only twenty-four. I mean, I don't know where I had the chutzpah to do this. But—they all said, "Okay." Some of us had told Jerry McConnell that we were unhappy, and he was sort of skeptical as to whether we would be able to get jobs, because *Chicago Today* had just been folded, and at that time, in that year, a number of major, big-city dailies were folding. That was a time of consolidation in the newspaper industry, and a lot of people, including I'm sure the *Arkansas Gazette*, used this as an anti-union tool to say, "This is not your market; this is an employer's market." But in fact, that really wasn't the case, and it almost never is the case when you have mergers, because what you have is the new company that emerges out of the takeover will often lay off older workers—those who are making more money—and they will hire new, younger workers. And I supposed I may have—I don't know, but I may have been the beneficiary of that. Because when I was hired at the *Chicago Tribune*, which I chose over the *Sun-Times* because I felt it had a higher quality, I came on board at that copy desk only to find there were a few old-timers who were wonderful, wonderful people, but there were a lot of new young faces who were about my age. So I'm sure that there was a whole large group of young people my age, that is to say in their mid-twenties, who were hired after *Chicago Today* was folded and people took early retirement or were forced out, or whatever, because I found an equally young

copy desk, an equally energetic copy desk. With a few wonderfully qualified old-timers who were just a source of knowledge. My first boss, the slot man—his name was Johnrae Earl—at the *Chicago Tribune*. And he was famous for having written the headline, "Dewey Defeats Truman" in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. For those of you in—what year is it, Mel?

MW: 2184.

SD: 2184? When Harry Truman ran for reelection . . .

MW: In 1948.

SD: . . . 1948, he was running against Thomas Dewey, the Republican candidate. In fact, it may have been Truman's first real race, because he ascended to the Presidency when Franklin Roosevelt died. Obviously, a very close race. According to Johnrae Earl, my boss—Johnrae was . . .

[01:00:31.28]

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

MW: When the tape ran out, we were discussing the famous Chicago newspaper headline, "Dewey Defeats Truman." Take it up where we were, Sheila.

SD: At the beginning of this interview, we talked about hot type in the days before offset printing. Hot type was more cumbersome; it took longer to set; it took longer to assemble. So what the *Tribune* had done that night is they had—just like in the movies, they had set two large headlines. One said, "Dewey Defeats Truman" [and] one said "Truman Defeats Dewey." Johnrae had written one of those. Now, it didn't take a rocket scientist to write those headlines. But the thing

is, Johnrae was the person who was in charge that night. And they went to press with their first edition. At which point, Dewey actually was in the lead. And hence, Johnrae took credit for this headline. He made the call that night, and they went with that headline. When I went there in 1975 . . .

MW: Let's say that one of the most famous news photographs of all time is Harry Truman holding the front page of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that said, "Dewey Defeats Truman."

SD: Absolutely.

MW: That's one of the most famous newspapers—and he's got a big smile on his face. Of course, Truman ended up defeating Dewey later in the evening.

SD: And Dewey was never really heard from again.

MW: Yes.

SD: But—the controversy as to how the call was made to go with that headline lived on for twenty more years because, when I first went to the *Tribune* in 1975, Johnrae gave me the report that the *Tribune* had—the *Tribune* had had an internal investigation that went on and on, and the latest one was published internally in the late 1960s. So it was a point of contention at the *Tribune*; it was a very big deal for twenty, twenty-five years. When I first went there, that was one of the things they did to young [newly hired employees], I suppose. Johnrae gave me the entire volume to read on everyone . . .

MW: [Laughs] The investigative report of what happened?

SD: The investigative internal audit of what happened, and everyone trying to cover their own behind as to who made the call and why they went to press with that

headline at that particular time. It was a convoluted process in which every single person in the chain of command, and every witness, every copy editor, everyone who was there that night was interviewed. Over and over for twenty years. I mean, they were never satisfied, so they kept ordering a new investigation. So I read the most recent one, and it was long. It was a long, complicated thing, and very hard for me to understand because I didn't know any of these people at the time, although I later became acquainted with many of them. But it was an ongoing, serious controversy. The man who was at the center of it always took great delight in passing out this report to new people.

MW: [Laughs] Well, he was responsible for—he was part of one of the most historic photographs ever made.

