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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Martin Holmes
Modesto, California
27 August 2005

Interviewer: Gary Rice

[00:00:00.00] Gary Rice: This is part of the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's] project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, at which time you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is to tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make this transcription available to others.

Martin Holmes: Thank you. My name is Martin Holmes. I certainly agree that the Center can use this transcript any way they want.

[00:00:44.02] GR: Okay. Well, let's just begin. Why don't you tell us what year we're in and sort of set the scene.

MH: Okay. This is 2005. This story will commence as far as my connection with the

Democrat in 1949. I went to work as a sportswriter. I was fairly fresh out of the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville], and I didn't know too much. [Laughs] Jack Keady, the sports editor of the *Democrat*, hired me. Since sports was one of my main interests at that time, and still is, I had a knowledge of what I was getting into and I liked it a lot. I enjoyed the games—you know, sports—and I enjoyed the people that I knew in it. So it was really kind of a natural job for me at that time.

GR: Yes.

MH: I was single. I had plenty of time to spend on it, so I did it. [Laughs] Should I continue?

GR: Go ahead.

MH: Well, anyway, I worked there as a sportswriter for several years. Very quickly, about the third day I was at the paper, Jack Keady—we were handling the copy and sending it up—and Jack says, "Well, why don't you go up to the composing room and make up?" I said, "I don't know how to make up." [Laughter] He says, "You ask for Ham Bowen up there, the foreman, and he'll tell you how to do it." [Laughter] And, sure enough, Mr. Bowen and I quickly became friends, and he taught me a whole lot. In fact, we used to go to the races and do things together once in a while.

GR: I see. I see.

MH: I had many friends on the printing staff there and other jobs I've had as well. They're good guys. Used to be, anyway. [Laughs]

GR: Yes, that's one of the differences. There's not as much fraternization with the printers anymore, is there? Nobody in the newsroom knows the printers.

MH: Well, there aren't any *real* printers, you know? The hot metal guys were really good craftsmen. The good ones were really great. The others were not so great. [Laughs] Anyway, it's just like anything else.

[00:03:03.28] GR: What was it like in the sports department then?

MH: Well, we had—this was a competitive newspaper town in Little Rock in that time, and both had pretty good sports departments. They were not nearly as heavily manned as they are now. And in those days, the University of Arkansas had not yet achieved the popularity and the following it has now. When I graduated in 1946, the stadium was about 12,000 people, and you could get a seat any day you wanted to by laying down a dollar and a half or two dollars a ticket [laughs] and just take your pick of seats. John Barnhill had just come and established his coaching career in Arkansas. He had been at Tennessee. Pretty soon—well, the first year he was there—the Hogs [the Arkansas Razorback football team] went to the Cotton Bowl. So the interest quickly began growing, and we had pretty good teams as long as Coach Barnhill was there and was competing for championships. Well, right away, of course, a boom began for a big stadium in Little Rock because the population was there.

GR: Yes.

MH: I don't think they realized yet that people were doing the drive up to Fayetteville quite often to go to football games. [Laughter] But the money was raised, and the stadium was built. Before long, the Razorbacks were playing before big crowds in Little Rock. And it has continued to what it is right now. Anyway, when I started, the high schools had pretty good play in the papers—I guess, more than they do now—and the state colleges.

GR: Yes.

MH: And those old-time rivalries—like between Ouachita Baptist and Henderson State Teachers' College, the [Arkansas] State Teachers' [College] and [Arkansas] Tech and different ones—were big games. They were treated that way in both the *Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*. I'd cover a lot of them, and it was a lot of fun. But that was *then*. [Laughter] The Razorbacks have become one of the great things in Arkansas. More attention is paid to them than almost anything else—any other single thing, I guess.

[00:05:40.08] GR: How many sportswriters were there then? Do you recall?

MH: Yes, I can tell you. [Laughs] It was about four at each one of them. Orville Henry had about three guys working for him—Bill Bentley and Adren Cooper and somebody else. I forget right now. And we had Keady and [Fred] Petrucelli and me and usually some high school kid who was just breaking in. There would be about—that's the way it was for some time. Charlie Allbright started that way. He became a columnist at the *Democrat* and also later had a daily column in the *Gazette* for years and years. He was a good guy, by the way. [Laughs]

GR: So it got pretty frantic on high school game night?

MH: Oh, yes. Well, it wasn't nights for us.

GR: That's right.

