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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Deborah Mathis
16 June 2007
Telephone Interview

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 1]

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is Saturday, June 16, 2007. I'm sitting in my home in Greenwood, Arkansas, preparing to do a telephone interview with Deborah Mathis, who is in her home, which I believe is in North Bethesda, Maryland. This interview is for the *Arkansas Democrat* Project and the [David and Barbara] Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas. And the thing I need to do first, Deborah, is ask you if I have your permission to tape this interview and turn it over to the University.

Deborah Mathis: Yes, you do.

JM: Okay, very good. And we will get into all this as we go along, but you have worked in all sorts of media. You worked in newspapers, television, national syndicated columnist, Internet/online columnist, and written three books. But as I remember, you got your start at the *Arkansas Democrat*, is that correct?

DM: That is correct.

JM: Okay. Well, let's find out how you got to the *Democrat*. Let's just start from the beginning. Where and when were you born?

DM: I was born in Little Rock, at what was the University Hospital in MacArthur Park at the time.

JM: Okay.

DM: In August of 1953. August 24, 1953.

JM: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

DM: My parents: Lloyd H. Myers, M-Y-E-R-S. Deceased. He was a businessman and a Baptist minister, pastor. And my mother is Rachel A. Helms Myers, H-E-L-M-S Myers, an educator.

JM: Okay. Spell Myers again for me.

DM: M-Y-E-R-S.

JM: M-Y-E-R-S. Okay. And Lloyd is two Ls: L-L-O-Y-D?

DM: Correct.

JM: Okay. And where did you go to school?

DM: I went to school at Gibbs Elementary in Little Rock, Rightsell Elementary—everything in Little Rock, Westside Junior High—now defunct, and Little Rock Central.

JM: When did you graduate from Central?

DM: I graduated from Central in 1971. Yes.

JM: Okay. So how did you—how did you get interested in—in the newspaper business and—and how did you get to the *Democrat*?

DM: Well, when I was in the eighth grade—at the end of my eighth-grade year—I don't know how they do it nowadays—but in those days, we had required subjects—this was before everyone was talking about core curriculum and all that—we had required subjects and then elective subjects. And I had filled up my plate with my required subjects for the coming ninth-grade year as we were planning for that and had a few elective slots open. And I got a note from an English teacher at Westside Junior High, who said, "Your teacher said that you always are really good in composition, so I wondered if you might think about journalism as one of your elective courses next year." She was the sponsor of the school newspaper. I didn't even know what journalism really meant. I wasn't sure. I said, "Journalism, what's that? The school paper?" And you know, it had never occurred to me. I thought, "Well, why not?" And I tried it, immediately loved it. By the second semester of my ninth-grade year, I was the editor of the paper. And couldn't wait to get to Central, because I had, you know, I had quickly gotten up to speed on student journalism and learned that Central High had such a fabulous reputation and record and won so many awards for its school newspaper, so I couldn't wait to get there—only to find out that you had to be in eleventh grade to take journalism at Central. And so I had to sit out a year and got in—in the eleventh grade, and at the end of the eleventh grade was named editor for the coming year, my senior year.

JM: Okay.

DM: Now there had never been a—a black student or a female student who had edited the student newspaper alone. There, I think, had been a female coeditor or

something. But no black editor or coeditor, and, you know, so this was kind of virgin territory for me, and I took it on under the amazing leadership of Charles Lance, who is now also deceased, who was just so fabulously acclaimed in that area. And I later learned journalism the way it really works in the real newsroom, as opposed to, you know, a schoolhouse.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And James Scudder was assistant city editor at the *Arkansas Democrat*. But still doing some reporting, and he called me about doing a story, a feature story of me as this female black editor at the Central High paper, and we spent several hours one day during the interview, and I told him—I said, "Now when I get out of college, I'm gonna come to you for a job." He said, "Well, call me." And by the end of that senior year, I had met and fallen in love with a guy who was a senior in college and thought, "Well, I'll delay my going away to college and just go to maybe UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock] or something, and stay here in the name of love." So I need a job. And so it was months—just a few months after I had told him that I was gonna be calling one day that I did call him and say, you know, "I—I need—I need to go to work." And he was good for his word—put me in touch with a man named Jerry McConnell.

JM: Oh!

DM: And I was hired as a clerk typist to start.

JM: Okay. [Laughs] That was in 1971, correct?

DM: That's right. That was in August of 1971 that I—I went just a few days, less than a week after my marriage to Bill Mathis.

JM: Well, okay. Then you went to work? Okay. All right, so that was in August of 1971, and so I assume I interviewed you and hired you. And so what did you do as a—as a clerk typist?

DM: Oh, boy. Farm—we took farm reports. There were three of us at the desk—kind of, you know, the acolytes to Ralph Patrick, the city editor, and James Scudder, the assistant city editor. And we took—we did farm reports, obits [obituaries], weather reports, all of those kind of little staples of the newspaper that have to be in there every day and the obits. Then around 11:00—because we were an afternoon paper, and I remember this like it was last week—the phones would start ringing, and reporters would start calling in their stories. This is a lost art. Dictating a story. I tried to do it a few—I had to tell you—I tried to do it a few years ago. First, we couldn't find anybody in the newsroom who could take dictation . . .

JM: [Laughs]

DM: . . . knew even how to do it. They were afraid to do that, and I was real proud that I still kind of had that thing, you know, talking off— the top of your head and just thumbing through your notes and catching quotes and figures and things like that. And we just took the dictation and handed the story over, ripped it out of the manual typewriter and handed it over to the—the editors who marked it up and sent it to the copy desk for a head and sent it up the chute, you know. And that was—what I loved about it and what I tell young people now, including those that I taught, because I did some teaching at Northwestern [University] for a couple of years that—what I tell them now is that—what I loved is that I—I came in to

journalism at a time when it was done the way it always had been done. It might have been, you know, in the—in the last gasp of that but still, it was—it was the way it had always been done, you know, setting the type and marking it up with red pens and all of that. And that's what I loved. I—I feel real, real fortunate for that.

JM: Okay, so—so what was it like working in the—the newsroom at—at the *Democrat* at that time?

