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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Jon Kennedy
North Little Rock
15 May 2006

Interviewer: Bob McCord

Bob McCord: [This interview is being conducted for the University of Arkansas Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's project on the *Arkansas Democrat*.] Jon, when did you go to the *Democrat*?

Jon Kennedy: I joined the *Democrat* in August of 1941. I came down here from Springfield, Missouri. I worked for the *Springfield Leader Press* for five years, and I was twenty-three years old when I came down here. I think that I was the first professional artist for a newspaper in the state's history. I've claimed that for about forty years, and nobody has denied it.

BM: Yes. Well, you were there, then, all during the war, when there were more women up there than men. And kids. Isn't that right?

JK: No, I wasn't there all through the war because I served three years in World War II.

BM: So you got drafted after you came to Little Rock?

JK: I didn't get drafted, I enlisted. I had a bad right eye that would've kept me out of the service, but I got to the point that I was full of patriotism and wanted to go. I'd been there [at the *Democrat*] two years when I enlisted in the army.

BM: Did you enlist in Little Rock?

JK: Yes. I was sworn in at Camp Robinson.

BM: How long did you stay in the service?

JK: I was in the service for thirty-two months.

BM: Good night!

JK: Almost three years. I started out at Camp Robinson. I went from there to—well, I was at Fort Leonard Wood [Missouri], Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and Fort Smith, Arkansas, at Camp Chaffee. I was up there for over a year.

BM: Were you doing any artwork?

JK: Oh, yes. Yes. When you go into the army, they classify you. They've got about 200 or 300 classifications, and they had a classification for artists. They had me classified that way. So most of the stuff that I did was of an art nature. And when I got to Camp Robinson, I met for the first time [Arkansas artist] Louis Freund, who was doing a series of murals up there for a day room. He was going to show the progress of a recruit going in and everything that he had to do, from the GI haircut and getting his uniform—all the rest of it. He made a twelve-piece mural for that. He hadn't met me before, but he asked me if I'd like to stay up there and help him, and I said, "Well, sure, I would." Otherwise, I guess I would have gone with the army to an infantry training camp.

BM: Yes, probably so.

JK: I was glad to meet him because he was a famous artist even then.

BM: What is his last name?

JK: Freund. F-R-E-U-N-D. [Pronounced: Friend] Louis Freund. He died [in] December [of] 1999, not too long ago. Anyway, I was put to work doing cartoons

for the *Camp Robinson News*, the camp newspaper. I did a cartoon a week for them, and I really had a ball. I really enjoyed my time up there. Louis and I were both were transferred on to Camp Chaffee up in Fort Smith. They put me in there as head of the paint department. I [laughs] didn't know any more about painting than the average guy, but they gave me a crew of about five or six POW [prisoner of war] painters. We painted mess hall tables and various other things that needed painting. I got to do my cartooning [and] enjoyed that. From there I went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to study for a mapping bunch that was preparing for the Japanese invasion. I had to learn topographical mapping, something I didn't know much about. I was there, I think, three months when the war ended. When I left Camp Robinson, I had made quite a reputation as a cartoonist. The head of the camp at that time was Colonel Graham, a staid, old guy—very conservative. He said he wanted me to go to Fort Belvoir and become another Bill Mauldin, the great political cartoonist for the *Stars and Stripes*.

BM: Well, that would have been nice.

JK: And I thought, "That's okay by me." One thing that was kind of funny—Cary Grant, the movie star, was making a tour of the United States, stopping at camps and entertaining troops. I couldn't imagine what he'd be doing. Anyway, he came in there for an overnight. I met him, by the way, through Al Pollard. He did an interview and Al took me along with him to the Albert Pike Hotel. The first thing Cary said when we went in there was, "Is this the best hotel in town?" [Laughter] Everybody in Little Rock thought it was great.

BM: Well, sure, it was then.