MH: [Laughs] We could come in the next morning and do our stories, but the *Gazette* guys had to do them at night. So, you know, Little Rock [versus] North Little Rock, Little Rock [versus] Pine Bluff—those were pretty big football games in those days and they still are on the high school level. Anyway, I worked at that for several years and enjoyed it. It stayed pretty much like that. But as the inter-

est in the Razorbacks grew and we were going to the Cotton Bowls. I went down to help Keady cover the Cotton Bowl when we played Georgia Tech. I forget now what year, but it was a Cotton Bowl game. Normally, if there was somebody else who was going to fill in—you know, for Keady if he was off or he decided to let somebody else cover the ball game—or Petrucelli, who was from the University of Alabama by way of Bridgeport, Connecticut. [Laughter] He married a Little Rock girl. Anyway, we had quite a bit of fun. I enjoyed it. But about the time—oh, I had been there seven or eight years, I guess, and thanks to the *Democrat*, my wife worked there on a temporary job for a few days. She wasn't my wife *then* [laughs], but it happened. Well, you know how it is when you're a junior sportswriter on a paper. Your income is not all that great. Some of your reward is in the fun of going to the games. [Laughs] Anyway, I thought, "Well, maybe I need to make a change here to see if I can't get more involved in a more serious way." So I quit the paper and worked with an ad[vertising] agency—a public relations firm with a fellow at the *Democrat*—a reporter named Tom Hockersmith. I worked for him for about two years, and then I decided I didn't like that too much. I decided I'd get back into the newspaper if I could. So I chose to go back to the *Democrat* because I preferred day work, you know.

GR: Yes.

[00:08:51.14] MH: So Gene Herrington was city editor then. He said, "Sure, you can come back whenever you want to." I went back to work. The way they started a reporter in those days—you worked the rubber chicken circuit for about a week. By that [I mean] you went to service clubs for luncheons. There was one every day. [Laughs] And, you know, you got a free lunch that way, and also you were-

n't required to write anything. You would if it was a newsy thing, but otherwise you were just there so people would get to know you and you could have access to them. And that's the way it worked. Most of the people in business—the leaders in Little Rock at that time—were located in an area on Main Street from about Sixth or Seventh on back down to around Third [Street]. You know, the *Gazette* was on Third and Louisiana, and we were up on Fifth and Scott, just a block off of Main. So pretty soon you got to know these guys and they'd recognize you. You could talk to them. You could call them on the phone. And most anytime you did, they would talk to you. It was a lot different than it is now. It was sort of a tight-knit structure in Little Rock. Pretty soon I was doing regular reporter work. But as it always happens—if you've had any experience doing desk work—pretty soon somebody has a day off or gets sick or something. And they'll say, "I want you to fill in over there." Well, the first thing you know, you're working as a desk man [laughter] on a regular basis if you have any aptitude for it at all. So pretty soon I was working on the city desk and the state desk helping rewrite and just whatever they needed. [Laughs] You know how it is on a small newspaper. That became my part of the operation. I gradually—I was filling in for Si Dunn then as a wire editor when he would be gone. And I worked on the state desk. I was pretty quick on rewriting, and they kind of liked that. [Laughs] Old Deane Allen was the state editor. So I had to work up a couple of pretty good stories for him, and pretty soon he was pushing me to better positions. And somebody else—you know, I was doing okay. As the openings occurred, I finally became news editor when Allen went to work—he had been supporting Dale Alford in his race for Congress. And Alford got him a job up in Washington [D.C.].

So that left the news editor job open. And Si Dunn was a logical candidate since he'd been wire editor all that time, but I had worked a lot up there, too. So Herrington just said, "You guys will have equal reign around here to keep things smooth." [Laughs] So I enjoyed that a lot—working in the composing room. Like I said, I already knew the printers up there pretty well. You know, you get pretty handy at figuring out how to get something done by massaging the foreman and various little things you can do [laughs] to make things happen.

[00:12:42.15] GR: Did it seem like every morning was frantic at the afternoon paper? Did you go in and hit the ground running?

MH: It really is pretty much that way or used to be. You'd come in there in the morning and just say, "What's going on?" And pretty soon you'd know when the reporters came to work. You didn't have much time, either. The first edition deadline would be around 11:00 [a.m.] Well, you know how it is about deadlines [laughs]—you've got to meet them or the paper won't come out. Then, at that time, at the *Democrat* they had a first edition that went in about then, and then they had a second state edition at about 12:30 or so. The first city edition was at about 1:00. That was very much of a remake, whereas the second edition was just pretty much cleanup. And then the second city edition, which was the one that went out to the homes, and the final. And they changed the front page up a little bit. So there was a remake on that front page every time. That kind of kept you on your toes [laughs], to say the least.