SD: He was a wonderful guy. Great slot man—best slot man I ever had. He was also the food critic, and he would literally—he would go to London for lunch. And back. Those were the heyday—the 1970s and early 1980s were the heydays of newspapers, and I was fortunate to work for two very prosperous newspapers during that time.

MW: Before we go on to what you did after the *Democrat* further, let's go back just one second. Of course, one of the things we are interested in here is the famous war, [the] so-called war between the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, which ended up with the *Gazette* being sold to Gannett and eventually selling its assets to the *Democrat* and the end of the *Arkansas Gazette* as we knew it. But when we're talking about when you and I were there—1974, 1975—that war was not really hot yet. I mean, the *Gazette* was still a morning paper, the *Democrat* was an afternoon paper, and

John Robert Starr, the famous firebrand managing editor of the *Democrat*, had not come to the *Democrat* when you and I were there. I'm sure he hadn't, because I was there after you and he hadn't come yet. So there was not—there was competition in that you wanted to do stories better than the other paper or get stories the other paper didn't have, but it wasn't the newspaper war that developed later in the 1970s and 1980s. Right? Is that the way you remember it?

SD: Right. No, the *Gazette* was clearly the ascendant paper. But the *Democrat* tried very hard. An interesting side note is that the man who brokered the sale of the *Gazette* for Gannett, Rupert Phillips, had been the publisher of the Mountain Home paper after the Mountain Home paper was sold to Multimedia Corporation, which was based in Birmingham, Alabama, which ultimately was sold to Gannett. And Rupert continued as an adviser with Gannett for a time.

MW: You're talking about the *Baxter Bulletin* . . .

SD: Yes. When I was in college, Rupert was the publisher of the *Baxter Bulletin*. He's the man who ultimately helped to broker the sale of the *Gazette* on behalf of the *Democrat*.

MW: Wow. Small world-ism. Wow.

SD: Well, Arkansas is a very small state.

MW: We're going to take a break here because there's a train going by as you can hear. We are in Sheila's backyard and there's a train across the river. [Train whistling in background.]

[01:07:21.04]

[Tape Stopped]

MW: I think the train has passed now. By the way, it's a beautiful day, October 14. It's one of those perfect Arkansas days that we get about three weeks of in the spring and the fall. When you and I were there, again, we were competing with the *Gazette*, but the famous war had not happened. And you were out of state by the time that happened. You were gone to Chicago and L.A. and stuff.

SD: That's correct.

MW: Did you have much interaction with the Hussmans at that point?

SD: I never did. I don't know if I even met Mr. Hussman.

MW: Do you remember—I've been trying to remember—tell me if I'm wrong, okay? You and I went to the paper within probably—we figured out—within a few weeks of each other in the summer of 1974. Now, I remember a meeting where they told us the paper had been sold and Hussman introduced himself and talked about—do you remember this at all?

SD: No. When I went to the *Democrat*, the Hussmans already owned it.

MW: I tried to look this up on the Internet, and I think that the Hussmans bought it in 1974. Anyway, give us a brief rundown of your career post-*Democrat*, post-1975-ish. You went to the *Chicago Tribune* on the copy desk.

SD: Oh the copy desk, that's correct.

MW: And eventually some of your buddies from the *Democrat* joined you there, right?

SD: Yes. In fact, in the fall of 1975 or late summer, Carol Stogsdill, Mike Kirkendall, and myself all . . .

MW: Carol Stogsdill is the person we were referring to as Carol Gordon . . .

SD: Yes. Carol Gordon . . .

MW: . . . was married to Larry Gordon, the city editor when we were there.

SD: Carol, at the time, was a copy editor, and I believe she became assistant news editor or wire editor or whatever.

MW: She ran the slot sometimes.

SD: Yes. She was and has always been from the very beginning an outstanding newspaperwoman. But Mike, Carol and I were good friends, and we were all somewhat dissatisfied with our lives in Little Rock. Not that we disliked the *Democrat*, but we were only—I was only making $140 a week. I can't speak for what Carol and Mike were making . . .

MW: I was making $125 a week, so you were making $15 more than me.

SD: I believe Mike was making somewhere like $170, $175, a week, and I thought he was so rich.

