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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Sam Krebs
Lowell, Arkansas
21 August 2005

Interviewer: Bob Holt

Bob Holt: This is Bob Holt from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, and Sam Krebs, from the paper. This is an interview we're doing as part of the Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History Project on the *Arkansas Democrat* [and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.] I'm doing this interview freely. Sam, why don't you confirm that you're doing that, too?

Sam Krebs: I'm doing it freely. We're just as free as we can be here on a Sunday afternoon.

BH: Okay. Well, let's get at it, then. Why don't you just tell the listeners a little bit about yourself—how you got into newspapers and just a little bit about your background, and where you're from?

SK: Okay. I am a native Arkansan, born in West Memphis. I basically grew up on the other end of the state in Fort Smith. I went to good old Fort Smith Northside [High School]. Coach Barry Lunney was one of my classmates. From there I went to the—while I was still in high school I started to work at the Fort Smith *Southwest Times-Record*. I guess I was about seventeen. Lyndon Finney called me one September night—in fact, it's coming on thirty-five years [ago], this September.

BH: That's a long time ago. [Laughs]

SK: That's a long time. He called me on a Thursday night and asked me if I wanted to go cover a junior high football game. I had been kind of hanging around. Some of my buddies were working up there, just kind of part-time. I got to hanging around and kind of liked the place. I seemed to fit in where I could and fill in where I could. So I took the job for the princely sum of twenty cents a column inch . . .

BH: Wow.

SK: . . . which basically means that if you write ten inches of copy, you make two bucks [dollars]. Since it only took five bucks to fill up my car back then . . .

BH: [Laughs]

SK: . . . I had a little sixty [1960] Ford Falcon—that worked for me. It got me out of the house. My mother used to tell me. "Oh, you don't work, you just go to ball games free and then sit in an air-conditioned office and sit and type." In her mind, that wasn't working, but I changed her mind after a few years of that.

BH: Lyndon Finney. L-Y-N-D-O-N F-I-N-N-E-Y.

SK: Lyndon's the one who got me started, then he ended up being my boss at the [Arkansas] *Democrat*.

BH: Yes. What was his position at the . . . ?

SK: He was the sports editor at Fort Smith.

BH: Okay. Then he went to the *Democrat* as the assistant managing editor?

SK: Later on, he became the assistant managing editor under Bob [John Robert] Starr.

BH: Okay.

SK: Small world, isn't it?

BH: If you wrote a thirty-inch story, would they pay you for that, or would they cut it and not give you so much money? [Laughs]

SK: It would happen sometimes. I covered American Legion baseball over the summer.

BH: Yes.

SK: You could pile up some pretty good cash that way. I parleyed that into—when I went up to the University of Arkansas—that I became kind of a part-time correspondent. I covered Razorback practices. Back in those days—I don't know what some of you guys do nowadays, but you could string for the area papers in Missouri and Oklahoma.

BH: Right.

SK: You could make a pretty good deal out of that, too.

BH: So what year was this that you went to the *Times-Record*?

SK: I started there in the late sixties [1960s]—1968, [or] 1969. Then I went to school in 1970.

BH: Okay. The year after the big shoot-out. [Reference to the famous Arkansas/Texas football game in 1969.]

SK: Yes.

BH: Now, what years were you up here in Fayetteville?

SK: I didn't get up to Fayetteville until 1970.

BH: Oh, okay. That's what you said. Yes.

SK: Yes. I worked for the *Arkansas Traveler* [the University of Arkansas student newspaper]. It was interesting. Some of my most important journalism classes,

to me, were classes I wasn't even *enrolled* in. I would sneak into [them] when I was a freshman. I was working with Skip Rutherford and Steve Snow and those guys on the *Traveler*, and they would sneak me into Ernie Deane's class. Ernie Deane—for some of the folks who don't know around here—but anybody involved in journalism around here should know that Ernie Deane was, I think, the first *Arkansas Traveler* columnist for the *Arkansas Gazette*.

BH: Right.

SK: He had this beautiful way of homespun humor, and he could just hold your attention in a class. What we would do is we would take the *Traveler* and we would just kind of dissect the week's *Travelers*. We called it "advanced practices."

BH: That's what you'd do in class?

SK: Yes, that's what the seniors would do in class. Like I said, I was just a freshman. I [would] just sneak in and . . .

BH: So you were a drop-in?

SK: I was a drop-in. Yes.

BH: Not a drop-out, but you were a drop-in. [Laughs]

SK: But it was so interesting to me. You know, that's kind of what I dedicated to myself to do. I took all the journalism I could get up here before I decided to go to Little Rock later on when a position came open there.

BH: Right.

SK: But I enjoyed my time up here. I became what they called a senior reporter for the *Traveler* as a freshman. I just got involved.

BH: You did sports or news or . . . ?

SK: I did everything.

BH: Yes.

SK: I did a little bit of everything.

BH: Oh, that's a good background.

SK: It was a *great* background. It was a great background for what I'm doing now.

BH: Right.

SK: Now I'm back in the news on the copy desk—what we call the "late man" around here. I just got—I don't know whether you'd ever reach a point, Bob, but I just got to a point where I got too old to chase around [after] these coaches and kids.

BH: Yes. [Laughs] I did wonder about that.

SK: Yes. You'll know sooner or later.

BH: Yes. [Laughs]

SK: But I love sports. I still follow sports, and I love it, but I just got to a point—I had heart trouble. I had a heart attack, I guess, in 1996 or somewhere in the nineties [1990s] when I was in Georgia. I just got to where I couldn't cover sports anymore.

BH: Right.

SK: But I still love it.

BH: Yes.

SK: Okay. That leads me to—well, first, the *Northwest Arkansas Times*.

BH: So when did you graduate from the UA [University of Arkansas]?

SK: I didn't graduate.

BH: Okay. What year did you come?

SK: I was one of their less successful success stories, I guess.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: I left—like I said, I worked at the *Arkansas Times* under Ish Haley at first, then went to the *Dallas Morning News*, I believe.