[00:13:51.14] GR: Yes. Do you remember any big breaking news events over the years you were there?

MH: Yes. I'll tell you something, I made a little memo here of some of them. The big

ones that we had locally, besides the integration thing [reference to the 1957 Little Rock Central High School integration crisis], which was just an ongoing thing for a long time, as you well know. I mean, it was a *long* time. Then we had an airplane, based at a Little Rock air force base, blow up over the city. We were having sonic booms all the time, only that one wasn't a sonic boom. Debris was falling all over town, so you just had to put those guys—we had every reporter in the office out just for stuff you could get—you know, police and anyone. [Laughs] And [I don't think anybody] was hurt on the ground, but the crew of the airplane, of course, was just blown to pieces. That was one. And the stuff that happened in those first days of the integration, when those crowds were over there at Central High School—it was hard traveling for newspaper people. I'm telling you, it was tough. They were fairly ugly people out there. And the main guys who took the brunt of it were the photographers because, in those days, they mostly carried those big four-by-fives instead of the thirty-five millimeter [cameras]. [Laughs] God, it was *scary*! There never was really an episode where anybody was manhandled, I don't believe, or hurt in any way. But plenty of mad people were right close to you. Not that I had to do that, being a desk person [laughs], but you heard of it. And you could see it. I lived pretty close to Central High in those days. I had an apartment over there then. It was a tough deal.

GR: Did you all plan the Central High coverage or did you pretty much just respond to it? Do you recall any strategy?

MH: Well, the way it came together was the Little Rock School Board and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] collaborated in a plan that they thought would be the smoothest way to integrate that high school,

by carefully choosing the children that were to make this entry and hoping for a smooth transition, that this could be accomplished without too much trouble. They were wrong because the people who were so opposed to integration chose to make Little Rock the battle point. And it *was* the first big integration struggle, and, I guess, the worst of them, really. But it was pretty ugly. People came from far and wide—not just from this state, but every place. And it went through two or three years almost. I remember one time—they would have these marches, and the police—God, I really appreciated the courage the policemen showed. They were up against it *every day* for a long time, and it was not easy. Anyway, that was the one with the longest duration, I guess. The other big thing that happened in Arkansas politics was the advent of Winthrop Rockefeller, who spearheaded a lot of things—most all of which, as far as I'm concerned, were really good—and his philanthropy and personal leadership, and bringing people to the jobs, like the Industrial Development Corporation. It really stimulated a lot of favorable things in Arkansas. The Republican Party was rejuvenated. Rejuvenated—I mean, they never had been anything since the Reconstruction days [post-Civil War era]. Republicans were mostly people around Little Rock who had always been Republicans. I guess they had come from Republican families way back. But this changed things. Winthrop was a pretty good-natured guy. He took a lot of guff. [Laughs]

[00:19:31.29 GR: Did he ever visit the newsroom that you recall?

MH: I can't recall him coming in there, but he might have. He wouldn't have been adverse to it. But you'd see him around Little Rock—this big old' guy in cowboy boots. He usually had somebody driving him. He was quite visible and ap-

proachable, and really a nice guy. I did work for him when I was working for the ad agency—go up to Winrock Farm. I'd hang around there and discuss things and get things going. He was an interesting guy.

GR: Was he sort of a favorite of the reporters?

MH: Well, I'll tell you something about Winthrop—he was a good-natured guy, I'll tell you that. [Laughs] He liked to drink a little bit. I remember George Douthit, the political writer for the *Democrat*—he'd ask the hard questions. Winthrop, I think, made his inaugural address, and old George says, "Governor, were you *drunk* when you [gave your inaugural address]?" He said, "Well, George, I had a couple, but—" It went something like that. He was just not a guy who just really got upset. It was remarkable. [Laughs] And he liked it down there.

GR: Well, that must have just been like a comet landing in Arkansas.

MH: It *was*. Well, the first thing they did, I guess, was the [Arkansas] Arts Center. They agreed to put up half of whatever it took build that Arts Center out there for the rest of the community, and they came through and it all happened. Boy, we had a real press party out there, I'll tell you. Ask [Bob] McCord the next time you see him. [Laughs] Anyway, what they did—he was going to have the events in tents—you know, with big barbecues and so forth and so on. They had two parties, one for the press and other people of that nature, and then the next night they had another one. And I went to both of them because my wife's family connections got me in that way. [Laughs] And I was on with the newspaper on the other one. Anyway, we went out there. They were a little slow getting the food out there that night, and I think everybody was pretty well [laughs] blasted. You know how newspaper men are when there's an open bar with really good liquor.