MW: You were making $15 a week more than I was. But you were a *Gazette* scholar and I . . .

SD: I know. And that $15 made a big difference.

MW: Yes. In those days, for $15 you could buy a Cadillac. Just kidding, just kidding. Go ahead. You went to the *Chicago Tribune*.

SD: I went to the *Chicago Tribune*; I worked there three years. Two of those three years were the coldest winters on record in Chicago. When I moved to Chicago, I had the City Service station in Mountain Home check my Opel, which was still working at that point. My new Opel, which was only two years old, but for an Opel that was pretty old. Checked it, and said it was fine. I went to Chicago. I started work the third week of November. I parked my car in front of my apart-

ment house on the North Side. I lived on the North Side in Lincoln Park neighborhood near the lake [Lake Michigan]. It snowed. I went to work the first week in December—there was a huge blizzard. It covered my car. Three months later it thawed, and I took my car to the local garage to be checked. And the man said, "Lady, you've got no antifreeze in this car. You're lucky your block didn't crack." So we decided my block hadn't cracked—whatever that means. The first night in Chicago a blizzard completely covered my car and insulated it until it thawed. So I had no idea. When I moved to Chicago, I had lived in Little Rock—that's it. In Little Rock I never took a bus, but I knew people occasionally who did take a bus. Mike Kirkendall took a bus sometimes. From his job. But in Little Rock, correct me if I'm wrong, you stood on the bus route and you waved at the bus and they stopped for you in those days. I didn't know that you had to go to a bus stop. So when I went to Chicago I walked out to Lincoln Park where the 151 and the 153 buses ran by, and I walked out there and when I got to the street that the buses came by on, I stopped. I waved and the buses picked me up and they took me and deposited me at the front door of the *Chicago Tribune*. And this worked fine for about a week, and then one day I was really late because the bus wouldn't stop. No one really believed me; they thought I was just late. And about three or four days later that happened again, and I waved and I waved and it was so cold and the wind was blowing so much that I actually had to hold onto a tree so I wouldn't blow away. And the bus wouldn't stop for me. I got to work and said the bus wouldn't stop, and several other people on the copy desk also lived on the North Side and rode the very same bus. They said, "Now wait a minute, what time was

that? I was on the 153, and I got here on time." They continued questioning me and finally someone said, "Where were you standing? Because we don't recall the bus ever having run a stop." I told them, and I said, "What do you mean, a stop?" And they said, "Oh, dear, honey, we have these things called bus stops in Chicago. And you have to go to them and that's why they call them bus stops, because that's where the buses stop. And you have to be there. If you're at another stop—and a driver's been stopping for you for a week? You're really lucky. We've never heard of that. I mean, you were lucky that the driver was stopping for you. From now on, go to the bus stop and this is where it is." They told me, and so I went there and everything was fine after that. I took a lot of abuse in those years at the *Tribune*. One morning I had to go to work at 7:00 in the morning like I had in Little Rock, but that meant getting up at 5:30, whereas in Little Rock you had to get up at 6:00 or 6:15, and it was no big deal. I have never been a morning person. In fact, my mother used to say that I would never be able to hold a job down because she could never get me to school on time in the morning. And my first job on the *Arkansas Gazette*—when I told her I had been hired, she said, "What time are you starting?" And I said, "12:30 p.m." And she almost—her jaw dropped. She just couldn't believe it. All these years she'd been telling me I could never hold a job because I could never get up in the morning. And actually, most of my life has been spent working evenings. But on this one occasion I went to work and looked down and realized I was wearing two sandal heels, both of them brown, but not—definitely not—the same pair. And I was—I looked down and I happened to sigh out loud, "Oh, my God," and the person sit-