BH: Okay. And that's Ish—I-S-H H-A-L-E-Y.

SK: I-S-H H-A-L-E-Y.

BH: Yes. He worked for the *Gazette* and then the *Dallas Times-Herald*.

SK: Oh, yes. He worked for everybody around here.

BH: Yes, I know Ish.

SK: But he got me started here. I had spent about a year with the *Northwest Arkansas Times*.

BH: Now, was that while you were going to school or . . . ?

SK: While I was still going to school. Yes.

BH: So you were working for the *Times*.

SK: I was doing a little bit of everything.

BH: Yes.

SK: Again, that was good practice, too.

BH: Right.

SK: I covered the Fayetteville [High School] Bulldogs that one year. I was still doing some string work at the time, and that got me in touch with the arch-rival at the time. I guess, in a way, they still are our arch-rival, the *Springdale [Morning] News*.

BH: Right.

SK: Collins Hemingway. H-E-M-I-N-G—like Ernest Hemingway. [He] was the sports editor back then.

BH: His first name was Collins?

SK: Collins.

BH: C-O-L-L-I-N-S?

SK: Yes.

BH: Okay.

SK: I got to doing these string things for him, as I recall. He's the one who recommended me to Fred Morrow.

BH: Okay. M-O-R-R-O-W?

SK: M-O-R-R-O-W.

BH: I'm making sure everything's here for whoever's transcribing. [Laughs]

SK: Everybody's got to remember Fred Morrow because everybody either loved him or hated him.

BH: Yes. He was the sports editor of the *Democrat*.

SK: He was the sports editor of the *Arkansas Democrat* in 1972, I guess it was, when I started there.

BH: So was he the one who hired you, or did Lyndon Finney?

SK: He was the one who hired me.

BH: Okay. Yes, I've never met him, but I've heard a lot of stories—very talented writer, but seemed to have a knack for [laughs] ticking people off.

SK: Very talented writer. He'd tick people off, but he told the truth, I think,

sometimes.

BH: Yes.

SK: And some people didn't want to hear the truth around here.

BH: Yes.

SK: They were used to—and I'm not knocking Orville Henry [the sports editor for the *Arkansas Gazette*], but they were used to Orville sugar-coating things and giving that side of the story, so to speak.

BH: Right.

SK: Fred was refreshing, in a way, that he'd kind of tell it like it is.

BH: Right.

SK: I think Fred would intentionally tick people off sometimes, but I liked Fred. Fred was great to me. I have nothing but great things to say about Fred. He got us involved—we had just a young group then. I mean, John Brummett was [about] nineteen years old.

BH: Right.

SK: Bill Farris, I think, was still going to high school.

BH: Who was that? I think people know John Brummett, but who . . . ?

SK: Bill Farris. B-I-L-L F-A-R-R-I-S.

BH: Okay.

SK: Rodney Lorenzen was on our staff.

BH: Did John Brummett write sports for the *Democrat*?

SK: John Brummett once wrote sports for the *Democrat*.

BH: I didn't know that.

SK: He probably doesn't want to *admit* it, but, yes, he did.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: He was basically our prep editor the first year I was there.

BH: Really? Oh, man.

SK: At nineteen years old.

BH: I never knew that he wrote sports for the *Democrat*.

SK: Well, most people don't.

BH: Yes.

SK: And he probably doesn't admit it, but he did.

BH: [Laughs] Well, I'm intrigued.

SK: I took over as prep editor from John when John took over, I think, the
[unintelligible] beat.

BH: So you got hired in 1972 to cover just—were you general assignment
[unintelligible] or . . . ?

SK: My first appointment was the [unintelligible] all-star game.

BH: Right.

SK: I started a tradition there where I would go down and spend a week with the high
school all-star kids.

BH: That's when it was in Conway.

SK: That's when it was [in] Conway. It was hot, and you stayed in a dorm in Conway.
It was an interesting way to get to know those people. Like I said, I started doing
it every year.

BH: Who were some of the high school stars you might have covered that people

would remember now who've maybe gone on to be good college players?

SK: I'll give you a good story. One of my first unsung heroes that we started—guys who weren't really noticeable at the camp, but became noticeable during the week, was a young kid from Valley Springs named James Dickey. People know him now as the former Texas Tech [University] coach.

BH: Right. D-I-C-K-E-Y?

SK: D-I-C-K-E-Y. He parleyed that into . . .

BH: He was a Razorback assistant for Eddie Sutton. . . .

SK: He was a Razorback assistant [for] Eddie Sutton.

BH: . . . and again at Oklahoma State [University].

SK: And again at Oklahoma State.

BH: Right.

SK: But he parleyed that great week at all-star camp, I think, into a scholarship at UCA [University of Central Arkansas, Conway].

BH: Right.

SK: From there, I think he got the graduate assistant's job for Eddie.

BH: Right. Yes, James is a great guy.

SK: Speaking of Eddie, I've got an interesting story about Eddie.

BH: Eddie Sutton, who's the Oklahoma State basketball coach and longtime Arkansas coach.

SK: Longtime Arkansas coach. I covered his first press conference at Arkansas for the *Arkansas Democrat*.

BH: When he got hired in 1974.

SK: When he got [hired] in 1974. And the roundabout way that came about was I wasn't covering basically the Razorback beat. I would do some things from time to time, but mainly I was the prep writer—prep editor, I guess, by then. But we wrote a story—we kind of jumped the gun and wrote a story. I'm not going to name names, but I think I know who did it—we were going to say that Bill Guthridge, who later became the coach at North Carolina . . .

BH: Right.

SK: . . . and was longtime assistant to Dean Smith was going to be the new coach at Arkansas.

BH: That's Guthridge—G-U-T . . .

SK: G-U-T-H-R-I-D-G-E, I believe.

BH: Yes.

SK: But we didn't check our facts well enough, and we ran with that story, and it didn't happen.