DM: I loved it, because I loved the energy of the newsroom. And I loved how—how united we were in our competition against the mighty *Arkansas Gazette*, the morning paper. And, you know, we were—we took a lot of delight in—in getting stories in that afternoon's paper that they couldn't [have] gotten in that morning's paper, or having somehow advanced a story that they had that morning even more so. And that kind of thing, being real scrappy. I loved it. I—I knew then this is the only thing for me. I just knew it.

JM: Yeah, okay, so do you remember you were talking about the people you worked with at that time?

DM: Oh, I remember tons of them. You know, I remember Roger Armbrust and Jerry Dean and Bill Husted and Brenda Tirey and Dianne Woodruff. I just—and Linda Zimmer. I remember so many people. And I remember you as being so kind to me, Jerry. And, and that impressed me very early on, because, I thought, "This is the managing editor of this paper. He does not have to talk to me the way he does. I mean, spend time with me and listen to me." And when I went into your office that day, and said, "I want a chance to be a reporter," you didn't laugh me out or

shoo me out of the room. You were kind to me, and said, "Okay, we'll give you a chance." And I didn't expect that, because I had only been there, you know, six or nine months at the most and was eighteen years old, for heaven's sake. What did I know? But you, you know, gave me that—that chance.

JM: Uh-huh. You . . .

DM: And I—I felt, you know, there weren't—I don't think—it's hard for me to remember many other black people around there. I don't know, I might have been the only one. But you know what? That was nothing. There—there was no sense of "Oh, who are you, outsider" kind of thing there. And that's saying something. I think.

JM: Well, you were—uh, you came in and—and you said that you thought that—that you could be a reporter, is that correct? You said you believed that you could do that.

DM: Right.

JM: And—and . . .

DM: And I said, "Just give me a chance to prove it, and if I can't, put me back on this desk."

JM: Yeah. [Laughter] And—and I think I said, "Okay."

DM: Right, you did. I was really surprised. I thought you were gonna give me a kinda little girl pat on the head. Your time will come. But you said, "Okay." And you made good on it. Within a couple of weeks, I was sent out on a story. And I remember what story it was. [Laughs] The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra was performing and had a guest conductor in. And—and so I went in and did all this

research about their repertoire for that night. And—and I remember [Sergei] Prokofiev was some of the music that they were playing. And I did all this research on Prokofiev, started out my review with something like, "[Sergei] Prokofiev would have been proud" or something. What did I know about quality of things? But still, certain—some reporters came to me and said, "How did you know that stuff?" And, I think people were kind of impressed that I didn't botch it. And in hindsight, even then I knew that it was, you know, having done—taken so much dictation and having seen the stories, you know, heard how the reporters did their stories and—and turned those stories over and see them coming up on the front page or on the section fronts or something of the papers. I knew, by comparison, that this was a story that could have been trashed if I had blown it. You know, the editors could have thrown it away and never missed the hole.

JM: Uh-huh. Yeah.

DM: But I still, you know, and I wasn't offended by that. In fact, in fact I found a little comfort in that. So from there, I went to—the next thing I got were movie reviews. And when I think I really scored my chops was when I just destroyed a movie in one of our reviews one time. And so many people talked about it and said, "You made it sound so bad, that I wanna go see it." [Laughter] So, you know, we started out nice and easy and—kind of, you know, and free.

JM: Do you—do you remember the movie?

DM: Yeah, it was—it was *Cotton Comes to Har*—no, no—*Come Back, Charleston Blue*. The same guys who were in *Cotton Comes to Harlem* were in that.

JM: I don't remember that.

DM: *Cotton Comes to Harlem* was kind of—it was Godfrey—gosh, I can't . . .

JM: Cambridge?

DM: Godfrey Cambridge. Yes.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: And Roscoe Lee Brown.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: And—and they were making a series of movies, and *Cotton Comes to Harlem* was kind of—kind of a semiclassic in the black community now. But they tried to follow it with *Come Back, Charleston Blue*, which was just God-awful. Just terrible. And I said so, and—[laughs]—and I kept doin' that, and then there were a few general assignments, you know, car wrecks and four-alarm fires and things like that. And my big break came when Rik—oh, gosh—Rik. He was a young up-and-comer, and he went on to be a really good journalist with huge papers and stuff.

JM: Tell me on the staff on the—on the *Democrat* at that time?

DM: Yeah.

JM: Rik O'Neal?

DM: Rik. Was it Rik O'Neal? Yeah, I think it was Rik O'Neal. Yeah, Rik O'Neal.

JM: There was a Rik O'Neal.

DM: Covering the Guy "Mutt" Jones tax evasion case in the federal courthouse. And that, you know, that was front-page top of the fold news every single day. That was his story, and he called in early in the story—some time within the first or second week of this ongoing trial—sick. Mono [mononucleosis]. And

somebody—he had to go home, and somebody had to get over there and take his place in the press box. And I was the only one in the house at that time. Everybody else was on assignment. And they sent me over there. And there were all the top reporters from the competition were covering that and rookie me. And I would call in my story and say, "The third day of the Guy "Mutt" Jones tax evasion trial—," you know. And James Scudder would pick up the phone and he called me "Motorfreight." And—and he and—and Ralph Patrick called me "Motorfreight" like "motormouth," that my mouth moved like a car in a freight train.

JM: [Laughs]

DM: Or something like that. And he said, "Motorfreight, this is not what I'm lookin' for. You're tellin' me it's the third day. Tell me what happened on the third day first." I said, "Okay." The next day I called in, "The fourth day of the—," and he called me. He picked up the phone again, snatches the phone, "What are you doing?" You know. The fifth or sixth day, it finally hit me. It was—there was a witness that got up there and said, "Guy "Mutt" Jones had put out the word that if he testified against him, he—he and his family would be killed.

JM: Yeah, hmm.

DM: And I knew, oh, that is just huge. And I thought, "That's what I got to tell them first." [Laughs] And so, you know, and so I said, you know, "Conway Farmer says that Senator Guy "Mutt" Jones had threatened to kill him if he testified against him in his tax evasion trial now in its fifth day in Federal Court in Little Rock."