ting next to me on this horseshoe rim—similar to the one that we had at the *Democrat* and at all newspapers at that time—looked down and said, "Ha! The little hillbilly's wearing shoes that don't match." And I was so embarrassed that I went to the phone and I called my friend Mike Kirkendall, who by that time was working at the *Chicago Sun-Times* because he had come to Chicago and left the *Democrat* also in the same space of a few months. Mike went to work in the afternoon, so I called Mike on my break. No, Mike went to work late morning, because he was on the entertainment desk at the *Sun-Times*. And I called Mike and I said, "Mike, you've got a key to my apartment. Please go over to my apartment and get either this pair of shoes or that pair of shoes. Because I'm wearing brown sandal heels." So he went over to my apartment, called me back, and said, "Sheila, you've got two dozen pairs of brown sandals with heels." And I said, "Just put them in a bag and bring all of them, okay?" So he did. And when I took my break—our lunch break came at 10:00 in the morning. I took a break. Mike was downstairs in the lobby to meet me. I found shoes that matched, put them on, went back upstairs, and the assistant managing editor called me into his office. The managing editor, the assistant managing—well, all four assistant managing editors, and the news editor were standing there, and they gave me a long lecture. They said, "Sheila, you know we don't have a real strict dress code at the *Chicago Tribune*, and we know that you're recently arrived from Arkansas, so we know you're not used to wearing all of your clothes all of the time—maybe not your shoes, but we do like you to have shoes that match." And I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." At that point, everyone in the office looked down at

my shoes, which were of course, perfectly matched. And the slot man said, "How did she do that? Half an hour ago those shoes didn't match." So anyway, this spoiled their punch line, which was—from then on they were going to call me Sheila Two-Shoes.

MW: [Laughs] So it was kind of a joke. They were calling you in to just pull your chain a little bit.

SD: Yes. I was their reigning hillbilly until . . .

MW: Like a little cliché thing . . .

SD: . . .until Carol Stogsdill showed up and came to work there a year and a half later. And one more thing I will say before leaving the *Chicago Tribune*. Did I already mention that they had never heard of the *Arkansas Gazette*?

MW: I'm not sure.

SD: I went there from the *Arkansas Democrat* and at some point a couple of weeks later, after I had passed the tryout and been hired, the assistant managing editor happened to say something to me like, "What was that paper you came from that you worked at? The *Arkansas Gazette*? What is that? Is that a weekly?" Which was—I had to laugh at that, because when I went to work at the *Gazette*, people at the *Gazette* thought that they were so well-known that their caché was so elite that they had this caché throughout the journalism profession just because they had won one Pulitzer prize. Which was very well deserved and people at the *Gazette* went through hell during the desegregation crisis of Little Rock [reference to the 1957 Little Rock Central High School integration crisis]. But twenty-five years later they were not that well-known everywhere, although they were a wonderful

paper with high standards. That was quite a revelation for me to go to Chicago and no one at the *Tribune* who had hired me had ever heard of the *Arkansas Gazette*, although they had heard of the *Democrat*. Now that may be because there were a number of people from the *Democrat* who went east and worked in Philadelphia and New York, who spread the *Democrat*'s name in that way. And to this day, even when I was in Paris two years ago, my colleagues from *The New York Times* who had come over to work for the summer all asked me about certain people at the *Democrat*. In fact, one of my colleagues at the *Herald Tribune* was originally an employee of both the *Gazette* and the *Democrat*, Richard Allen. Not the Richard Allin who wrote the column, but another Richard Allen, who, when he lived in Arkansas, was usually referred to as Dicky.

MW: Okay. I didn't know him.

SD: But the *Democrat* actually—by virtue of the people who were employed for the *Democrat* and then worked all over the world, the *Democrat* really is quite well known, more than you might think.

MW: Well, you and I both owe a lot to Jerry McConnell for giving us a chance.

SD: Yes.

MW: Of course, you'd already proven yourself at the *Gazette* . . .

SD: But I was about to be fired for all I knew [laughter]. I could never verify that story, because how can you verify something that doesn't happen?

MW: Right. But Jerry . . .

SD: And by the way, I've never been threatened with firing since then.

MW: [Laughs] Well, then you weren't trying hard enough [laughter]. Jerry gave a lot of people a chance based who knows what—instinct? You know, pheromones. Who knows what? But a lot of people who wanted to work in newspapers and had nothing going for them except that desire—Jerry gave us a chance, and a lot of folks who were given a chance used that to go on to lots of different things. And you're one of them. Okay. You worked at the *Tribune* for three years, which would be what? About 1978 or so?

SD: Yes. In 1978, after two of the three worst winters on record . . .

MW: You were ready to leave Chicago maybe?