BH: Right.

SK: Next thing we know, the *Gazette's* running that Eddie Sutton is going to be the coach at Arkansas.

BH: He was the Creighton [University, Omaha, Nebraska] coach at the time.

SK: Oh, yes. Outstanding.

BH: He has done very well [unintelligible].

SK: Outstanding. Yes, I've got nothing but good things to say about my experiences with Eddie Sutton.

BH: Yes.

SK: Strangely enough, they gave me the story once they didn't want to touch it anymore—after they blew it. So I called up Eddie Sutton that morning . . .

BH: Wait. Was he in—you were in Little Rock?

SK: Eddie Sutton was the coach at Creighton.

BH: Right. In Omaha.

SK: I got hold of him in Omaha.

BH: Right.

SK: I said, "Coach, it's reported that you're going to be the new coach at Arkansas."

BH: Right.

SK: He said, "Well, I'm not sure that I'd say anything about that right now."

BH: Right.

SK: Basically, he said, "I'm out recruiting people from Dayton University."

BH: This was in the spring of 1974, right?

SK: I think it was 1974.

BH: Yes.

SK: Somewhere along those lines.

BH: Yes. Well, that's when he got hired.

SK: I'm a little fuzzy on dates these days.

BH: Yes. [Laugh]

SK: When you've been at this thirty-four or thirty-five years, you get a little fuzzy.

BH: Yes.

SK: Anyway, the way I confirmed that was I called up the former coach, Lanny Van Eman. I said, "Lanny, Eddie Sutton *wants* to tell me that he's going to be the

coach at Arkansas, but he can't. What do *you* know?" Of course, I think Lanny Van Eman hadn't been fired by Arkansas.

BH: Yes.

SK: But usually the guy who leaves is one of the first ones to know who his replacement is going to be, and, sure enough, Lanny did. He said, "Eddie's the man."

BH: Yes.

SK: He said, "Sutton's the man." So we had—I don't know if folks remember it at the time—we had a statewide press conference on Channel 7 at night to introduce Eddie Sutton.

BH: Was it at Fayetteville or Little Rock?

SK: It was at Little Rock at the Channel 7 studios.

BH: Wow.

SK: I remember asking a question during the press conference. I didn't think he really knew who the heck I was. He came up to me afterwards.

BH: Who—Eddie Sutton?

SK: Eddie Sutton. As soon as we broke the press conference, he came up to me. He said, "I want to apologize to this man."

BH: He said that in front of everybody?

SK: In front of everybody.

BH: That's pretty cool. [Laughs]

SK: And he explained why. He said, "I'm sorry I pretty much had to lie to you this morning because I couldn't very well say that I'm going to be the new coach at

Arkansas."

BH: Right.

SK: I've always respected him for that.

BH: Yes.

SK: That was a nice thing to say because I know coaches hem and haw around me. I know you've experienced this with [current Arkansas Razorbacks football coach] Houston [Nutt] . . .

BH: Yes.

SK: . . . and how they have to play up these days about "Well, I may be interested in that job, but I can't say anything," or rather not say anything, I guess, is Houston's case—[he would have] probably been better off not to say anything about the LSU [Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana] job.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: But it's just strange how things came about.

BH: Yes.

SK: That's how I came to know Eddie Sutton. I had a pretty good relationship with Eddie Sutton, even after I became sports editor up in Blytheville.

BH: Right.

SK: I would've gotten there, I guess, in the fall of 1974, to be sports editor at Blytheville. So that's the first time I left the *Arkansas Democrat*.

BH: Then your second stint—you said you came back in . . .

SK: 1979. I had been in Georgia. I had been a sports editor in Georgia.

BH: Where in Georgia?

SK: A little town called Jonesboro, Georgia, of all places.

BH: Yes. [Laughs] I didn't know there was a Jonesboro, Georgia.

SK: There is a Jonesboro, Georgia. It was the *Clayton County News Daily* in Clayton County, Georgia. For anybody familiar with the Atlanta area, Clayton County is where the Atlanta Airport is at Riverdale in College Park.

BH: I've been there many times. I didn't know what county it was. [Laughs] But I've been through there. Can't go anywhere without going through the Atlanta Airport.

SK: But that was a good experience, too, because you not only covered the high schools; we got to dabble with the [Atlanta] Braves [professional baseball team] and the [Atlanta] Hawks [professional basketball team] and the [Atlanta] Falcons [professional football team]. It was a fun time, too, especially when you're young.

BH: When you were at the *Arkansas Democrat* from 1973 to 1974, it was a p.m. then, correct [meaning that it was an afternoon paper]? Am I right about that?

SK: Still was. Yes.

BH: And when you came back in 1979, was it still p.m.?

SK: We switched over.

BH: So in 1979 it was an a.m.—a morning paper?

SK: In 1979, I think, we were—I was there for the switch-over.

BH: Right.

SK: Whichever time it was.

BH: Yes. I know when I came in 1981, it was already an a.m. So it had—I'm just not sure if that happened in 1979 or 1980, or exactly when that happened.

SK: Seems to me it was the later seventies [1970s] that we switched over.

BH: Yes. How did you find the paper to be different, say, when you left in 1974 and when you came back in 1979?

SK: Oh, it was much different. The equipment—we went from typewriters to electric. Do you remember the old electric [IBM] Selectric typewriters and the scanners?

BH: Oh, yes. Yes.

SK: Jerry McConnell was saying, "Be sure to tell people about the scanners."

BH: Yes.

SK: You know, people these days wouldn't understand that type of . . .

BH: How would you describe the scanners?

SK: We would type it up on the Selectric typewriters, and you'd have to run it through a scanner, which had different codes. That's how we went to—that's how things go to—that how things got composed back in those days—through those scanners.

BH: Right. Yes.

SK: Compared to the old days, where—I was telling the kids this not too long ago—I remember when we used to send copy through pneumatic tubes that went from one part of the newsroom to another.

BH: Yes.