JM: [Laughs]

DM: You know, ah! And he picked up the phone and said, "There you go!" And that's when I learned to write a real lead. [Laughs]

JM: Okay.

DM: And it just—I had an epiphany. [Laughs]

JM: Okay, yes. [Laughs] And this is Scudder still talkin' to you, right?

DM: That's Scudder, yeah.

JM: James Scudder. He was a dandy.

DM: Great guy.

JM: Yeah, anyway—so what did you—what did you do after that?

DM: Well, after that, I was put on a regular beat. I covered Criminal Court. And I covered—I did some education reporting, but mainly Criminal Court. And I just became a regular at the courthouse until I got whisked away by television—lured away by television in 1973.

JM: How did—let me—let me go back one thing and say covering—covering the symphony, you were perhaps a little better versed than some people would have been, because you—you were a musician also. Correct?

DM: Yes, and—and the—actually, the guest conductor also brought along a guest—there was a guest pianist that night, so my training was in classical piano.

JM: Okay.

DM: So I knew some of the work that was being performed, but I also knew the difficulty of the work. And so I could appreciate that, you know, right away. So in that way, I was, I guess, more prepared than, you know, the average bear would

have been but still, perspective is another thing.

JM: Well, I—I understand starting out though—your first assignment. That's still a big challenge. Okay, so. That was good. That was a great approach you took, but okay, how did you get whisked away by television?

DM: Well, in the course of covering news conferences and all that, I remember Jim Guy Tucker was the—was the prosecuting attorney in Little Rock at the time. And there was a reporter and I working on this case together—me, because I covered the county courthouse so much and him, because he was covering the story about the North Little Rock police pension plan. There had been some malfeasance going on or suspected there, and there had been, you know, the prosecutor is gonna take it to the grand jury and all this kind of thing. And Richard, who later became a lawyer, and I covered this story together. And that was the first time, I think, I had seen television cameras.

JM: And this—was this Richard Quiggle?

DM: Richard Quiggle.

JM: Yes, okay.

DM: And we had covered this—this news conference together. And I remember I was—I don't know that it was the first time—no, it wasn't the first time, but I remember it was one memorable time, because I was furious that, that the *Democrat* had been leading and breaking this story the whole time. And Jim Guy Tucker was gonna have a news conference, and we were all there waiting, waiting, waiting for television to get there and get set up.

JM: [Laughs]

DM: And I was just furious about that, you know. And I—I just had no regard for the TV folks at all or television. It never occurred to me to even wonder how they operated or wonder what it would be like to work for television. I just had no curiosity even about it. But after a few months of running into television reporters and camera people all the time and getting to know them, Charles Kelly at Channel 11, who was the news director, was actually out on a story one day himself covering. And he said to me, "Hey, why don't you come over to television where we'll treat you right." And I said, "Humph, please." Didn't, you know, didn't faze me. Didn't intrigue me or anything. I kept running into him or hearing from his reporters, you know. "Our news director really wants to talk to you about coming to work over there." And I realized he was serious about it. Then I started getting messages sent to me from my fellow *Democrat* reporters, who said, "I ran into Charles Kelly today and he says to ask you to call him." So finally, I called him or he called me, but we talked.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And I was not interested at all. I said, "I don't know television. I have no training in it." He says, "Well, we'll train you. We'll teach you everything." And what got me hooked was $110 a week. [Laughs]

JM: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

DM: Because in those days—it sounds unbelievable, but, you know, we were making, like, $70 or $85 or $90 a week. But my rent, for example, was $90 a month. And so, you know, by comparison it's all relative. I mean, it was . . .

JM: Sure.

DM: It was reasonable money and everything, but $110 sounded like so much to me.

JM: Uh-huh. I can understand that.

DM: So I thought, "Well, I'll go give it a try." And had no idea what I was doing. And went over there and hated it and thought I was terrible at it. I'll never get this. This is awful, but I thought, "I can't turn around and leave right now, because then I'll be a laughing stock. I have to stick it out for at least a year. Then I can go back to the newspaper." And I stayed fifteen years.

JM: Stayed how long?

DM: Fifteen years.

JM: Did you really? Well, you became—as I recall, you became really good at it pretty quick.

DM: Well, you know, thank you for that, but, you know, it—it took a lot of—I mean, I think I'm a good student is what—what I am more than anything. I pay attention to what the theory is, but I also watch the practice. And I pick up on how people do things and close my eyes sometimes and listen to it and say, "Oh, it would have been better if he said this word. That really would make me look." Or, you know, think or whatever. And so, I—I study human nature and kind of trust that if I'm giving it my best shot then that's what gives me my confidence—if I—I'm confident that I have given it my best shot then I can be confident in my performance. And then if my performance flops—well, I was meant to flop. It was destiny. That was the way I would look at it. So that's the way I approached it. My mother tells me that when I called her that first night to tell her—tell her, "You all watch TV tonight, because I'm gonna be on doing a story." And she said,

"Oh, my God, this child doesn't know what she's doing. What does she mean she's gonna be on TV?" [Laughs]

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And I didn't. My voice pitch was too high. My stories were too long, because I didn't know how to write in terms of seconds. I was just writing in terms of inches. And it was a lot to learn right away. If, you know, it worked for me after a while.

JM: So what all, so what all did you do, uh, for television? I assume that you started out just as a reporter and then progressed.

DM: Yeah, I started as a reporter, and I think my reporting skills, you know, transferred well. It was just the writing that was different. And then having to, you know, actually voice it and learning to let the video, the film in those days, do some of the speaking for you. You didn't have to tell everything, because the pictures were gonna tell some of the story.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: Um. And I did that, and they put me on the noon news as an anchor, and this was before teleprompters and, uh, I got so nervous one day that they tried to give me every trick in the book: pretend that the camera is your mother, pretend that there are people sitting at home in their underwear, just pretend. You know, nothing worked. I said, "That's—that's a television camera. That's what that is." And I can't fool myself otherwise. And you know, it was real—very nervous at first—so much so that one time, my hand was sweating so badly that it was on top of the script and when I raised my hand, the print had all transferred to my hand

[laughter] and it wasn't on the script anymore, and the fortunate thing was that I have a photographic memory, which is—is really slipping nowadays. But if I had read something, I could usually see it again in my mind word for word.