JK: Well, anyhow, entertainers always held a press conference before they left. He went to Colonel Graham's office to hold it. All the press was there, you know, and I was there, too, somewhere. The colonel let me in. Everybody wanted to get a picture of Cary Grant, you know? This staid, old camp commander was sitting there. He didn't have much to say at all. Right at the end of the session, they said, "Colonel, would you like to have your picture made with Cary Grant?" He thought a minute and said, "It wouldn't mean anything to Mr. Grant, and it wouldn't mean anything *to me*." [Laughter]

BM: That sounds like a colonel.

JK: Incidentally, Al Pollard corresponded with Cary for a while after that—
everywhere he'd go.

BM: Yes. Al was a good friend of yours, I know. I liked him, too. I thought he was a fine writer. Did you come back to the *Democrat* after you got out of the army?

JK: Yes. I got discharged from the army in April of 1946, so the war was over by then.

BM: Yes.

JK: My wife [Opal Dillon Kennedy] came up to the camp and she had bought a car. We decided we would take a run up east and see if I could find a job at a big newspaper. I thought I was ready for a bigger post than I had before. We went to Chicago, but I went first to a Cleveland syndicate, NEA. They looked my stuff over and liked it okay. They said, "The way we do it—we'll give you a job and let you work in our studio with us about six months, and if we like what you're doing, we'll give you a chance on a comic strip." I had a couple of strips I was

thinking about doing. I didn't give them any answer. I left then and went to Chicago, to the *Chicago Sun Times*, and they offered me a job at \$60-a-week, which was exactly what I was going to get at the *Democrat* if I came back.

BM: [Laughs]

JK: We just decided we didn't like any of those places as well as Little Rock. So we piled into [the car] and came on back down here and started looking for a house. That's the way I got to Little Rock the second time.

BM: Had the *Democrat* put on a cartoonist after you went into the army?

JK: Yes. As a matter of fact, they had. G. T. Maxwell, who was from Baltimore. His wife was looking for a warmer climate. I didn't know the guy, although I'd heard of him. K. August Engel [owner of the *Democrat*] hired him to replace me when I was gone. The law required that you had to rehire veterans after the war.

BM: Yes.

JK: G. T. was a heck of a nice guy, and he was a collector of cartoons. He was probably one of the biggest collectors of cartoons in the United States. Before he left, he tried to get me started collecting old cartoons. He said he'd give me a starter collection for \$25. I couldn't turn that down, so I bought the collection. I guess there were about thirty or forty cartoons—originals. Some of them were 100 years old. They were valuable. I guess on that collection I must have made \$2,000 to \$3,000 selling them. Not a bad return on \$25.

BM: Really?

JK: I didn't make a big effort. I just corresponded with collectors. Yes, it was nothing for them to pay \$100 or \$50 per cartoon.

BM: Who would buy them?

JK: A lot of collectors all over the country.

BM: So you came back. Do you remember when you came back to work at the *Democrat*?

JK: April of 1946.

BM: Of course, Mr. Engel was there, and Ed Liske was still there.

JK: Allen Tilden and Deane Allen—known as “The Major and the Minor.”

BM: Was Tilden back from the war? He was in the service, too, you know.

JK: Yes. I think he was back by the time I came back.

BM: And, let's see, who else was there?

JK: Joe Crossley, George Douthit, [and] Earle Johnson, to name a few.

BM: Joe Crossley. One of the best newspaper men I ever knew. He taught me a lot.

JK: Graduate of Harvard [University].

BM: He taught me a *lot*. I will never forget him. Yes. Well, I went to the *Democrat* in 1945.

JK: The year the war ended.

BM: Yes. I was a junior in high school—North Little Rock High School. I'll always remember James Verhoff, the city editor who took Tilden's place while he was in the service.

JK: A little short guy?

BM: Yes.

JK: I think of old man Vaughan Root, who was the state editor.

BM: Yes. What was the name of the assistant city editor? A woman.