SK: They had that at Fort Smith, I know.

BH: Yes.

SK: I think in the early days of the *Democrat* we had a system like that.

BH: Yes. Like something of the *The Front Page* [famous newspaper play and film]?

SK: Yes. No computers. [Laughs] Those smoky newsrooms. Don't you remember those, too?

BH: Yes. But was there a lot of cigarette smoke in the newsroom?

SK: Oh, yes. The police reporters and people like that—the hard-core police reporters and the city editors.

BH: Yes.

SK: City editors back then were characters. They really were. Gosh, I wish I could remember some names now.

BH: But there was a lot of second-hand smoke floating around in the newsroom.

[Laughs]

SK: A lot of second-hand smoke. You just don't see that nowadays.

BH: Yes.

SK: I guess that's a good thing.

BH: Yes. Besides the technological side of it, how did the paper change—maybe in terms of content? How did you compare the *Democrat*—you left in the early seventies [1970s]—to when you came back in the late seventies [1970s]?

SK: Walter Hussman [Jr.] changed it tremendously.

BH: Right. Walter Hussman is now the publisher.

SK: He's now the publisher. We had a huge announcement up here just last Friday about us buying what we call the "alliance papers"—the Bentonville paper [reference to the *Benton County Daily Record*] and the Fayetteville paper, the old-time *Northwest Arkansas Times* that I used to work for in the seventies [1970s]. I credit Walter Hussman would change a whole lot of things about how we do

newspapers. Once he aligned an unholy alliance with John Robert Starr, things started happening.

BH: You know, he hired John Robert Starr as the managing editor.

SK: He hired John Robert Starr, I guess, from the AP [Associated Press]. [Editor's note: Star had left the AP and had returned to university, where he was working on a graduate degree.]

BH: Right. The AP in Little Rock.

SK: I first knew him as *Bob* Starr at the AP in Little Rock.

BH: And that's John Robert Starr with two "Rs."

SK: Yes.

BH: Like Bart Starr who was the Green Bay Packers quarterback.

SK: But he was Harry King's boss at the AP.

BH: Right.

SK: That's how I first met him. They said back then he was *Bob* Starr, and he became John Robert at the *Democrat*. He'll always be a great character in Arkansas journalism. He changed things tremendously, sometimes for the good and sometimes for the worst. [Laughs] There were people [who were] afraid of him. I still know people in Little Rock who were afraid of Bob Starr.

BH: I can't say that I really got to know him well, because I was in Fayetteville.

SK: It's hard to get to know him.

BH: But one thing—I remember seeing him—I guess it was the cover of the *Arkansas Times* magazine where [laughs] Mr. Starr has got the knife . . .

SK: The picture of the knife . . .

BH: . . . and he looks like a commando.

SK: There was the declaration of the real newspaper war, as I recall. [Reference to the newspaper war between the *Arkansas Democrat* and the *Arkansas Gazette*.]

BH: Now, when was that—about 1980 or something?

SK: That had to be around the eighties [1980s]. Yes.

BH: Yes, like 1979 or 1980.

SK: Yes. But those were great times, Bob, because we could see things were going to start to happen. We came from the days where they used to tell us that "You better get your paycheck in the bank on Friday because I don't know how solvent we are," before the Hussmans took over.

BH: Wow.

SK: I guess it wasn't that bad, but there were rumors around that we . . .

BH: Yes.

SK: We always thought that the *Gazette* would probably buy *us* out.

BH: Right. [Laughs] Not the other way around.

SK: Not the other way around—and how things developed. Like I said, I wasn't there when it finally happened, but, gosh, just to be in those early years and to see how things *were* changing. We were getting some respect around—especially, I noticed it with the coaches that we were starting to get respect.

BH: With high school, college . . .?

SK: High school coaches [and] college coaches.

BH: Yes. How did that manifest itself? In what way . . .?

SK: I think they started *reading* our newspaper.

BH: Yes.

SK: They started picking up our newspaper, for whatever reasons. We were the exciting newspaper at the time, and I've got some great friends who worked on the *Gazette* back then. Jim Bailey was probably the best Arkansas sportswriter there ever was, as far as I'm concerned.

BH: Right—who still does a column occasionally for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

SK: Who I used to cover the Travelers [reference to the minor league basketball team in Little Rock] against . . .

BH: Right.

SK: I think the *Gazette* just got complacent, and I think a lot of people believe that they just sat back and let it happen, when it probably didn't need to. If they'd taken steps at that time, it might not have happened.

BH: Because Mr. Hussman was putting in—the news hole was getting bigger and the writers—how do you think the paper improved in that time—in the early seventies [1970s] or early eighties [1980s]?

SK: We spent money. We spent money, Bob.

BH: Yes.

SK: I'm sure Walter Hussman can tell you the details behind that more than I can, but we started putting some money into that newspaper, and it started looking *good*—color schemes, layout differences—in fact, people. We were hiring good people. We got some good people. We were hiring people from the *Gazette* sometimes.

BH: Who were some of the people you remember us getting from the *Gazette*? Anybody in particular that jumps out at you?

SK: Jim Lassiter came over to us from the *Gazette*.

BH: Right. Who again? L-A-S-S-I-T-E-R?

SK: Yes. He was a columnist for the *Gazette* and came over to the *Democrat*.

BH: Right.

SK: I think he had a stint in Oklahoma City for a while, too.

BH: Right.

SK: We hired some other people from the *Gazette* at one point. But the point I guess I'm trying to make is that you could see things were going to happen one way or the other—that we were going to be good enough to where the *Gazette* was doing to want to buy us . . .

BH: Right.

SK: . . . or we were going to form our own identity, which I think we pretty well did. You've got to give Bob Starr the credit. He made people want to read our newspapers. Whether you loved him or hated him, he made people want to read our newspapers. I think Meredith Oakley in Little Rock can tell you the same time. Now, she was close with Bob Starr and works with him. I think she'll tell you the same. [She] still writes our “Voices” column in Little Rock. It was just an exciting time that things were starting to happen.