You can't—[laughs] at least it used to be that way. I imagine it still is. [Laughs] Anyhow, it was really a fun time. You just couldn't help but like the guy if you knew him at all.

[00:22:35.18] GR: So that would've been the years—because he had two terms or . . .?

MH: Yes. Yes.

GR: Two terms.

MH: Yes. And let me see. A big memory for me was the day that President Kennedy was shot [in 1963]. I was upstairs working in the composing room, I guess it was after noon when the story broke. I didn't think the type we had was big enough. The make-up man I had said, "There's an old barrel of type somewhere around here. Let's go and look." So we went over there and picked out all we could. We looked to see what letters we had, and I think we came up with "JFK Was Slain" or something like that. That was all we could do.

GR: So how big do you think that type was? How many points do you think?

MH: Oh, 120, maybe. It wasn't little. [Laughs] And, you know, in those days street sales counted for something.

GR: Yes. Well, how many street copies did you make? Did you have to do extra that day, do you think?

MH: I don't think so. We just did the edition and, God, everybody knew it by that time. Television was alive by then, so people were watching TV for news. And the really unfortunate—the personal thing—this change—the gradual domination of news by television. You know, television just told you what time to do it, and they'd do it that way. So, anyhow, that was a long time ago. But I can remember it very well. I'm one of the ones who really liked to do it, too.

GR: Yes. Well, you know, I think one of the stereotypes people have of the old days in the newspaper business [was] lots of heavy drinkers even in the newsroom.

MH: Well, we had a few guys around there in those earlier days who liked to nip a bit. Now, another thing—there were guys—kind of like printers, too—they would go someplace, and as long as you could keep them sober, they were good guys to have around. And then when they didn't, you just had to kiss them off. They'd have other [stops?]. There was a guy named Deacon Parker, who was a good friend of old [A.R.] Nelson at the *Gazette*, and he worked at the *Gazette* a couple of times. And he could come over to our place. He was from El Dorado, I believe. He'd get to where he just couldn't work, and then they'd ship him off down to his sister's in El Dorado. You know, maybe a year or two later, old Deacon would come in again. He was a pretty bedraggled-looking guy. He could really do pretty good work if you could keep him straight.

GR: Did any newsmen keep bottles in their desk drawer?

MH: Well, not during this time, but I'm sure—Mr. Bowen, my friend up in the composing room, said that in the Prohibition days that there was a guy who made regular stops at the *Democrat*. He'd come and supply the guys with the business ad department with whatever they needed and then come to the newsroom and take care of his customers there. Then he'd go on up to the third floor where the printers were. There were customers there as well. [Laughter] And another story I heard was they had a Linotype operator over at the *Gazette* named—what was his name? Ma Grant. But he was the only guy that Mr. [J. N.] Heiskell liked [laughs]. And Ma would keep a small jug in the lower part of his Linotype machine.

[00:28:30.15] GR: Well, talk a little bit about the competition between the two papers.

MH: Well, when I first went to work, it was like morning and night. The *Gazette* was the more dignified paper, I would say. Mr. Heiskell kind of set the tone over there. He was from the aristocracy, so to speak. There were people who kind of acted like that. Not the reporters—they were just like our guys—like anybody. But the *Gazette* looked like that, and that was the sort of thing that they stressed in their paper. But on our paper, as you say, it's today's news today. And you just go in there and you take it as you can. If you were lucky, you had some pretty good accidents and crime and things to start you. [Laughs] And, of course, the beat guys—the politics in Little Rock was always a big, big thing, and still is, I'm sure. But when a newspaper was reporting the news, you'd go out to the state capitol and God knows what would likely be going on out there. And guys like George Douthit and the *Gazette* guys—they had their sources. There was lots of news going through that way. But it seemed like there was always something happening around Little Rock.

GR: Yes.

[00:30:15.13] MH: [Laughs] It's a lot different than *here* in Modesto—let's put it that way. [Laughter] We had storms—you know, the tornadoes—I can remember a time when we had a party out at the [Boyle Park?]. It was a *Democrat* staff party. It was one of those days when the tornadoes were looming. And the first one hit down around Hope somewhere. It wasn't in Hope, but it was one of those small towns out there. So we sent someone . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

MH: Anyway, he had no more than been gone thirty or forty minutes, and there was another one a little bit closer. And before the day was over—that was what was popularly called the Judsonia tornado. Then another at Cotton Plant—it was pretty well across the state. There were a lot of people who died that day. It was the worst one I had ever seen that I remember. They were just spots all over the state. Of course, there were lots of individual ones that were terrible. Have you ever been where one has happened? You know what I'm talking about. I mean, it's scary.