JK: Effie Laura Wooten. She died about a year ago.

BM: Just about a year ago. I went to her funeral. Anyway, they said, "Well, we can use you at night for things like car wrecks and all that." Because, you know, women reporters just wouldn't go to things like that in those days.

JK: And you had that camera.

BM: I had the camera and I knew how to use it, but I couldn't drive because I didn't have a driver's license. So I had to get in the taxi cab or get somebody to drive it. Finally, I got to be sixteen, so the next summer and the next season I got a big—O. D. Gunter was there. He was 4F [meaning he was physically unfit for the army], so he never had to go into the army.

JK: Yes.

BM: What was the girl's name who was the photographer there for a while? She was cute. She was . . .

JK: Norma Byner?

BM: Norma somebody. Anyway, that's when I met you. And I remember now that you had just gotten back a year or so [before] from the service when I got to work at the *Democrat*. We've known each other since . . .

JK: 1948, that's a long time.

BM: You know—you, probably more than anybody around, really knew Mr. Engel. What are your thoughts about Mr. Engel? We all know that he was tight and chintzy and all that. Everybody knows that, but what else do we know about him? What kind of a fellow was he?

JK: Well, when I got down here in 1941, he was a pillar in the community.

BM: He was young and . . .

JK: No, he wasn't young. It struck me when I first saw him that he looked like a central casting publisher, you know? He looked the part. I always respected and admired him, but was disappointed when he took no stand on the [Little Rock] Central High [School Integration] Crisis of 1957. Here was one of the top stories of the twentieth century right in his own backyard, but he ignored it. He *did* permit his writers to go their own way, and since most of them were friendly to Orval Faubus, most readers considered the *Democrat* to be pro-Faubus. Why did Engel stay neutral? He worked very hard to build and keep circulation and didn't want to upset the apple cart. I think that was the reason.

BM: In editorials, he tried to avoid controversial issues.

JK: K. A. Engel was not your average man. [He] never married, though he came close once. Never had a family to support, never owned a home, never went to church, never traveled, except to publishers meetings and an occasional Razorback game. On the whole, [he was] a happy man with a pleasant disposition. Julian Hernden used to say, "We're on the hind tit," but Engel was okay with that, so long as his paper turned a profit.

BM: Well, you always got along with him, didn't you?

JK: Yes. He was really the one who hired me. I guess you'd say that Julian Hernden was the first one I knew who was with the *Democrat*.

BM: With the advertising department?

JK: Yes, advertising manager and vice president of the *Democrat*.

BM: Yes. What was his first name?

JK: Julian Hernden. We got to be good friends. He was very instrumental in my coming to Little Rock because he was the first one to contact me. He had a nickname for me. [He] called me, "Pride of the Ozarks." And the way that happened was that he went to conventions of advertising managers, wherever they held them every year, and he got close to this guy up in Springfield, Missouri—Dan Wheeler, who was the advertising manager there at the *Leader-Press*. I didn't know Dan well, but we were nominal friends. We had coffee one afternoon at the little café across the street from the newspaper. He said, "Jon, I found out something that you might be interested in. It's said that the *Democrat* down in Little Rock is looking for an artist. I don't know whether you'd be interested in that or not." He said, "If you want to check it out, get in touch with Julian Hernden down there." So I did. I got in touch with him. He asked me to send some clips down there if I was interested in it. I got him an envelope full of clips—cartoons that I had done—and sent them down there to Mr. Engel. And I waited. I thought I'd hear from him in a couple of days, but I waited a week, two weeks, and three weeks. I didn't hear a word. Finally, I wrote to Mr. Engel. I said, "Would you please send me back those clips." Those were the only copies I had. I needed them back. And I waited another week. Finally, he sent me a letter saying he would start me at \$45-a-week and more as years go by. I accepted immediately. After my first year there, I scored a small raise by threatening to take a job offer in Kansas City. Engel said if \$5-a-week would keep me at the *Democrat*, they could handle that. Then I had to wait about three or four weeks for a raise to go through. [Laughs] That was the custom at the *Democrat*—that

your raise had to “go through” before you would get it.