JM: Oh.

DM: And so I was able to just go ahead and recite that from my memory, uh, but it was on my hand. Backwards, of course, and not on the paper.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: [Laughs] So it was terrible, and I went in and told Charles Kelly one day, I said—I cussed him, "Don't you ever make me do that shit again. Don't you ever put me out there again, and I'm never going out there." And he looked at me. He let me finish, and he said, "You will go back out there tomorrow and the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day." And I realized that he was the boss, and I only had one other choice, so I went out there day after day and finally got fairly comfortable with it. And then I got invited to join the staff at WTTG in Washington [DC]. And this was when I was twenty years old. And I just blew them off when they started calling me. I thought that this was a joke; this was a pipe dream. This kind of thing does not happen.

JM: What—what station was it?

DM: It was WTTG.

JM: Okay.

DM: In Washington. It's now a FOX station, but at that time it was owned by Metro Media.

JM: Okay. So . . .

DM: And I just—I just, you know, when they started calling me about coming to work there, I didn't even respond. They asked me to send tape of some of my stories. I didn't do that. They asked for resumes. I didn't do that. And—because I thought it was a lot of work in those days to put a demo tape together, because nowadays it's on videotape—you pop things in a machine. But in those days, it was on these huge reel-to-reels. And you had different rolls. You had A rolls, B rolls, C rolls, and sometimes D rolls that you had to lap over each other to make everything run smoothly. Now you can, with a push of a button, dissolve in and out and things, but for those effects in those days, you had all these different rolls that you had to run. You had to time the ride and all of that. You had to transfer all of that into—onto another big, fat reel—took a lot of work and time for the engineers and—and you, too.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: So I thought, "Why go through all this trouble for something that's never gonna happen anyway? I've been in this business a year. I'm a kid. I'm in Little Rock, Arkansas. This is Washington, DC, calling. Who are they kidding?" But after they persisted, I got embarrassed, and started lying to them: "Oh, you didn't get my tape? Gee, I sent it, you know." And so, I guess I'd better get something done here. And I—I slapped some things together and sent it and thought, "Well, that will shut them up." Then the next thing I knew, they were calling me and telling me, "We'd like to fly you and your husband up here to talk to you about coming to work here and look around, " and all of that and—okay. So we thought, "We'll get a free trip to Washington out of it, if nothing else." And I went up there, and I had

a horrendous headache the day of my interview. And they wanted me to do a—an on-set audition—just throw some copy out at me and see how I did as an anchorperson. And when I have a headache, I care about nothing. Just nothing. I'm not afraid of anything. I'm not concerned about anything, you know. I just wanted to get it over with. I thought, "Oh well, that was terrible." And we—I finished talking with the—the news director and some producers and some assignment editors and went looking around the station—went back to my hotel room, had dinner that night, uh, got up the next morning—husband and I took a flight back to Little Rock, went into work at around noon, and my desk had all of these pink messages on it from Stan Burke, the news director. "Please call." "Please call." "Please call."

JM: Yeah.

DM: And he was offering me the job. So, I've had a very blessed life, I think.

JM: [Laughs] And that was, uh, that probably was a pretty significant advance in salary, too.

DM: Well, I'll put it this way: I was going from back then at about a $125 dollars a week, which—let me see—$125 dollars a week times fifty-two weeks comes out to about $6,500 a year to about $30,000 a year overnight. [Laughs] I thought I was—I thought I was the Queen of Sheba.

JM: I can understand. [Laughs]

DM: It was amazing in 1974, I mean that was still something.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Of course, Channel 11 didn't have a reputation for exactly being [the] highest paying TV station around either. So . . .

DM: No, no, no. No, it didn't.

JM: It had been . . .

DM: Even the high ones probably wouldn't have taken me for above $8,500.

JM: But—but it happened to be owned one time by K. A. Engel, who was—also owned the *Democrat* and, of course, by this time you were there—well, Marcus George and Stanley Berry were involved in—in the ownership, too.

DM: That's right. And they—they were—their offices were in Channel 11. They moved over there at one point. They were hiding. There would be occasional sightings, but, uh, you know, that was the high business end—corporate end.

JM: Yeah,

DM: We were just the working stiffs.

JM: But okay, so you—so you went to—you went to Washington. Then what was Charles's reaction?

DM: Well, he told me that I had to do it. I was real reluctant about it. He says, "You got to do this, you know. Of course, I want you to stay. You've got to do this." He—he has been so much like a father to me in my work, because he hired me one other time after he left the news business and went to work for what was then APL—Arkansas Power & Light—later became Entergy. And he hired me there, and once told someone, "I'd hire her a third time, if I could."

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: So, you know, he's been amazingly good to me all my career. And he told me that I had to do it and that if I didn't like it, I could always come back there. I always loved that—that kind of—of security. Who doesn't, you know? It reduces the risk

substantially, because you know you can go home again. It was tough, though. I was a young woman. I—my whole family was there in Little Rock. My brothers and sisters, my parents, and my in-laws, and all, you know, were there and my history. And I had never lived away from home, since I didn't go to college and all. And it was a tough thing to do, but I knew I had to, and I'm glad I did.

JM: So what did you do at WTTG?

DM: Well, I started as a general-assignment reporter. Everybody was general assignment. All the reporters were. And covered all kinds of things from—because we covered—because it was Washington, you know, you crossed that line. We sort of focused on local news, but we also covered a lot of national news as well. And because we weren't network-tied, we also had to depend on ourselves to cover a lot of the national news, rather than get fed by our network. And so I covered [President] Richard Nixon's resignation. I was there on the White House lawn the day before he—he—resigned when he was saying he was—wasn't going to, and Hugh Scott and—and Barry Goldwater and John Rhodes had gone to the White House to try to tell him, "Mr. President, you gotta do this." And, you know, and the day he resigned, I was in Lafayette Square right across from—from the White House to watch the crowds gather and those things and a lot of little pieces of Watergate. I got a piece of that Chuck Colson interview and some other things.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And—and CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] hearings, the first hearings on CIA covert activities. I was there for that. And then—and then I covered a lot of the local news, too, the—the city government particularly. And the school district,

which was in turmoil. It still is, in Washington. And then I was named weekend coanchor with Maury Povich. And we anchored the weekend news together and had a blast.