SD: Actually, I bought a new car. A Toyota, because the Opel died. Bought a new car and then I promptly lost it because you had to park on the street. I didn't live—I lived in a very nice neighborhood, but still there was no off-street parking, as we say. I parked my car—again, it snowed. But this time, it didn't thaw for five months, and I lost my car. But I wasn't really worried about it.

MW: Lost in—how do you mean?

SD: I couldn't find it because it was covered with snow and I forgot where I parked. Also, I lived in a wonderful brownstone, but half of the radiators didn't work. My landlord, who lived on the third floor, was going through a nasty divorce, and he—whenever I complained about my heaters, he just said, "Oh, you women are so cold." It was a nutty time. It was a very nutty time and there were wonderful characters in Chicago. I tried all winter to get my radiators fixed. I was so cold. I was so cold. The following July some workmen showed up on my stoop, and I said, "What are you doing here?" And they said, "We came to fix your radiators."

And I said—as it turns out, this was what turned out to be the hottest day of the year. I said to these men, "Well, you can come in and fix them, but you really don't have to if you have something else to do because I'm not going to be here when it gets cold." So I moved. This is a tip to people—I don't know if it will still work today, but when I called people in Chicago and asked for tryout, I didn't know anyone. They knew my sister, but I didn't know the specific people I was applying to. In the fall of 1978, my friend Mike Kirkendall had already moved to Los Angeles and was working for the Long Beach paper. He had just moved there, and I called him and asked him if I could come to visit him. I called the *Los Angeles Times* one night. I talked to a man on the city desk, and I said, "I want to apply for a job there, who should I write?" The man told me; he later became a very good friend. I called the national editor; I said, "My name is Sheila Daniel. I'm going to be out there in a couple of weeks visiting, and I'd like to come in and talk to you." I did. I wasn't really prepared to do a tryout that week because I wanted to get an expense-paid trip later to do a tryout, but Dennis Britton ended up talking me into coming in to trying out for a couple of days. I called in sick of my third day of the tryout, but for some reason they hired me anyway, and then I was off to L.A. And the reason I gave in Chicago when I quit was the absolute truth. It was just too cold and I wanted to live near a palm tree. So I moved to Los Angeles, and I worked in L.A. for three years—working on the national desk in various capacities. One of my jobs was to back up the national assignment editor, so on Sundays I ran the national bureaus, which is pretty incredible when I think back about it, because I was only twenty-eight or twenty-nine,

and I was running Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters in the national bureaus, one of whom was in Chicago. I had never met him when I lived in Chicago, but his name was Bob Secter and we got acquainted on the phone as he was one of my reporters. Eventually we decided to get married, so the *L.A. Times* found a job in Los Angeles for my husband, and they found someone in Los Angeles who wanted to work in Chicago, and so they did a swap in order for us to get married. The *L.A. Times* was great about that. It was paternalistic in a way that was very pleasant.

MW: In those days—as we speak, there's a story in this week's *New Yorker* about the *L.A. Times*, amazingly enough, so I learned a little bit of their history. This was when they were still owned by the Chandler family.

SD: Yes.

MW: Which had owned them for a long, long time.

SD: It was very much a family operation.

MW: Right. And this story in *The New Yorker* this week made the point that these really great papers in America have been owned by families that didn't have to answer to a board of directors, didn't have to answer to stockholders, make their profit margin, blah blah blah. Nowadays, more and more papers are owned by chains that are just basically looking at the bottom line. But when you worked for the *L.A. Times* it was still owned by the Chandler family, so it didn't have to answer to anybody except the family, I suppose.

SD: There are upsides and downsides to that kind of an arrangement. In the early part of the twentieth century, these newspaper families like the Hearsts and the Chandlers . . .

MW: The Sulzbergers, or whoever owned *The New York Times*.