BH: Did you sense the morale was just a lot better with the writers and editors and stuff? How did that change from the early seventies [1970s] to late seventies [1970s]?

SK: I think there was a pride showing, finally, that we were—we had been number two for so long—so long, and still were, but people were taking notice. Like I

said, I was out of there before the real shake-up happened, but you could see that the wheels were turning, anyway.

BH: Yes. The second time you came back—were the Arkansas Travelers and the [St. Louis] Cardinals [AA] baseball. Was that your main thing?

SK: Yes. I covered two Texas League championships for the Arkansas Travelers. That was a great time.

BH: Right. Who were some of the great players you remember [who went on] to good major-league careers?

SK: Oh, yes. Todd Zeile played a while. He was with the Travelers back then.

BH: Z-E-I-L-E. [Laughs]

SK: Z-E-I-L-E, I think. Yes. Andy Van Slyke was a great ball player.

BH: Right.

SK: Garry Templeton, who was later traded for Ozzie Smith, came through Little Rock.

BH: Garry with two Rs?

SK: Garry with two Rs. The only guy who ever refused an interview with me.

BH: Really? Why?

SK: From high schools on up through the pro[essional] ranks, he was the only one who ever refused an interview.

BH: Why? Do you remember the circumstances of that?

SK: I remember the circumstances very well. He came to Little Rock for an exhibition game.

BH: That was when he was playing for the Cardinals?

SK: When he was playing for the Cardinals. Obviously, he didn't want to make the trip for the exhibition game, and he was surly anyway.

BH: Right.

SK: I wanted to interview him because he'd had a great campaign back when he was in Little Rock that kind of boosted his way up to the major leagues.

BH: Yes.

SK: But he didn't want to talk, and I'll always remember that. I remember that day for two reasons.

BH: Do you remember what year this was?

SK: Oh, man.

BH: It would have been 1979, 1980—somewhere in there—1981.

SK: Sometime in the early eighties [1980s]. Anyway, the Cardinals played the Travelers in an exhibition game.

BH: This was at the end of spring training?

SK: The end of spring training in Little Rock, and Garry Templeton refused the interview, and he said something to me. I said, "Well, Garry, you had a great time in Little Rock. I thought you'd want to talk about it." He said, "Man, don't talk about what a great year I had in Little Rock. I *know* I had a great year in Little Rock."

BH: [Laughs]

SK: And that was the first experience I've had in all my years of sports writing of that kind of attitude.

BH: Yes.

SK: But I would—what I remember most about that day, Bob, is that the Travelers *beat* the Cardinals on a home run by fellow name Jim Riggleman, who ended up managing the Chicago Cubs.

BH: Right. And the [San Diego] Padres, I think.

SK: And he's still involved, I think, in the [Los Angeles] Dodgers or somebody's organization now.

BH: Did he manage the Travs [Travelers] team?

SK: I think he may have managed the Travs at one point. He was kind of a player/coach back then.

BH: Yes.

SK: But he was one of the characters I remember. It seemed to me he hit a home run off of Darryl Knowles . . .

BH: Darryl Knowles.

SK: . . . who ended up being a Cardinal Farm System pitching coach.

BH: Yes. Is it D-A-R-R-Y-L K-N-O-W-L-E-S?

SK: I believe that's right.

BH: Yes. It sounds right to me.

SK: Yes. It was a weird spelling. But from that stint with the *Democrat*, that's what I remember most is covering the Travelers.

BH: What did you think of Ray Winder Field?

SK: I loved Ray Winder Field.

BH: Yes.

SK: I loved Ray Winder Field. It breaks my heart that they're going to do something

with Ray Winder Field—make an elephant habitat or whatever they're going to do with it, and that's a shame.

BH: Build them a new ball park.

SK: It was a great ball park. Man, it was good. Bill Valentine—it was great time out there.

BH: Right. That's the Travelers general manager.

SK: Travelers general manager, Bill Valentine.

BH: He's kind of known as the guy who created the Umpires Union.

SK: [Unintelligible]—he was a promoter, and he's still a great promoter, I'm sure.

BH: Yes.

SK: I think Little Rock is going to miss those days. I think Little Rock misses the Cardinals' Farm System. We were so attached to the Cardinals.

BH: There are so many people in Arkansas who are Cardinals fans.

SK: It's a great—you were asking a while ago about some of the great Cardinals who came—Keith Hernandez came through the Traveler Farm System. A fellow named Hector Cruz was one of the finest minor-league players I ever saw.

BH: Yes, he had some monster years.

SK: He ended up playing with the Cubs.

BH: Yes—good major leaguer—not great, but he had some monster years in Little Rock.

SK: You remember, I guess, his brothers, too.

BH: José Cruz. C-R-U-Z.

SK: Yes. The whole Cruz family has gone through now.

BH: They've got José Cruz, Jr., playing, I guess, for the Red Sox. I can't keep track.
All these guys get traded around. [Laughs] But I think he plays for the Red Sox.

SK: Can't tell the player without the scorecard these days, can you?

BH: No, not really. [Laughs]

SK: But that was the great time about those days. Of course, Wally Hall became the sports editor, which was ironic because Wally was on my high school staff back when I was a high school sports editor. He succeeded me as the high school sports editor back then.

BH: At the *Democrat*?

SK: In my first stint at the *Democrat*.

BH: When you left to go to . . .

SK: To go to Blytheville.

BH: Right.

SK: And, to tell you the truth, I think at that time Todd Gurley had left.

BH: That's who hired me—Todd Gurley.

SK: Yes, Todd Gurley was the sports editor.

BH: Yes. G-U-R-L-E-Y.

SK: Yes. G-U-R-L-E-Y. I had known him from Jonesboro. He had been on the *Jonesboro Sun* at the same time I was at Blytheville. I liked Todd. He was young, but we liked working with him. Todd Gurley and Bob Merrick, I think, pretty much ran things back then.