JM: Uh-huh. So—so how long did you do that?

DM: I was there for about two and a half years. And my husband at the time—never quite fell in love with—with being away from home. I was always an adventurer as a kid. When I got—when summer came and it was time to go to summer camp, my sister was terrified, and I couldn't wait. Didn't want it to be over. I never had that same kind of feeling. My husband was more tied to home.

JM: This is Bill you're talking about?

DM: Bill Mathis. He always talked about going back home. I mean, the first six months we were in Washington, it was, like, a constant song. It got on my nerves to no end. But I, you know, I—to try to silence him, I made a deal with him. I said, "I tell you what," because we had been married for about four years. Or three years or something. Three and a half years. I said, "If—if we get pregnant, we'll move back to Little Rock," because both of us wanted any children we had to be close to grandparents. They were there. So, lo and behold in 1975, that fall I learned that I was pregnant. So we started setting the wheels in motion. I had to keep my word, and I stayed there until Meredith, my first born, was two weeks old. And then she and I got on a plane, and he got in the van and moved back to Little Rock.

JM: Uh-huh. So—so Meredith is M-E-R-E-D-I-T-H?

DM: M-E-R-E-D-I-T-H.

JM: Okay, okay. And so what did you do when you got back to Little Rock?

DM: Well, for a few months, I just played mommy and loved that. And then I thought, "I'd, you know, better get back to work here before people forget who I am." And the good thing from coming back from Washington is I kind of had the pick of, you know, my choice. Everybody wanted me on their staff then. And I ended up going to Channel 4, KARK as a reporter and morning anchor and did that for several years and—and was assistant news—assignment editor for a couple of years and assistant news director there. And then had my second child, Allison, A-L-L-I-S-O-N.

JM: Okay.

DM: And stayed out with her for a little while. And we moved briefly for Bill's work, this time to Naperville, Illinois, just forty miles west of Chicago. And we were there and miserable. I mean, absolutely miserable there. And we only stayed for about four or five months, and he worked out a deal to keep working for this company but from Little Rock. We had to get back. And came back, and I just kind of stayed at home with my two little children. And then became pregnant with my third child, Joseph, my only son. And . . .

JM: Did you say Douglas?

DM: Joseph.

JM: Oh, Joseph.

DM: J-O-S-E-P-H. And after he was about, I guess, about six months old, I went to work part-time for the Rockefeller Foundation. The Win Rockefeller Foundation. And I just worked half days there, but my baby son was having a terrible time

adjusting—crying the entire time and not eating while I was gone. And I had some—a little—a few questions about the woman who was staying with my two little ones, because the older one at that time was in school—elementary school. And so I just decided that this doesn't feel right. I'm just going to stay at home and be with my baby. And I did and got him back on his feet, so to speak. And then when he was a year old, I went to work at—at Channel 7, which is where I ended my television career. And I was there for six years.

JM: Okay. And what were you doing at 7?

DM: At 7, I was special assignment reporter. I did documentaries. I did kind of investigative reporting. I also anchored—coanchored the 5:00 news with Greg Hurst—coanchored first with Steve Barnes and then with Greg Hurst after Steve left.

JM: Yeah.

DM: Yeah.

JM: So—and then when you were at 4, who was—who was the lineup at 4? They had with Tom Bonner and . . . ?

DM: Tom Bonner, Dave Woodward on sports, and Roy Mitchell.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: On the news.

JM: That's what I thought. That's what I remembered. And who was the lineup on Channel 7?

DM: On 7, it was Steve Barnes, and there was kind of a string of—of women for the evening news when I was there. There was—gosh—Aviva Diamond and Ruth—I

think Spencer was her last name, and Susan Rosegen, who was . . .

JM: So what year would this have been?

DM: Let's see, that would have been—when I went to 4, it was in 1983. And I was there until 1988. So I was there five years.

JM: Yeah, okay. So was that 4 or 7?

DM: Oh, when I went to 4. I'm sorry. When I went to 4, it was in 1976, and I was there until 1980.

JM: Okay. And then you went to 7 from there?

DM: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

DM: 1983 to 1985.

JM: Yeah, that's—that's why I don't remember that. I was in Oklahoma City.

DM: Nineteen eighty-three–nineteen eighty-eight.

JM: Okay. I was at Oklahoma City at that time. So I don't remember. But, uh, okay. And then—then in 1988, what happened?

DM: Well, I was getting kind of bored, I guess, with television and really wanted to do long form things. I wanted to do documentary work. That kind of thing. So—and I was getting more sophisticated in my political understanding and my understanding of policy and how it affects life and things. And I wanted to do more in-depth stuff. And help people understand. You know, I didn't want to do—I wanted to cover, go down more layers into the story. And, at the same time, television was becoming more and more—the line between entertainment and news was becoming thinner and fainter and fainter. Even to the point where the

people in—the reporters themselves were—and the anchors themselves were being promoted so much—becoming such personalities, and that kind of rubbed me the wrong way, because I was old-fashioned about the way things were done.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: Again, you know, when I started newspapers, you didn't automatically get a by-line just because you wrote the story. By-lines were a little stingy, you know. And now, you know, everybody's by-line pictures were there in the newspapers and television. You know, all this promotion about the people, and we brought in this consultant team—Channel 7 did. And they told me they wanted to talk with the weatherman more about his garden. Well, I said, "I don't give a damn about his garden. Why, you know, why would I ask him about that?" And I just didn't like the—the phoniness of it.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: You know, I'm a nice person, I think, but I'm not a sweet person. You know, I don't "Gee, Ned." That's not me. You know that. Everybody who knows me knows that. And I thought, "I can't fake this kind of thing." I'm kind of sarcastic. I'm kind of, you know, real kind of street talking and everything. And I—I can't do this other thing. And so I just thought, "Maybe it's time for me to get out of here before they tell me I have to go," because I was having such a difficult time adjusting to the new age.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And so this was beginning to nag at me for a while. And then when my father died quite suddenly in 1986, I really just started getting this sense of needing to do

something more purposeful. That feeling wouldn't go away, and so all of this was kind of blending together, you know. And yet, I couldn't really make sense of it, but I couldn't get a clear message about what it meant, what I was supposed to do. Just driving me nuts. And one day, I came in from an assignment at Channel 7, and I was getting ready to go to lunch. And the assignment editor said, "Oh, I need you to cover something at City Hall this afternoon after lunch at 2:30." I said, "Okay." I went to lunch, and I came back, and I typed up my letter of resignation. And I put it on my news director's desk. He was not in his office.