SD: The Sulzbergers and Colonel McCormick in Chicago. A lot of these people—newspapers were so influential in those days, and these were in the days of the Carnegies and the Mellons and the—the early part of that century, which was so rife with corruption. Newspapers were very powerful and they could use their power in any way they wanted. It just so happened that when the second and third generation of these newspaper pioneers came along, they were sort of like the Kennedys, the second generation and the third generation of the Kennedys, who grew up in wealth, and whereas their parents may have had a very specific agenda—may have started wars for all we know—did lots of unscrupulous things. Even the Chandlers in Los Angeles—everyone agrees now that they were pretty much complicit in stealing water from the Owens Valley. If you've seen the movie Chinatown, or heard about it, that was really largely about the Chandler family. So the early Chandlers built Los Angeles in a very significant way, in that they were instrumental in bringing water from the Sierra Nevada down to Los Angeles. But their children—particularly Otis Chandler—had loftier ideals, having grown up as children of privilege. Otis Chandler made the *Los Angeles Times* into an international paper with a tremendous reputation, and he put a lot of—he continued to make the paper profitable, but he put a lot of energy into making it a very quality—to putting out a product, as we say, of very high quality. And I was

there. I first went to L.A. when Otis Chandler was still active as the publisher. He had just stepped down and had been replaced by Tom Johnson, who was equally well thought of. Tom Johnson had gotten his start in the Lyndon Johnson Administration. I may have to check my facts on this; he may have started with the Kennedy Administration. He was a Texan who worked in the press office of the White House and was a very progressive newspaperman, as well as a very shrewd newspaperman. He eventually left the *L.A. Times* and went on to CNN before retiring several years ago. So when I went to the *L.A. Times*, we were still on the upswing; we were still expanding our foreign bureaus, still expanding our national bureaus. It was a very exciting time to be at that paper. At that time, when I was running the national bureaus, that's when I met my husband. He came out there and we got married, and a couple of years later we decided we wanted to be foreign correspondents. And no sooner had we asked than Bob was given a job as the Bangkok bureau chief for Southeast Asia, so I quit my job. By then I had a number of contacts, so for three years in Southeast Asia, based in Bangkok [Thailand], I covered about a dozen countries as a freelancer, primarily with the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris [France]. I was the freelance assignment editor-photographer-writer based in Bangkok for a number of special sections ranging from Brunei's independence from Britain to Hong Kong's jitters over re-unification with China. I spent a lot of time in the Philippines, because that was the pre-revolutionary Philippines in the times leading up to the overthrow of [Ferdinand E.] Marcos. I worked on business news; I worked for *Business Week* and for *The Economist*, and I was even an on-air reporter for National Public Ra-

dio covering the Thai-Cambodian border conflict. I was admitted to Cambodia and Vietnam under the auspices of *The Economist*. We were the first group of Western journalists to witness what later became known as the killing fields. That's probably the most horrendous sight I will ever see in my life. I hope that it is. This was obviously before the movie was made; this was before the outside world was really convinced that a massive genocide had taken place. I was unfortunate enough to witness open graves and other atrocities. I saw, during that time, skulls stacked up in sheds like trophies. I covered the Muslim insurgency in the southern Philippines. I was in India the night Indira Gandhi was assassinated. I watched New Delhi go up in flames, and I remember saying to my husband at the time, "You know, this could happen in L.A." This is how I understood that night how quickly civilization can turn into anarchy. Which, of course, I later witnessed with the L.A. riots. Unfortunately, around that time my marriage was breaking up. So about a month after Indira was assassinated, I left and came back to the States. The *L.A. Times*, as always, was wonderful. The day I showed up, Noel Greenwood—then the metropolitan editor—called me and offered me a job. He couldn't offer me a permanent job, but he could offer me a temporary full-time job. Similarly, a couple of other people at the paper found jobs for me, and I finally ended up within a few days with a full-time job in the San Fernando Valley edition. I worked there for a year, then I went on and I worked in the suburban sections, which at the time were very large, important parts of the *Los Angeles Times*. Just to go over those positions briefly, I was assistant news editor in the San Fernando Valley, and then I became Valley business editor and went down-