BM: [Laughter] I remember that.

JK: But he did what he said [he would do]. He paid \$50. He was always very nice to me. One time I went to a Cotton Bowl game down in Dallas [Texas] in 1946—along in there. I don't remember who our opponent was. I went down with Mr. Hernden and his wife. They stayed at the Adolphus Hotel. I got a room in a cheaper place. One night I walked into a restaurant where Mr. Engel was with Clyde Lowery. They were partners, you know, until they sold the business they had. They invited me to sit down and eat with them, so I did. We had a nice little session there while we were eating. When we got through, they got into an argument over who would pay the checks. [Laughter] "I'll get it." "No, August, I'll get it." I sat there and listened to it. Finally, I said, "Well, it doesn't make any difference who gets it, you're both millionaires."

BM: Weren't you doing some commercial work, too, along with your work at the *Democrat*?

JK: During all my years at the *Democrat*, I wore two hats: one as editorial cartoonist, and one as a commercial artist. I always tried never to let my commercial or political work influence my editorial cartoons. In order to keep them separate, I rented studio space downtown in which to do my commercial work, and did it in my spare time. Actually, I never got any complaints from the *Democrat*, or anybody else. Early on, I got to know Mr. Robert H. Brooks, who was the top advertising man in Little Rock. Al Pollard eventually went to work for him. Mr. Brooks was kind of impressed with my artwork in the newspaper. He also did ads

for the Southern Forestry Association and some of the big lumber groups in the South. He needed some art for a series of ads and asked me if I'd do them. I did, and I knew that he was in a position to pay a good rate for this stuff, so I got another "job" just before I went into the army. I got started doing work for him and a couple of other advertising agencies here.

BM: Yes. Old Phil—what was his name?

JK: Phil Back.

BM: You did some work for him, too, I remember.

JK: Yes.

BM: In fact, I remember you had me make a picture one time with him. We had kind of a little deal there that we worked out. I remember that. That was a long time ago. [Laughs] Well, when did it come that they finally hired an aide or somebody to work with you?

JK: Well, in 1962, Mr. Liske said I shouldn't have to be doing all this grunt work with photographs and layouts.

BM: Retouching? And you did—what did you call that—what you did around the pictures—when we'd make the pictures that weren't just right? God, you must have done thousands of them.

JK: They brought in Lili Wing—she was a hairdresser, actually [laughs]. She was a pretty fair artist, and she wanted to be my assistant. Lili was an attractive girl. She also believed in astrology. Of course, before I hired her, she turned in the doorway and said, "What month are you?" And I said, a "Leo." She started figuring in her head. "Oh, that's all right," she said. You remember her, don't

you?

BM: Yes, I do. She was pretty. Yes. So she was the first one that you . . .?

JK: She was the first one. And after her, I hired a kid from North Little Rock named Charles Tuthill. He worked for me about—I guess three or four years.

BM: I don't guess I ever met him.

JK: He went to the [*Memphis*] *Commercial Appeal* and did really well over there. I think last I heard he's still there. He is very talented.

BM: And who was the next one you got?

JK: Well, let's see, Bruce Plante came along in there about 1970. I gave him his first job right out of college. Oh, and Deb Polston.

BM: That's the one I'm thinking about.

JK: Actually, his name was Delbert Polston, but everyone called him Deb. He was a nice guy.

BM: What happened to him?

JK: Well, he and his wife moved to the East Coast. He got an agent and did very well. He was making good money. He died prematurely at fifty-two or fifty-three. He was a good friend of mine.

BM: Wasn't he a good cartoonist?

JK: Yes, he developed into one.

BM: I thought you liked him.

JK: Yes, and he had a great sense of humor.

BM: Yes.