JM: You said you typed up your resignation and put it on your news director's desk. Then what happened?

DM: And then I went on to the 2:30 assignment that I had been given at City Hall, and when I came back, my director had this startled, deer-in-the-headlights look on his face and said, "Can I see you in my office for a minute?" And he asked me, "What is this about?" I said, "I can't really tell you. All I know is that I have this sense that it's time for me to go." "Well, you have another job? Where are you gonna go?" "No, and I have three children who are dependent on me, a husband who is expecting certain things from me, and I have nothing lined up. I haven't talked with anybody or haven't even told—talked to my husband about this. I just had a sense that I had to go." Right now. And, um, and so it was, it was not even a leap of faith. It was some kind of compulsion that I had to do something. And so I gave two weeks' notice, and the next day, Paul Johnson, who wrote about television for the *Arkansas Gazette*, called me and said, "I hear that you're—you turned in your resignation." "Yes." "Well, Dale Nicholson, who was the general

manager of Channel 7, tells me that you wrote one of the best resignation letters that he's ever seen. Do you mind if I publish some of it in my column?" [Laughs] And I—I laughed just like I'm laughing now. I said, "No, I can't imagine why anybody—I never heard of such a thing, but if you want to—." And so we talked about, you know, what—why I decided to do this, and I told him about this sense of purpose and that I was looking for something and that I had nothing lined up. And the next day, the story ran. The next day or two days later the story ran. And then I started getting all these calls from—from advertising firms—from a couple of radio stations, and nothing just really, you know, rang my bell.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And then one day, when I was getting close to the end of my time at Channel 7, I went to lunch with a few colleagues who wanted to treat me to a farewell lunch. And on the way there, I saw standing on a corner Ernie Dumas, Bob McCord, and it seems like a couple of other people. I think, Jerry Dhonau and somebody else. And maybe Doug Smith. Maybe the whole editorial department at the *Gazette* standing on the corner. I guess they were on their way to lunch, too, or back. And we were at a stoplight. So I waved to them, and they waved at me. I said, "Bob, I need to call you and talk to you about something." He said, "Okay, call me." Now, to this day, I don't know what made me say that, because I hadn't thought at all about calling Bob McCord.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And I still don't know why I thought of that then. I think I was gonna call him maybe and say, "You know, I've quit my job. Got any ideas as to what I might

do?" And, of course, I knew Bob from the *Arkansas Democrat*. He was editorial. And, you know, he was always so good to me, too. And so I didn't call him, because I had nothing to call him for. But I was thinking about it, and I thought, "Gosh, I really would like to write a column for the paper." And he called me, and he said, "Deborah, I've been waiting for your call." A few days later, he called me. Well, he says, "What did you want to talk about?" I said, "Well, you know, I'm leaving Channel 7." "Yeah, I saw that. What are you gonna do?" I said, "I don't know, but I have an idea of something I would like to do, and I'd like to send it to you. I'd like to put it in writing and send it to you." "Well, don't worry about putting it in writing. I got a few minutes. Tell me now." Well, the reason I wanted to put it in writing was because the *Arkansas Gazette* at the time was 170 years old. You know, award winning, historic—I mean, the *Arkansas Gazette* was a historic paper.

JM: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

DM: [It] had never had a woman or a black person or a person under forty, to my knowledge, ever write opinion. And, furthermore, I was a "TV babe" as they called us, you know, not taken—television reporters weren't taken as seriously—weren't held in the same esteem as print journalists at the time. And I thought, "Who am I to go and propose this?" So I thought if I put it in writing, at least I wouldn't have to hear him laugh in my face. But he forced my hand on it by saying, "Come on and talk to me now." And if I'm gonna be a grown up about it, I couldn't, you know, hem and haw. I had to go do it. And I just kind of braced for it. But I told him what I had in mind. I said, "I wanna write. I know that you all

are used to writing about SALT II [Strategic Arms Limitation] Treaties." You know, the Cold War was still going on at that time. And, you know, so I said, "You know, worried about the big one and all of that, but I think—think that before people worry about, you know, a nuclear attack from Russia, or the Soviet Union, they worry about these little bombs that drop in their lives all the time: why their spouse won't talk to them, why their kids won't obey or come home, why their kids are failing at school, what about drugs—all these things." And so, I'm talking on and on, and said, "I, you know, want to write about that." And Bob says to me, "You know, we've been saying we need to shake up the editorial page." "I would love this," he says, "so I would be willing to go with this." I'm shocked, okay. But then he tells me, "The only one catch is that we've got a brand new editor coming in. His name is Walker Lundy. He's coming in from Texas, and he'll be here in the next couple of weeks. And you have to sell him on this. And if he's with this, then we can set—we can go from there." Well, I thought the only thing I really had going for me was my reputation. And Walker Lundy, coming from Texas, wouldn't know who I was.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: So I already had these disadvantages—no reputation to speak for me, young, you know, I was thirty-five—thirty-four, thirty-five years old—black, female, from television. Oh, my God, you know. There goes that dream. But Bob set up a lunch meeting with Walker. He and I sat at lunch one day, and I'm just talkin' away about the same thing: before the bomb drops in your life, you know, this whole thing about making people feel connected, and you know, and realizing that

other people are dealing with—with these same issues and all of this. And Walker is sitting there without a word, without a nod, without a blink, no body language, nothing. And I'm talking like "Motorfreight," a mile a minute just trying to—just overselling. And finally, I just decided, "Okay, that's all I can say. You know, he's gonna tell me, 'Well, that's interesting and cute,' or whatever." But he said, "How many can you write a week?" And my jaw dropped. [Laughs] So again—once again, things just worked for me, kind of against the odds. And I started writing that column. And it took off. It took off right away. In fact, Bob McCord wrote—every year, he would write a kind of a state of the editorial page column for the *Arkansas Gazette*. And wrote that in his forty years at the time of [journalism]—daily journalism, he had never seen anything catch fire like my column. It had generated all this—these letters, all this readership, all this—so, you know, it was something that I think was, was destined and divinely guided.