GR: I covered the Forrest City one.

MH: Okay. Well, it's *terrible.* And we used to have floods, too, before they built all those big dams. I mean, I've gone out on assignment with a photographer to take aerial [shots], and, you know, that whole bottom land over there on the White River and the Cache River was under water. Lot of trees sticking up but you didn't see any land, except maybe a levee here and there. And that was another thing we had. You could count on it. So I guess that's mainly what—that's about the run of things we had.

[00:32:32.25] GR: Yes.

MH: And then the ongoing problems in Arkansas—low pay for the teachers and most any other line of work. Well, I know that has improved, especially up there in northwest Arkansas, where there is the Tyson plant and Wal-Mart. And the supporting industries that have grown up there with them—truck lines and the like. I told those people up there—I said, "This is going to make some money here, but it's going to be looking like California before long," [Laughter] "and you're not going to like it quite as well as you used to."

[00:33:25.14] GR: Did the reporters and editors from the two papers socialize at all?

MH: Oh, you'd see them at Christmas parties and things like that. I used to have friends at the *Gazette*, and we'd get together and have a couple of beers and talk things over. It wasn't just a common thing every day, but you'd see them around. Of course, we worked different shifts and that made it a little more difficult. Guys like Bill Lewis and—I knew Roy Reed pretty well, as well as Lewis, but it just seemed like I was where he *was* a lot. He's such a nice guy. I don't know. There were lots more. Gosh, they had some guys in their sports department, like Tom Dygard—he became one of the big cheeses at the Associated Press [AP]. He was in Japan for a long time and he wrote a lot of children's books. Others—there was always something interesting going on around Little Rock in the news business. I sure liked a lot of the *Gazette* guys and I thought a lot of them.

GR: Well, did people jump back and forth between the two papers?

MH: Gosh, no.

GR: That didn't happen, then?

MH: No. Not hardly. Once in a while. I can't remember us getting any *Gazette* guys to come over to our paper, but there was one or two of our guys who left. We had a lot of really good reporters, and most of them were kind of like me. They liked to work days, and it was really a hard time when we changed.

[00:35:14.05] GR: Yes.

MH: And that happened to me here, too, and I didn't much like it. But that's one of the reasons I came out here.

GR: Yes.

MH: But there were a couple of things that happened at the *Gazette* that really didn't

affect us too much, when the Guild—there was an attempt to organize [a labor union] over there, and it lost out. It [cost] a lot of those guys quite a bit. There were some hard feelings.

GR: Yes.

MH: But those were hard times around the *Gazette* for a while after that happened. I don't know. It was kind of tough. You'd see some of your friends pull out and go to Memphis or somewhere.

GR: Yes.

MH: And I started to—I had a job offer—well, two of them—over there. And I just couldn't do it because I was afraid it might mess up my family life.

GR: Yes. So was that the paper that people aspired to go to if they were going to move up a notch— to go to Memphis?

MH: Well, actually, you could do better than that, I guess, if you were really—if you didn't mind moving up into the Midwest. People could get jobs up there if you were competent.

GR: Yes.

MH: AP guys could help you, for example.

GR: Yes.

MH: I have often had a lot of friends up there. It didn't take much. A qualified guy could get a job if he was willing to move.

GR: Yes.

MH: When I got ready to leave Little Rock, there were two or three criteria, one of them being [that] it can't be any colder than Little Rock, Arkansas.

GR: Yes.

MH: I don't like cold weather. [Laughs] And the next one was a pay level that I thought [was] satisfactory, and I guess that was about it, really.

GR: Yes.

MH: Of course, I wanted to work someplace where it looked like it was stable. I answered an ad in *Editor and Publisher*. There was a job in Fresno [California] advertised. The guy called me back and said, "Well, we filled that job. Would you be willing to go to Modesto [California?] I said, "Sure, I'll go to Modesto." I knew about it. The Cal Relays, a major track meet, is held in Modesto.

GR: Yes.

MH: [Laughs] That's the only reason I knew. I don't think we were getting Gallo wine in Little Rock at that point. [Reference to the Ernest and Julio Gallo Wineries in Modesto] [Laughter] Later. [Laughter]

GR: Yes.

MH: They got jobs and did *great*. I mean, there were some good reporters around.

[00:38:44.19] GR: How did it hit people at the *Democrat* when the *Gazette* got the Pulitzer [Prize] for the integration thing?