BH: Yes.

SK: Lyndon also had his finger in the pie . . .

BH: Lyndon Finney.

SK: . . . because he was Bob Starr's assistant. But he dabbled in sports quite a bit.

BH: Do you remember Bob Merrick—was that M-E-R-R-I-C-K?

SK: M-E-R-R-I-C-K. We went to the same high school at Fort Smith Northside.

BH: Right.

SK: Last I heard of Bob, I think he ended up at the *Kansas City Star*.

BH: As a designer.

SK: As a designer.

BH: I never knew him, but I heard he was a really brilliant guy.

SK: Sharp.

BH: He was a brilliant guy.

SK: Yes.

BH: You left in 1983. Where did you go in 1983?

SK: I tried to get into the business in Conway. A fellow named Mike Harrison in Conway . . .

BH: I'm sorry. What was it?

SK: Mike Harrison in Conway.

BH: Okay.

SK: He had radio stations in Conway. He also has something called the Creative Sports Network back then. I don't know what they call it now.

BH: Yes.

SK: Back then, we were covering Traveler games, high school sports—I tried to get in on the ground floor of advertising, PR [public relations] and that sort of thing. It

was a good experience for a while. But the only way you make money at it was to sell ads [advertisements] and things like that. I never liked being a salesman. I've had to do it a couple of times, but I've really liked being a salesman.

BH: Yes.

SK: Selling things to people that they may not need.

BH: Yes.

SK: From there, I became editor of the weekly in Germantown, Tennessee.

BH: Right outside Memphis.

SK: Outside Memphis—kind of the ritzy part of Memphis, back then. I guess some other areas of Memphis have caught up since.

BH: When was this that you went there?

SK: That would be spring or summer of 1983, I guess.

BH: So you weren't in Conway very long.

SK: No, I didn't spend much time in Conway. I tried to get—this is an ironic story, too. I tried to get the sports editor job for the *Log Cabin Democrat* . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

BH: Yes. So you say you came back to the *Democrat-Gazette*, by now, in 1998?

SK: Not until 1998.

BH: Yes.

SK: I spent a lot of time in—I spent some time back in West Memphis and the Memphis area. I did some stringing for the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, the *Evening Times* in West Memphis. Mainly, I was over there to take care of my

grandmother. My grandmother was really sick at the time. I stayed with her about three years and did some string work. I also did some market research editing, which was fun, too. I went into some areas of Memphis that I'd never go in again because it's dangerous these days.

BH: Yes. So you'd just go to people's houses and do surveys?

SK: I'd go to people's houses and do surveys.

BH: Yes.

SK: That was a good experience, too, because you got to meet all sorts of different kinds of people. I worked myself way up their organization to where I not only got to be interviewed, I ended up editing interviews. Nowadays, when they come out with political polls, I know how they do them.

BH: Yes.

SK: I know how you can slant them.

BH: That's probably good in your line of work.

SK: It was. We did polls for ABC News. We did polls for Al Gore's senatorial race in Tennessee. It was good experience, but you're always going to miss the newspaper business.

BH: What was the company called—the polling company?

SK: Hilton or Chilton or something like that.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: It was a national group, but we had an office there at the Mall of Memphis.

BH: There in Memphis.

SK: I never will forget that place. Yes.

BH: So how did you end up coming back to the *Democrat* in 1998? How did that come about?

SK: I'd been in Georgia—had a heart attack—tried to edit a weekly newspaper—had a heart attack.

BH: Where was the paper?

SK: A little place called Dallas, Georgia, which is in Paulding County, Georgia—west of Atlanta. It's on the tip of the suburbs of Atlanta. But it was one of the fastest-growing counties in the country back then, kind of like our area up here now.

BH: Right. Northwest Arkansas.

SK: How this place has just really taken off. But my folks weren't getting along at the time, and my mom had been sick. Like I said, I hadn't been doing so well myself, so it was time to come back to Arkansas. I always gravitate back to Arkansas, for some strange reason.

BH: Yes.

SK: I've been here ever since.

BH: When you came back in 1998, you came up here to northwest Arkansas?

SK: No.

BH: Did you go to Little Rock first?

SK: I went to Little Rock first. I spent two years, I guess, in Little Rock before I came up here.

BH: And what did you do those two years?

SK: I was the copy editor. Because of our northwest edition, they expanded their copy desk there.

BH: Right. You were editing the northwest edition . . .

SK: I called up Frank Fellone. I had known Frank Fellone for a number of years.

BH: That's F-E-L-L-O-N-E.

SK: Yes—our deputy editor now. I called him up and said, "I notice you've got an ad for copy editors, and that's something I'd like to try."

BH: So you knew Frank from before.

SK: I know Frank from—Frank's the one who kept me from going to Jacksonville at one point. I was going to be the sports editor at Jacksonville, and he told me, "That will be the biggest mistake you'll ever make."

BH: That was Jacksonville, Arkansas?

SK: Jacksonville, Arkansas. He had worked with those people before and didn't like them, or something like that.

BH: Yes.

SK: He told me not to go, and I didn't. So I've always had kind of a soft place in my heart for Frank, and he has helped me out along the way. He sent me up here to be Yoda. [Reference to the wise Jedi leader in the *Star Wars* movie franchise.] I'm the guy that's supposed to know things that other people don't know.

BH: So you were there in Little Rock for two years being the copy editor.

SK: Here in Little Rock for two years. I also had cancer surgery while I was still in Little Rock.

BH: Wow. What kind of cancer, if you don't mind me asking?

SK: Colorectal cancer. That was a serious situation for a while when I first came back to Little Rock.

BH: Right.

SK: I knew that I wasn't completely healthy when I came back to Little Rock, but I didn't quite know why.

BH: Right.

SK: And that's what it turned out to be. But they think they caught it. I've been okay since. I've got checkups coming up in September, and they always say it can come back, but you never know. I just kind of watch my health. I had heart surgery a year ago last summer—heart bypass surgery. I just had a single bypass. I had mine before [William Jefferson] Bill Clinton did.