JM: Uh-huh. And this ran on the op-ed page or the editorial page?

DM: It ran on the op-ed page. I also wrote editorials, because I was eventually named—about a year later, I was named to the editorial board. Associate editor of the *Gazette*. And so, then I went on staff at—for—for the first, I guess, six months, I just wrote from home. I wrote three columns a week from home.

JM: Oh, okay.

DM: And then I went on staff there as a columnist and editorial—associate editor. And so I wrote also editorials—probably about three or four a week. And then once a month, I wrote—as we all did on the editorial board—a major think piece. So I—there was my dream again to write something in-depth. So I was—I was getting

all the good journalism that I wanted. You see, I did go back to print. And that's where I was happy.

JM: Uh huh. Okay, so by this time, when you were in editorial board, Gannett had already bought the paper.

DM: Gannett?

JM: Yes.

DM: Bought the paper, yes.

JM: Yeah, okay. So, so what was it like working at the *Gazette* at that interval, at that time?

DM: It was the single most thrilling time in my career for me—because it was so alive—I think Little Rock was so alive. And we had the Clintons [Governor Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton] there with all of that change and ambition going on, you know, possibility happening all the time. And we were in a two-newspaper—a vicious—one of the most vicious and invigorating newspaper wars in the country at a time when the country was just ablaze with newspaper wars. I think ours was probably one of the most exciting ones. The *Arkansas Gazette* and the *Arkansas Democrat*, because as you well know, the *Democrat* had, many years before that, gone morning. And now so they were head to head. And the *Democrat* was quickly gaining ground, in part because of its own policies and in part because of the *Gazette*'s own policies, which were, you know, the interesting thing, Jerry, is that I think I was—I think I was the first one to report on—on the Little Rock newspaper war. I was still working for Channel 11.

JM: Hmm. Okay.

DM: When—when the *Democrat* started free classifieds. That was the first. That was the opening salvo of the newspaper war. And I did interviews with [*Arkansas Democrat* publisher Walter] Hussman and all the people at the *Democrat*, and I interviewed Hugh Patterson at the *Gazette*, who said—and I never forgot this. As young as I was, I still knew, "Wow, what a thing to say!" I asked him about the *Arkansas Democrat*, and he said, and he had this—this really interesting British-sounding—semi-British accent that was true to him, I believe, but he said, quote, "They have a perfect right to exist." And that made me think, "Oh, my God." Because the last time I heard anybody say something like that was when [U.S. Senator] J. William Fulbright said something similar about Dale Bumpers's decision to run against him for the Senate. The same kind of condescending, dismissive, shrug-off kind of thing. And we know what happened to J. William Fulbright in that race.

JM: [Laughs] Yes, we do.

DM: So when I heard that, I thought, "Oh, my God. I cannot believe that this man is so sure of himself and—and assumes so much about the future of his paper that not only will he think this way, he will say it." Publicly. For public consumption, he will say this. You know, because to me, unless you know you got a slam dunk. I mean, I was taught that you kind of don't say things like that even if you know you have a slam dunk. You better be able to deliver if you're gonna talk like that. So I thought, "Oh my God. What a thing to say!" And I felt it coming [laughs] from that moment on. And I—I think I was the first one to really report on—on the war. And then found myself smack in the middle of it once I went to the *Gazette* and

was—was thrilled by it, because I thought the readership was being so well served by our competition. Even though it was maddening for us sometimes [laughs], especially with John Robert Starr laying into us the way he did, just unabashedly and tearing into Walker Lundy, who did not have the same kind of, uh, street chops that John Robert had. He tried to write back something and would come off like he's slapping somebody when—when John Robert was throwing punches. [Laughs]

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: [Laughs] And it was—that was very frustrating to us. It was still just the most exciting time.

JM: And most—both newspapers were—had—had hired a lot of reporters and had a lot of space and were going through all—all odds to cover everything.

DM: Right, exactly.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: Exactly. Exactly. And, you know, and that is what competition does. I mean, you know, the winner almost always in that kind of thing is the customer. And—and the customers being both the advertisers and the subscribers and the readership. I mean, they all won because of that. And, you know, you lose a competition, and they lose their bargaining clout. They have to take what they get.

JM: Did you—did you have any more connection or chances to relate to any people over at the *Gazette*—Mr. Patterson—anybody else before—before they sold out to the Gannett in 1986?

DM: No.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: No. I—I didn't—that was kind of—it, you know, the rest of the time, I was just a reader like anybody else. But that I was—I was sad to hear when they sold out to Gannett, because I knew by that time, you know, Gannett's reputation for just kind of homogenizing all of its papers kind of in the—in the spirit of *USA Today*. And I said one time, you know, "Something is wrong with a newspaper when the comics are in black and white and the news is in color." [Laughs] You know, I thought "This is kind of backwards."

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

DM: Yeah, and so, I really, you know, I was really the one who didn't like going from manual to electric typewriters. And then certainly didn't like going to word processors. And then when I was in television, I didn't like going from film to tape. So, you know, I was a Luddite in those ways—wanting to stick with the old tradition and the old way of doing things. So I certainly didn't like these new changes that were being brought to the paper that, in my view, didn't need the change. The people weren't asking for it. You know, the times weren't really asking for it. So I didn't understand why. I thought it was arbitrary, and once I went to work there, I found just how arbitrary it was. It was so, so patronizing to us when we tried to tell them, and when citizens and well-regarded, high-powered people tried to say, you know, "Leave it alone," they would kind of just pat you on the head and tell you, "Okay, cute—now go away."