MH: Well, I'll tell you something about that. When you saw Relman Morin, a reporter who won a Pulitzer, come into the *Democrat* every morning and just wait for George Douthit's carbon for the AP, you wondered how. [Laughs] You know how it is. If you're on the right side, you greatly improve your chances. They did great work. It was a great story.

GR: Yes.

MH: I think the people who were cheated at the *Democrat* on that were the photographers. I mean, they did it under the *gun*, day after day. Their pictures were

just as good as anybody's.

GR: Yes.

MH: They had much more a time problem, that's what I'm saying. They'd go out and come in with great pictures. I covered the ceremony when that original integration class graduated. There were two of them missing, I think. I got the story on when Minniejean Brown was expelled. Then I was assigned to this other story. They had a lot of guards around Little Rock High School that night. There was not a single blemish on the ceremony or anything surrounding it.

GR: Yes.

MH: By that time, people were worn out with it. This was after the fact. I don't see how those children *stood* it. I mean, the pressure was on them from the word "go." And I guess it had to happen somewhere, and somebody had to do it first in a place like that. You know, it was just pitiful.

GR: Yes.

MH: Think about kids fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old subjected to that sort of pressure. Well, two or three of them were through Modesto not long ago and they addressed a group of black people. But I'll never forget it, and I don't think anybody else will who was around when it happened.

[00:41:46.19] GR: Yes.

MH: You know that it just goes on and on and on and on. And it affects all the students. And, you know, they're still under a court order there.

GR: Yes.

MH: Think about that. They're still under a court—and, you know, what they'd do—I mean, they tell me that they now run taxis to take the Hall [Hall High School]

kids to make the [racial quotas come out right].

GR: Hmm.

MH: And, you know, a lot of people moved—and this is an interesting thing—to places like Cabot, which is in Lonoke County, and Benton—down that way—and just out of Pulaski County where . . .

GR: Yes.

MH: You know, their schools were integrated, but they didn't have to go through all this other stuff. But, you know, just a constant torment. You just didn't know one year to the other. That's been a long time. [Laughs]

GR: Yes. Did the *Democrat* do any investigative reporting in those days or any series or anything?

MH: Have you ever heard of Bob Trout? You're asking that question. [Laughter] Yes. [Laughs] Yes, Bob was about the only investigative reporter I think that I can remember. You know, for years around Little Rock—and I think it's true of most all those towns that are of any size at all—there was a lot of gambling in all of them. Pool halls—you could go back in the back room—I could walk in any one of three right down there in the middle of downtown Little Rock and sit there and watch the ball game. You could bet on them if you wanted to. I didn't, but I've done that, and so have lots of other people. And especially during the racing season, bookies used to just cluster down there by Walgreens at Fifth and Main. [Laughs] I knew a lot of them. [Laughs] But I didn't bet on the ponies. I'm a terrible gambler. Anyway, Trout came there—he was sort of a good-looking guy. He was well-dressed at all times. He persuaded the *Democrat* to let him do some investigative [reporting]—he's not a writer at all—but he could get into some of

that stuff. [Laughs] And he *did*. It didn't accomplish a whole lot, but it was sort of interesting. I got tired of it myself because nothing ever happened. The funniest thing that could ever happen, that I remember—he got in there with a big—I don't know—they'd had a big craps game somewhere, and old Trout had a little camera on him, and he was taking pictures of the table. He got one of—the chairman of the grand jury was there shooting craps. [Laughs] That did cause a little bit of a stink. [Laughter] There he was. There was a guy who had a bait shop down there on Seventh or Eighth Street, I think—I could think of his name, but it's not coming right now—but it was something that just sort of riled things up a little bit. Really, it got kind of tedious after a while because nothing was really happening.

GR: So Trout was your designated investigative reporter?

MH: Well, he was self-designated. [Laughs] He sold himself to the—well, yes.

GR: Yes.

MH: And they finally [pooped out]. But, you know, he lingered on there and ran clubs himself and did stuff for a long time. I kept thinking somebody was going to either beat him up or run him off or something. But I don't know what ever really finally happened to him.

GR: You know, I recall when I was working down there that Ralph Patrick, the city editor, said, "When you have time, read this file." And he gave me a file of Bob Trout's stories. One of them included stories about the *Gazette* and an attempt to discredit it that ended up in some kind of a lawsuit. Do you recall that?

MH: I don't remember that. I'm not saying it didn't happen. It must have. [Laughs]

GR: Yes. The file was very thick. [Laughter]

MH: No, I didn't know about that. That was one thing I didn't miss when I left town. I got fed up with the entire [thing]. It wore thin after a while.