BH: Yes. Do you have any problem with any of this medical stuff being part of the interview, or [is there] anything you want to have off the record?

SK: No, I don't have a problem with it.

BH: Okay. I just want to make sure.

SK: That's just part of who I am.

BH: Right.

SK: Part of what I try to do now. I just try to be the old-timer around here now, I guess.

BH: Yes. So when did you move up here—in 2000?

SK: We've been up here almost five years. It'll be five years next May.

BH: Right.

SK: So that would be 2001, I guess.

BH: Yes. So you said Frank Fellone asked you to move up here?

SK: I consulted with him. Let's put it that way.

BH: Okay. [Laughs]

SK: David Bailey, who was our managing editor then—they were looking for people to come up here. We were starting a copy desk . . .

BH: Because we were expanding the operation up here.

SK: . . . under James Gilzow. I had known James back when he was at the *Gazette* and I was at the *Democrat*.

BH: Gilzow—how do you . . . ?

SK: G-I-L-Z-O-W. James would be my boss now.

BH: Yes. What was your job title when you came up here? What is your job title? Has your job title changed or is it?

SK: I'm the late man. What C. W. Browning does in Little Rock.

BH: Right.

SK: What you do is—we check the proofs, and you're just kind of the goalie for the newspaper.

BH: Right.

SK: You're the last guy that things can't get by before it gets in the newspaper.

BH: Right. The last line of defense.

SK: I love it. It's great for me. I get to go to the press and be the first and the last reader of the newspaper. It's good for me. It helps me stay in this business, basically, and it's something I still—as long as I'm able to do it, it's something I love to do. I was kidding with Mickey Doyle last night, who I work with on the copy desk . . .

BH: He's one of our copy editors, Mickey Doyle. D-O-Y-L-E.

SK: Yes, D-O-Y-L-E—and also helps out with some high school sports.

BH: He's an old sportswriter, too.

SK: An old sportswriter.

BH: Everybody's an old sportswriter.

SK: We're all old sportswriters.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: Everybody—Frank Fellone, I think, did some sports writing for a while. But I was kidding with Mickey just the other night. I said, "We're always going to know things that other people don't know as long as we stay around." That's kind of the truth.

BH: What do you mean by that?

SK: Things that happen in the past, especially in Arkansas. I remember one story that they were working on—Johnny Cash's obit[uary].

BH: Right.

SK: There was some fact in there that they didn't have right, and the fact that I'd grown up in Arkansas and knew about Johnny Cash—I knew that.

BH: Right.

SK: So that's kind of what I do now. I just try to point out—sometimes it's a nuisance, I guess, to point out mistakes to people, but that's kind of what I do. Somebody's got to do it.

BH: Well, you don't want mistakes in the paper.

SK: You don't want mistakes in the paper. I guess that kind of leads us to what I do now. I still love this business. We happened to be talking right in this room

today about an employee appreciation committee that we started here. So good things are happening up here—not only [unintelligible] northwest Arkansas, but with our newspaper up here. Like I said, we had the big announcements the other day. I guess we're expanding, more or less, to take on those other newspapers. Walter Hussman declared us as the number-one paper in the market up there. That's pretty cool.

BH: Yes.

SK: So things are beginning to happen up here. I like the time I spent up here. I like the folks I worked with. They've been good to me. The people in Little Rock have been good to me. This is an exciting place to be right now, Bob, is the best way to put it—as you well know.

BH: Yes. With this being your third tour of duty at the *Democrat*, really, you've seen it from . . .

SK: Fourteen years total, I figured it up the other day.

BH: Yes. But going back to 1972, that's over thirty years, right, when you first started?

SK: Yes.

BH: Talking about the *Democrat-Gazette* that you see today—and with this northwest operation, but also the paper in totality, maybe—what it is now compared to what it was in the early seventies [1970s] when you first started at the *Democrat*?

SK: I think we're a major player, not only in Arkansas, but in our region. We're award winners. We *are* the paper in this part of the country now. We're constantly changing. We've got a new design system that we just put in months ago. We're

just constantly trying to make things better for the readers up here. We're not only grabbing a share of this market, but this whole state knows what we do and who we are. Another thing I'd like to mention, I guess, is that about twenty years ago people were predicting the demise of newspapers—that the Internet is going to put the newspapers out of business or that television is going to put newspapers out of business. Yet, every morning, we're right there on the doorstep of people's homes. That sometimes amazes me that we *are* still a part of people's lives, but we are. I was telling the kids here one night that . . .

BH: When you say the kids, you mean other people at the paper. You not talking about a school group getting a tour.

SK: Well, some of them are kids. They're kids to me, I guess. They're like my kids, I guess.

BH: Yes.

SK: This is kind of the family that I have up here. But I was telling them one night, "We do great things for people we'll never meet." That's kind of the way the newspaper business is. People—especially like a Sunday newspaper—will get things out of a Sunday newspaper for people we'll never know, but we'll become important in their lives, one way or another—whether they need a job or whether somebody's getting married or somebody died. I think newspapers are still effective. Like I said, I love this business. I love being around people who still love this business. I hate it when people try to downgrade the business. You people in journalism—get involved in this business, *please*. We need young people coming up in this business.

BH: You said people downgrade it. How do you mean?

SK: I think people—well, look at the incident with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* . . .

BH: Jayson Blair.

SK: The Jayson Blair incident [Reference to the *New York Times* reporter who fabricated many of his stories]—that we're lazy and that we don't do the job we used to. I think the good newspapers still do. We try to. We try to every day. And that's a lesson that I think we can try to pass on to the younger people. Getting it right is still important. No matter how long it takes, let's try to get it right. And if we do make mistakes, let's fix them. Make it right for the people. Be honest with the people. So many newspapers, I think, nowadays, aren't being honest with people. They have their own agendas, and so far I don't see that with our paper, you know? I think we're fair with anybody. We'll run conservative columns, then we'll run Gene Lyons.