JK: He did gag cartoons for magazines in his spare time.

BM: That's right. I remember that. Who came after him?

JK: Bruce Plante and Deb worked in the art department at the same time. And John Deering was hired in 1983, I believe.

BM: Yes.

JK: I worked with John five years before I retired.

BM: You sort of taught him, didn't you?

JK: No, as a matter of fact, I didn't. He never asked me any instruction or how to do anything.

BM: So he had worked on a newspaper before?

JK: No. Actually, he was a commercial artist and worked for the advertising department at the *Democrat*.

BM: Oh, he did? I didn't know that.

JK: I hired him from the advertising department. John was from Fort Worth [Texas].

BM: He was with you for a long time, then, wasn't he?

JK: Well, I retired after about five years in 1988.

BM: Yes.

JK: And he went on. He has been there quite a few years now. John is very versatile. [He] even does sculpting.

BM: They're promoting him a lot, you know?

JK: Yes, he fell in good with John Robert Starr, and Starr used him a lot.

BM: I wanted to ask you about him, so let's talk about Mr. Starr for a while. Of course, you and I knew him when he was with the Associated Press [AP]. I was really surprised when he came back in 1978, but the new publisher, Mr. Walter

Hussman, Jr., was very impressed with him, you will remember, and hired him almost on the spot. I had made out a list of three people for him to go see that I had known through the Society of Professional Journalism that I belonged to. He went to see two of them, but the one he liked best was Bob, my number three [pick].

JK: That was for the post of managing editor?

BM: Yes, to take my place, you know. So he came in knowing almost nothing about getting a newspaper put together every day. But he was a very good Associated Press hand, you know, because he had been there for years. He had left the Associated Press and was teaching over in Memphis. Hussman had me call him, and he said, "Oh, I don't think I want to do that." I said, "Well, I'll tell him that, but he was impressed when he interviewed you." So I went back downstairs and told him Hussman what he said. He said, "Well, I don't know. Keep looking." About two days later, Hussman called me on the phone. He said, "I've talked to Bob Starr. He said he's going to take the job." I said, "Well, if that's what you want, that's fine." And he said, "Will you stay and tell him what you have to do to get a paper out?" I said, "Yes," and I told Bob that I would stay until as he felt he could handle the job. The very next day he told me that he knew what he had to do, so I didn't need to stay, as far as he cared. I stuck around for a few days, but left soon.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JK: Come to find out, he wouldn't have much to do with me. You know, I'd been

going to lunch with Marcus, the former editor and a good friend, but Bob wasn't interested.

BM: Yes.

JK: Bob wasn't going to have any favorites, I could see that.

BM: Didn't he get a little group that was with him and just stuck with them?

JK: Meredith Oakley was his "Girl Friday."

BM: She was his right-hand man, wasn't she?

JK: Yes. They got along great.

BM: There was this other fellow, Michael Storey. He's still there. He writes a column and reviews movies.

JK: I believe they both attended Memphis State.

BM: Well, he's still there.

JK: I remember that Starr wanted me to do cartoons for his column. He'd come in there with his column and want me to do a cartoon. I'd say, "Well, I'm doing the editorial cartoon. I don't really have time." [Laughs] One thing you had to learn about John Robert. The most important thing to him as an executive was production. He was always harping on production. If you worked for him, you produced. That was the AP—he got that from the Associated Press.

BM: I'm sure.

JK: If you didn't produce, you didn't stay long.

BM: Yes.

JK: That's what Starr liked. [Laughs] And, you know, Walter promised him—this was a common story up there—he promised him a trip around the world after the

newspaper war victory.

BM: Yes. I'd heard that.

JK: Bob loved traveling. He had a big RV [recreational vehicle] he drove on trips.

BM: Oh, did he?

JK: He used to brag that he'd been in every state in the Union, except one. He loved to travel and got ready to take that trip around the world that Walter gave him. I guess partly in payment for him winning the newspaper war. I don't remember when Marcus George left the *Democrat* and went to the TV station they owned [KTHV].