[00:46:47.29] GR: Well, let's talk about the demographics in the newsroom—the women in the newsroom and the age range of people. Maybe you saw a change over the years or . . .

MH: Well, when I first showed up, they—well, we had some women reporters. Bobbie Forster was a good one, too, but not as many as men. Not nearly as many. And I don't think that changed a whole lot. I'm talking about working as reporters. Quite often, there would be two or three—maybe a couple of gals who would come in—their husbands would be working [at the airbase].

GR: Yes.

MH: We had one Cracker-Jack girl—Betty something—she worked for a St. Petersburg paper. That was her home base.

GR: Yes.

MH: But we had women reporters. Effa Laura Wooten was another one, and Inez McDuff had worked at the *Gazette* and they chased her off or she got tired of them over there. She had worked over there for a long time.

GR: Yes.

MH: And we usually had a few young guys. It was sort of an even break. We had several guys like Douthit and—well, we had Maurice Moore, a real work horse as a reporter. They were older. And Carl Childress—he was state editor. He did more writing than he did working the state desk. These guys would go out and get on a story and they'd come back with about six more. They were those kind of people.

GR: Yes.

MH: But we had [young workers]. John Ward, for example, came on there. He was pretty raw when he first came in there, but he had talent—just plenty of talent. Once he kind of got his feet on the ground and had a little coaching, he was first class. And a guy named Bob Sallee, who was as good as I ever saw out on a story like a tornado or a thing like that. He had an uncanny knack for getting people to tell him stuff. He'd ask a question, and, God, he'd come back with the best quotes. And he wasn't lying about it. [Laughs] He had *done* it. The main trouble with Bob was getting him started. He liked to talk about everything [laughs] and smoke a few cigarettes and drink a little coffee before he got to the [typewriter] keys. And Ward was somewhat like that, too. But they sure were a pair of good ones. I'd take them anywhere. I used to see Bob once in a while. I'd go down there and I'd go by the paper. He worked late nights, and we used to play penny-ante poker or nickel poker up there in the city room. After around 11:00, the printers would get off and a few of those desk guys would come down and play poker with us. [Laughs] We usually had several of the desk guys.

[00:50:51.18] GR: Yes. Talk just a little bit about the notorious low pay at the *Arkansas Democrat*.

MH: Well, I'll tell you, when I first came to work there, the starting pay for an average beginner was $40 a week. You know, everybody was pretty quiet about it. The common word was "we don't talk about it." [Laughs] But, you know, we knew where *we* were. And it was pretty hard, too. And they 'd cheat a lot. They'd give you overtime just to give us more money.

GR: Yes.

MH: As long as you were working for a certain amount per hour, I think Mr. [K. August] Engel was satisfied. If you got a reward [that was okay] as long as your base pay was where he wanted it. [Laughter] And most of us moonlighted from time to time. I did, and most of the others did. You know, you could work for—you could do a lot of things—well, you could work for—you know, Bob McCord had that magazine [*Democrat Sunday Magazine*?] for a while. I used to do a lot of work for them. You'd get paid for those things. Bob was pretty good. He was a pretty good editor. He started out around there as a sportswriter during the war [reference to World War II], and [ ] [laughs]—he'd lay out the pages on the floor [laughs] at the newspaper, you know, figuring out what he was going to do. Anyway, Bob was a interesting character. He was a good friend of mine, too. It was easy for Bob, I guess. And that was usually what made people leave is you'd reach the [point?]. A guy like George Douthit, for example—[ ] and he had a pretty good job, and they weren't going anywhere. But most of the rest of us, we struggled. Mr. Engel was a hard-headed old German, and he never got in debt. And I think that's what he felt—if he could stay out of debt, he could keep that paper going. He was an old bachelor, a German, from Luchenbach, Texas. Did you know that? Have you ever heard of that song?

GR: I know the song. I know the town. I've been there.

MH: Well, that's the town [laughs] where Mr. Engel came from.

GR: Is that right?

MH: Well, you know how it is in Texas, they have these settlements of Germans. Everybody who lives in a town like New Braunfels or someplace like that is [laughs]—when I heard Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings singing that song, I

said, "God dang, I didn't know anybody knew about Luchenbach but me." [Laughter]

GR: Well, did people ever get a raise or any more money to entice them to stay?

MH: Oh, a little bit. You could usually get a little raise—five dollars is the best I ever did, I think. [Laughter] Some of them might have gotten more. I'll tell you a guy—Roy Bosson, who was a really wonderful reporter—he was from Hot Springs. He'd never been to college, but he was—God, he was a good reporter. Like I said, he'd come back with all these stories just like these other guys did. He got a job running the Brewers Foundation.