BH: L-Y-O-N-S.

SK: L-Y-O-N-S.

BH: And he would be characterized as a liberal?

SK: I guess. The closest thing we've got to an Arkansas liberal these days, I guess.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: Now that John Brummett has left the fold. I think John is probably becoming a little more conservative these days, too. I think we just try to be fair and honest with people, and as long as newspapers do that, then we're on the right track. We're doing well. I'm proud of the profession. I hope you are, too.

BH: Oh, yes. Definitely. We've done a lot of good stuff. Is there anything I didn't think to ask you about that you think might be good for people to hear?

SK: I was trying to think of something else.

BH: Either about funny stories or anecdotes about papers or anything you've covered—just anything.

SK: You know, the funniest stories are the things—the night is when things go wrong. I remember one of the greatest lessons I think I ever got as a writer in this newspaper business—I was thinking about this the other night—I can't remember the year—we had a copy editor by the name of Loyd Ryan. L-O-Y-D R-Y-A-N.

BH: Loyd Bryan?

SK: No, just Loyd Ryan. R-Y-A-N.

BH: Right.

SK: I think he ended up being the managing editor in Conway, eventually. He was from Conway, and he was just a good ol' country boy, and he would come in and work with us on the weekends. I remember one night I covered a Little Rock Central/Park View game. It went something like four overtimes—back in the Dexter Reed era.

BH: A basketball game.

SK: Basketball game. I think it was back in the Dexter Reed era.

BH: Reed. From Memphis.

SK: Great ball player from Little Rock Park View. Ended up going to Memphis State [University]. And did something like four overtimes. I was going to put in this big, flowery lead about—for some reason, I heard it on the radio, "The Thrill is

Gone," by B. B. King, on the way up there.

BH: Yes.

SK: "The thrill is not gone from this," and whatever—some flowery lead that I put on it. I never will forget this, Bob—one of my greatest lessons in journalism. Loyd Ryan took that paper—we were using copy back then. He tore the top part off of it [laughter] and wrote something like, "The Little Rock Central Tigers—" [SK makes "woosh" sound]. Sent it on.

BH: Yes.

SK: And, man, I was a young writer. I was going to complain. So I went to Fred Morrow. "Fred, he ruined my stuff." Fred looked at me and he just grinned. He said, "Sam, that's not what we needed at the time. We had to hit the deadline."

BH: Right.

SK: Like I said, that's the great lesson that young writers—these days, when I take flowery stuff out of these people's copy—I hope they'll understand someday that it's not what we need at this time. Those are the kind of things that you remember. If you're fortunate enough to have those things happen to you, even though you think they're bad at the time. Sometimes the worst experiences in this profession are the best teachers.

BH: Right.

SK: Of which I'm sure you're aware. Speaking of funny, one funny thing from the old *Democrat*: we had a sports editor emeritus, now, Jack Keady. K-E-A-D-Y.

BH: Right. I've heard of him before.

SK: Who was opposite Orville Henry at one time. He had moved on to—I think we

called him sports editor emeritus. But he would come in and he'd do his column. Nine times out of ten, he'd pick out little tidbits from the sporting news. So John Brummett got the idea—I think it was John Brummett.

BH: Yes.

SK: John, if it wasn't you, then I apologize, but I'm pretty sure that you had the idea one night. We were going to hide the sporting news from Jack Keady.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: He came in that next day, and he was looking for his sporting news because he wanted to write his column.

BH: Right.

SK: When you were young and you were in the newspaper business, you did little pranks like that.

BH: Yes.

SK: But I never will forget it. He was looking for that sporting news, and he couldn't find it. He had to go out and buy one, I think.

BH: [Laughs]

SK: Because it seemed to me that John was the one who hid his sporting news at the time.

BH: Did he ever find out what happened—Jack Keady?

SK: I don't think so.

BH: Nobody's going to—that's not something you want to own up to.

SK: That's not something you want to own up to. The camaraderie around newsrooms is really interesting sometimes—how you get to bond with people. I hope I bond

with these people now. We're friends on and off the court, so to speak. That's the other great thing about the newspaper business. I was telling folks when we started this employee appreciation committee. I said, "The interesting thing is that the person you may get mad at tonight is the guy who's going to save your butt tomorrow night."

BH: Right.

SK: We had that happen to us just last night. Two of our people got into a little bit of a squabble. I'm not going to name names, but . . .

BH: This was over copy—like a writer and an editor or . . . ?

SK: No, it's not—this was two editors.

BH: Right.

SK: Or two designers, basically.

BH: Right.

SK: They got cross with each other, and in the course of the evening we were going to run the wrong weather [report] in tomorrow's paper. The one person that they'd gotten angry at earlier is the one who saved his bacon later on.

BH: Right.

SK: So that's kind of the way we are in the newspaper business. We help out each other, or try to.

BH: Right.

SK: That's another lesson we learn.

BH: Okay. Well, this whole thing's pretty good.

SK: I appreciate it. Did I take all your time?

BH: Oh, no! We've only been talking for about an hour. In fact, not even an hour. I just want to go over this once again. This is Bob Holt, H-O-L-T, asking the questions. Sam Krebs is K-R-E-B-S. Right?

SK: K-R-E-B-S.

BH: Answering the questions. It is August 21, 2005, at 3:00 p.m., or thereabouts.

SK: And just an enjoyable time. Someday when they uncover this in some time capsule somewhere, I hope they learn something from it.

BH: [Laughs] Yes. We just want to make sure that this is a freely given interview and that there's nothing on here that you want to be off the record.

SK: I don't think so. No. What you see is what you get. I don't think I slandered anybody here. [Laughs]

BH: [Laughs] I don't think so, either. I think we're okay there.

SK: Thanks, Bob. I appreciate it.

BH: Okay. That was good. Thanks.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]