BM: He left before I did. Don't you remember? I went down the back stairs with him carrying his stuff out of his office. I said, "What the hell am I going to do?" He said, "I don't know. You just stay here, I guess."

JK: [Laughs] Those old back stairs back then—the old stairs to the press room.

BM: Yes, this was the old building.

JK: The first time I saw Walter Hussman, Sr. was on those back steps. He asked where the editorial department was. I was coming down and he was coming up. I had never even seen him before. I explained to him where the newsroom was. He said, "Who are you?" I said, "Oh, I'm the cartoonist, Jon Kennedy." He said, "Boy, you've been around here a long time, haven't you?" [Laughter]

BM: That's what he said? [Laughs] Well, you and young Walter got along well, didn't you?

JK: Yes, I got along okay with Walter. I get along with everybody. [Laughter]

BM: You retired when? When was the last day you worked there?

JK: I retired in September [of] 1988.

BM: Who took your place? What's his name?

JK: John Deering. He had been working for the paper five years. I used to kind of enjoy writing columns, too. Even wrote a couple of editorials.

BM: Yes, I think I remember that.

JK: Now, the only time Walter ever commented on my writing was a column I wrote when George Douthit died.

BM: Yes. Sent it up to you?

JK: Said, "Excellent." One word in his distinctive handwriting.

BM: Yes.

JK: Walter is one smart cookie. I never was really associated with him, but we were friends [].

BM: Yes. Did you ever think, when the newspaper war started—did you ever think it would turn out like it did?

JK: Which war are we talking about?

BM: The war of whether there was going to be one newspaper or two newspapers.

JK: Oh. Well, I could imagine the situation where there weren't two newspapers in Little Rock, but I didn't know which one—I would have thought the *Democrat* would be the first one down. That was a big surprise.

BM: Yes.

JK: Those Gannett people came in and made a mess of the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*.

BM: You would have believed it [laughs] if you'd been over there like I was. You wouldn't have believed the mistakes they made.

BM: One of the things that I wanted to ask you about that you and I both started and enjoyed—the Farkleberry Follies. Tell us what you did in the Farkleberry Follies.

JK: I played the role of Senator J. William Fulbright.

BM: [Laughs]

JK: I had a lot of fun with that. As far as I know, he never saw a performance.

BM: Did he never come? I thought maybe he had once.

JK: I don't think he ever did.

BM: [Laughs] Well, you were sure good at it. That was a lot of fun.

JK: I was up in Canada once. I was heading for a cartoonists' meeting to get together with others. After lunch, I was walking near the hotel and saw this group of dignitaries. I recognized one was Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, a friend of Senator Fulbright.

BM: Yes, I know whom you're talking about. [Laughs]

JK: I gave him a little bit of the Fulbright line, and he said, "Sounds just like him."

BM: [Laughs] Sure did. You were the one the audience always talked about, I remember, every time.

JK: And I met LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson] down at his ranch one time after he retired. I knew he and Fulbright were good friends—then during the Vietnam War they got to be enemies, you know? Fulbright wouldn't back him on the reasons for starting the Vietnam War. And I thought of giving him a little bit of this Fulbright line. I finally got one-on-one with him. I told him a little bit about the Follies. I said I was doing the lines for Fulbright and I thought he'd be interested in it. And he stood there and looked at me, and never cracked a smile.

BM: Oh, really? [Laughs]

JK: I heard later that he was very hard of hearing.

BM: I didn't know that.

JK: He wore a hearing aid.

BM: I didn't know that.

JK: I remarked about the fact that he didn't talk. Then he got into one of those big Lincoln limousines and drove cartoonists around the LBJ ranch.

BM: How many years were you at the *Democrat*? Forty-six?

JK: Forty-seven.