town, became the chief news editor of the Westside edition, which was a bi-weekly with a circulation of 250,000 within the *L.A. Times*. I took the South Bay edition to a daily edition. I then moved on to the Metro section, and, ironically, when I had first moved back to Los Angeles, I got a call from Carol Stogsdill, who was still in Chicago where she was the sports editor. Or assistant sports editor. I'm not sure of her position. You will hear that in her story. She called me and said, "How are you doing? I heard you were back in L.A." I said, "I'm not married anymore." And she said, "Hey, neither am I, and I'm interested in coming out." So I gave her a couple of names and she interviewed. She initially went to the Orange County edition, and it wasn't long before she was my boss downtown in Metro. So for at least two or three years, Carol was my boss. She left the paper shortly before I did. I worked there—I had many happy years and many productive years, first on the national news staff before I went to Bangkok and then when I came back in suburban and then the Metro news staff. I loved working there, but L.A. never felt like home. I always felt like Arkansas was where I belonged. In the year of 2001, a number of things happened that made me realize how short life can be, and how precious it is. I lost my mother and that, of course, to every single person alive—I think everyone who loses their mother—you never really get over that profound loss. Especially if it's the second parent to go. That really starts to make you evaluate your priorities. That happened. And then a number of things happened. The *Los Angeles Times* was in a great deal of turmoil. We were taken over by the *Chicago Tribune*, which was not necessarily a bad thing. At that time there was a lot of hope, because the *L.A. Times* had been

embroiled in a number of big, serious ethical controversies, so the staff morale was fairly low. A lot of my co-workers expressed the wish to just quit working altogether. And, strangely enough for me—I never planned to retire at age fifty, but a number of things came together. My doctor advised me to take some time off and think about it all. He advised me to do the math, and I decided that I would take a serious career break. So I left the *Times*, moved back to Arkansas, and bought this wonderful piece of land where I now live. I have a boat dock in my back yard and a boat to go with it. And, as you can hear in the background, there are all kinds of wildlife.

MW: Belted kingfisher. Red-bellied woodpecker. American goldfinch. Great blue heron. Carolina wren. Woodchuck. We could go on.

SD: I need to have one of my neighbors shoot the groundhog in my back yard. But I have a colony of mink—I have a little family of mink. I'm very attached to them. In my back yard. And I love it here. I lived here for about a year, and then I wasn't sure that I was really ready for full-time simple life, so I had a very fortunate opportunity in that I had an opportunity to go to work for the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris, which had just been acquired as a wholly-owned subsidiary of *The New York Times*. So in 2003, after having lived here for about a year, I closed up my house and moved to Paris and spent a very enjoyable time in Paris with the *International Herald Tribune*—six months as a copy editor and layout editor—and it was, among other things, the hottest summer in 500 years. Now, I don't know why this happens to me. I had been in Chicago in two of the three coldest winters on record, which made me leave Chicago. Paris—I get to Paris

and it's unusually hot and then it turns out to be the hottest summer in 500 years. So it was memorable on a number of different levels. I'm now back in Arkansas, back on the most wonderful piece of property that I could imagine ever finding. I'm very happy. I'm working on a novel as we all are. I'm still in my mid-life career break; I don't know what the future will hold. But to any of you who are considering journalism, I still think it's a worthwhile undertaking. I do think you have to prepare yourself to understand that you may not change the world, but it doesn't hurt to try. I was telling Mel off the record earlier that I felt that in my career I had tried to cover a number of things. I had tried to speak out on things that fell on deaf ears. And these were important issues, such as the genocide in Cambodia and the really ruthless Muslim insurgency in the southern Philippines that had its roots going back years and years and years. I was there—it was in the 1980s and it was ruthless even then. I saw things that I really wish I had never seen, but on the other hand, journalism has given me an opportunity to experience the world as a community, which few jobs can offer to young people, so I still think it's worth doing. I still think it's a profession worth following. In my next life, I don't know. Perhaps I'd rather work for an NGO [non-government organization]. Perhaps I'd rather be an aid worker. Perhaps I'd rather be more intimately involved. And I still might do that later in my life, but for the time being, it's a beautiful evening in the Ozarks. I'm here with a good friend—an old colleague, whom I haven't seen in at least twenty-five years, and I just want to close this interview with saying that I am so grateful to Jerry McConnell for having brought me on board at the *Democrat* and introducing me to so many truly good

and talented people. I think that's all I have to say. Do you have anything else you want to add, Mel?

MW: I'd like to add that I couldn't say it better myself. And, Sheila Daniel, thank you very much for this interview.

SD: You're welcomed.

[01:45:01.29]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Lu Ann Smith-Lacy]

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