[00:55:05.17] GR: Yes.

MH: He became the president—or the head of the National Brewery Foundation.

GR: Hmm.

MH: And a wonderful guy he was. I mean, he could just—he was an *excellent* reporter and just a good person as well who could do anything. He really was. And that's what a lot of them did. They'd get into advertising or public relations or something like that.

GR: Yes.

MH: Wayne Cranford—he started there, and he didn't stay at the place long. He worked there and he worked at the chamber of commerce, I think, for a little while, and pretty soon he took over an advertising agency. He married a Miss Arkansas. *There's* one of our grads. [Laughter] There were a lot of them like that who have done pretty well.

GR: And people did go from the *Democrat* to [the] Philadelphia [*Inquirer*] and *The New York Times*?

MH: Oh, yes. Yes. Sure. Absolutely. There's lots of good newspaper people who came through Little Rock.

GR: Now, what was your last year there?

MH: It was 1968. I guess 1968 was when I came out here.

GR: Yes.

MH: It was in the summer of 1968. Yes.

[00:56:51.27] GR: Was there ever a thought there near your latter years that the paper could fold—that it wasn't—? Talk about that a little bit.

MH: Well, that's one reason why I left. I mean, it just looked like the situation was getting worse for the afternoon papers all over, for one thing. And secondly, it just seemed like—we knew Mr. Engel was going to die one of these days, and sure enough, he did. But we just figured that the paper might not last if he wasn't there to hold it together. When he died, the two nephews were the heirs [Stanley Berry and Marcus George], I think, and there were provisions for several other relatives. This big thing happened—they swapped their share of the paper for a share of [a television station].

GR: Yes.

MH: And they were fat and happy and they got their go, and the paper would have—I think they would've had to fold one way or the other—or one of them had to. And it turned out the *Gazette*—they were worse off than over there than we thought.

GR: Yes.

MH: There wasn't anybody—the heirs—you know, when there are some heirs—you've got to have an heir who wants it and knows what to do with it or it's not going to

work. And, unfortunately, that happened to them. Well, I don't know—I don't think the *Democrat* could have made it as an afternoon paper no matter who was running it.

GR: Yes.

MH: But the *Gazette*—well, my notion—I thought that they would eventually absorb the *Democrat*.

GR: I think *everybody* thought that.

MH: But, as it turned out, you know, it seemed—the way it worked out, really, they were just about in the same shape as the *Democrat* was.

GR: Yes.

MH: It's too bad. It's hard what happened around there, and I felt for everybody. I think we had a pretty good newspaper town for a long time.

GR: Yes.

MH: And I certainly enjoyed my part of it. Yes, I felt like when you considered everything, we did a pretty good job. And I think, you know—[laughs] I think every paper's got its weaknesses—some we don't know about. [Laughter] And we sure had ours, but, you know, we were not—we didn't feel like we were just failing, you know, in what we were trying to do.

GR: Yes.

MH: But the economics finally put a stop to it.

GR: Did you think—at least that's what I thought when I was there—that you were really driven by pride? There was a . . .

MH: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

GR: . . . competition. I think it made you a better reporter.

MH: You bet. You bet. Absolutely. You didn't want to be ashamed and loaf, you know, because they'd show you up. That's the thing about a two-paper town. When we first started, they were a pretty rough crowd. I mean, those guys—you didn't dare leave a story—those guys at the *Gazette* would tear you a new one, and so likewise, if you got the chance, you'd do it. [Laughs]

GR: Right.

MH: So it was really—I had a lot . . .

GR: Yes, I think newsmen who haven't been through a situation like that, they've really missed out.

MH: Right. Right. You don't know what you can do unless you're doing it in a competitive deal. These people here—when I came here, they just, well, "Tight news hole Let's just save that until tomorrow."

GR: Yes.

MH: Well, it just always [ ] [laughs]. "What the hell is going on here anyway?" They didn't care. Nobody else cared, so I guess I quit caring myself. [Laughs]

GR: You didn't hear that term "hold that story" much in a competitive situation, did you?

MH: [Laughter] No, you damn sure didn't. You'd get your ass—that's the *last* thing you heard. "Where are we going to make some room for this?" I used to tell them . "I'll tell you, boys, if God wants this paper—and I'm putting the paper together—God will provide space." And I'd just walk away. [Laughter] Of course, God usually provided space, but with my *help.* [Laughter] You know, it was just a new thing here, and it was hard to adjust . . .

[01:02:21.03]

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]