BM: Forty-seven years—on just the one newspaper. Yes. That's not counting the ones in Springfield you did to begin with. Are you ever sorry that you wound up doing that?

JK: No, it's been a good occupation. I've really enjoyed everything I've done.

BM: So you'd do it all over again if you . . . ?

JK: It's hard to believe there's anything better than to make one of my comments on current affairs that are read by thousands of people and enjoyed.

BM: I remember when I was there—both times when I was there—nobody ever came up and told you what to do your cartoons about. Now, that's very unusual, isn't it, Jon?

JK: I don't know, Bob.

BM: Really?

JK: I've only had the one job, but I've always taken it as a compliment.

BM: Well, I mean, your other cartoonist friends—didn't they have to answer to

somebody every day?

JK: If so, they didn't tell me about it.

BM: You don't think so? You think they'd do it just like you did?

JK: I thought everybody did it that way.

BM: When Mr. Hussman came, he never said anything about what kind of cartoon to do, did he?

JK: Probably about his first or second day on the job, I had drawn a cartoon against something Orval Faubus was doing—Faubus might have been running for Governor. I did an anti-Faubus cartoon. And he came up with the page and said, "Well, you've done one against Faubus. Now do one for him."

BM: [Laughter] Did you do it?

JK: No. It kind of puzzled me.

BM: Did he ever say anything else about it?

JK: No. He had more important things to worry about.

BM: [Laughs]

JK: That was the first time I'd ever had a publisher tell me what to draw. I think it was more [of] a suggestion.

BM: Was that the first time? Really?

JK: Yes, I think it was.

BM: Did it ever happen again?

JK: No.

BM: Did Mr. Starr ever come in and tell you that you ought to do one about this, and not do that one?

JK: No, Starr left me alone. He claimed that I was the only one in the editorial department that he didn't hire. So he said, "I can't fire you."

BM: [Laughs] Now what do you think is going to happen? You know, so many people are saying that the daily newspapers are goners.

JK: Yes. The cartooning profession is getting smaller and smaller all the time. Newspaper circulation is going down. They can't get the young readers interested in newspapers. And now that my eyes are about to go out, I can hardly read a newspaper. I get most of my news off the TV and radio. That's bad. I can't read that fine print. But I don't know what the future is. It seems to me there will always be a place for a newspaper. You get more detail. I've seen newspapers die. The big problem, I'd say, is the young readers. They just get their news off TV. They don't read papers.

BM: Well, of course, if we don't have newspapers—or don't have as many—we're going to have fewer cartoonists. Of course, some of the magazines are doing that now, aren't they? Or are they just picking them up out of newspapers? Is that what they're doing?

JK: Well, they can do that. They pay to do it.

BM: Yes.

JK: Deering—I don't know what the magazines pay now, but I'm sure it's a lot more than I used to get.

BM: When *Newsweek* or one of them wanted to reprint one, [did] they pay you something?

JK: Yes. That is fair enough, as a small income booster.

BM: Well, sure. Is there anything else you'd like to say about this, in your fifty-some-odd years in this business? I know you'll be sorry to see the newspapers go out, but there's not much we can do about that.

JK: And not much you can do about when your eyes are going out and you can't read the fine print. It gets to be a job to read it—a chore to read it. You look closely. I just read the headlines unless it's something I really want to read.

BM: That was nice [the] way that *Arkansas Business* wrote the piece about you.

JK: Yes. It was absolutely unexpected. I was as surprised as anybody else was.

BM: Well, they're nice people.

JK: They practically gave me an issue.

BM: Yes. How long had you been doing cartoons for them?

JK: I started the week that [Wal-Mart founder] Sam Walton died, which was in 1992.

BM: Good night!

JK: Thirteen or fourteen years.

BM: Was there anything else you think you would like to say about journalism, about yourself?

JK: Well, I think cartooning is a great profession. You know, it's a job of some importance—trying to influence the public—and you realize that what you say is important. It has been said that a cartoon of mine in 1952 decided the governor's race—when Francis Cherry beat Ike Murry in a runoff. The cartoon showed AG [Attorney General] Ike Murry as a cop standing guard over a fruit stand, but he was sleeping while [Sid] McMath Administration “hoodlums” ran off with the fruit [a reference to the highway audit scandals]. Murry was favored to win the

runoff, but was bested by Francis Cherry. Tom Hockersmith, who represented Boyd Tackett in the race, was the one who came up with the fruit stand cartoon idea, though it didn't help his man. Governor McMath was defeated in his third term try.

BM: McMath was a good friend of yours, wasn't he?

JK: Hardly, but I was really a good friend of Tom Hockersmith. He was an air force pilot in World War II, went to Yale on the GI Bill, and eventually opened his own ad agency.

BM: [Laughs] I liked Tom. I thought he was a good fellow.

JK: He was a mystery man. No one ever knew what happened to him. He just disappeared. Yes, I liked him.

BM: How long since your wife died? I can't remember.

JK: That was 1996. Ten years this year. When I was in Europe in 1978, I wanted to visit the Vatican. I went with a fellow named Al Liederman who worked on the *Long Island Press*. We visited just about everything you'd want to see and do in Rome. I wanted to go to the Vatican and see the famous murals on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

BM: Yes.

JK: But Al was an Orthodox Jew. He said, "I'm not going in the Vatican. I'll wait for you out here."

BM: [Laughs]

JK: So he found a bench seat on the sidewalk and I went on. He said, "You know, it costs you money." I said, "I don't care about that. I want to see those

Michelangelo murals." So [I] went in and climbed the stairs. Have you been there?

BM: No.

JK: It's on an entire floor. I went through that and a few other floors. Anyway, it was a fabulous experience. I was in there for about two hours. When I came out and went to the park, Al was gone. But what I wanted to tell you was that I came home and told Phil Back about it. "Phil, I've got a good friend that's a Jew and we were at the Vatican and he wouldn't go in." I said, "You are a Jew, so what about that?" "Nonsense!" he said. "I've been in there several times. One time I went in there and I said, 'Hi, Pope' as he was carried by on a litter. He smiled and waved."

BM: Well, that sounds like him! [Laughs]

JK: Al wouldn't set a foot in that place.

BM: Tell us about your school poster business, Jon.

JK: My cartoons in the Democrat led to many things, but the best was a little poster business called "Jon Kennedy Cartoons." When John F. Kennedy was elected president, his New Frontier began a drive to limit school dropouts. Arkansas had a bad problem, so I decided to join the effort.

BM: How did it go?

JK: I drew up a strong dropout cartoon for the editorial page, and right away got a good response from a guidance director in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, asking for a dozen copies.

BM: She wanted to buy them?

JK: Right, and it dawned on me that if they liked them in Baton Rouge, why not in Dallas, or Detroit, or L.A. [Los Angeles, California], or any other city? I went to a print shop and had a hundred printed up in eleven-by-fourteen-inch size and sent off for a mailing list of guidance counselors to test. Bingo! They went like hotcakes in all parts of the country. This operation kept me hopping for thirty years as a part-time business. My wife, Opal, was a big help in typing invoices, letters, and running the office. And helping me spend money. I would say that I pretty well divided my time equally between my editorial duties and my poster biz [business].

BM: So you were bouncing two balls.

JK: Yes, and while the posters didn't put me on easy street, they did allow me to buy a new [Oldsmobile] Cutlass every two years, take my family on a Gulf Coast vacation every summer, and put a son through Missouri University [the University of Missouri]. Simply put, I was doing okay.

BM: Can you think of anything else you want to say?

JK: No, except I can't think of any other profession where you can meet as many interesting people as I've met.

BM: You sure can't make a lot of money out of a newspaper.

JK: No, but I managed to make a good living for fifty years.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

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