JM: Okay, leave what alone? I'm—I'm . . .

DM: Stop making these changes to the paper. Stop changing the number of columns,

the column width, the type, the—even the newsprint, the layout. Stop changing everything—adding these silly little features and taking this out and shortening everything. Stop changing, you know. I always said, you know, I thought the Gannett's motto was "If it ain't broke, break it."

JM: [Laughs] So it is.

DM: You know.

JM: Heh. I understand. So—so you were—you and others—were tellin'—, "Stop doin' all these silly things that . . ."

DM: Oh, oh, I went in to talk to Craig Moon myself. I asked him for a meeting. He was publisher when I was there. And I asked him for a meeting. "I know you didn't ask me for this, and I just want to tell you, I have nothing at—at stake here except for my love for this paper. And I want to tell you that, you know, I know that some of these things have worked in other places and you know what you're doing." I tried to be real deferential to him.

JM: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

DM: And yet at the same time, tell him that, you know, this paper had that—explain how Arkansans were, how tradition-bound we were, how we—how familiarity did not breed contempt. It bred, you know, comfort and security and credibility in Arkansas. And what, you know, this paper meant. I tried to bring him up to speed. And he kind of looked at me with a smirk—I'll never forget it—and just I felt so offended. And then I went back and told Ernie Dumas. He told me he had done that. That some, you know, high-powered community leaders had met with him, that nobody, nobody could get through. Break through the corporate—it

wasn't a veil; it was a wall.

JM: Uh-huh. Okay, so—so as we're—you're—you're writing the column, and—and it's a very exciting time for you and everything, but—but the—the newspaper war is beginning to—to approach an end. Could you discern anything coming at that time, 1988–1989?

DM: No, no. It felt like we were just, you know, it was touch and go. But I don't think anyone felt the end coming. And now that I think of it—this is the first time that I thought about the irony of this—the one who broke that story was another Channel 11 reporter, Joe Quinn.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: So there I was. I had done the beginning of the newspaper war for Channel 11 and now here's a Channel 11 reporter giving us the first sign that the war is coming to a close. And he had—what he reported was that—this was kind of strange—but a—a paperboy's father had called him and told him that all of the delivery team had been told that they would need to being looking for other jobs soon. And Joe reported that kind of third-hand information, and a lot of people started saying, "Oh, this is ridiculous." You know, listening to a paperboy, a paperboy's father and all. Yeah. But there was enough nervousness about it that folks started checking into it. And begin to find out about certain meetings that were done and certain lawyers that were called and so—and the whole time, the Gannett people—the—our management at the *Gazette* and the Gannett corporate people were like, "What are you talking about?" to us. Even when it became just all but naked, they said, "What are you talking about?" That was the thing that was so infuriating

about it on top of everything else. And I once told my editor, I said, "You know, if these people can't flush out the story, then you ought to fire everybody in here. These are reporters." And we had them dead to rights on this thing. We had all kinds of—it took months, but—but more and more was developing, and we were seeing the handwriting on the wall, and they were still saying, "What wall?" [Laughs] Not only "what handwriting" but "what wall."

JM: Yeah.

DM: And it was as clear as a bell to us, and everybody else knew it. And they would not acknowledge it. Even on the morning that they closed us.

JM: This was—this was about 1991, when all of this was transpiring.

DM: Nineteen ninety-one, yes.

JM: Yeah, okay. And, you so, you . . .

DM: And the morning that they closed us, they didn't even acknowledge it.

JM: Uh-huh. But you—you had stayed there all that time and were working there and still writing your column and still writing editorials and—and . . .

DM: And doing some special reporting—on the Persian Gulf, for example.

JM: Oh, did you?

DM: Yeah. I went to the Persian Gulf War—the only Arkansas reporter to do that. We had—Arkansas had a higher number of troops over in the Persian Gulf for the first Gulf War, per capita, you know, than any other state. We had an inordinate amount of troops over there. And so they were looking for someone to go, and I just kind of impulsively said okay one day and then thought about it as I was prepared to go: "What in the hell am I doin'?" And went over there and was

scared to death but had the time of my life in terms of, you know, the stories that I got. And just wrote and wrote and wrote for days and days. I came back and, you know, all this is shortly after I got back in January or February of 1991, you know, when—that's when stuff started happening. We started . . .

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: . . . Quinn's report came out and more, and it took months of this. It was—it was awful.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: It was wonderful in the way that it brought all of us together and made us really like a family trying to save it, but it was awful the way our corporate parents just denied the obvious, you know, to the point where people couldn't make choices, you know. They couldn't decide "Do I get the braces for the kid, do I close on the house, do I—," you know? They couldn't. "Do we have a baby or not?" I mean, life choices we need to make, because they didn't know about their job futures. And the corporation wouldn't consider that—that we had anything at stake in it. And it was, to me, unforgivable. I have not forgiven it to this day. Because you don't—you don't treat people that way. You don't treat—you don't treat one individual that way. You certainly don't treat hundreds of people that way. And that is just cruel.

JM: Uh-huh. So when—when did you, when did the people there learn for sure that it was going to happen? The day that it happened or . . . ?

DM: We had a very strong premonition the last week the paper was alive that it was any—we were at the any day now stage because of a lot of things that were

beginning to happen, including the evacuations, as I call them—certain Gannett favorites, like Craig Moon who for no apparent reason other than this one, was airlifted to Nashville [Tennessee]. That's the way I look at it. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

DM: I said, you know, we couldn't hear it, but there were helicopters on the roof. And certain people were just saved before the ship went down. And Moe Hickey, who was a retiree from Gannett and was retired out in Nevada somewhere, was pulled out of retirement—to come in and just kind of be the caretaker and—and hit man to close the place down. He showed up at the *Arkansas Gazette*, met no one, went—I used to call him Mole Hickey—M-O-L-E—because he hid out in his office. We never saw him, never heard from him, nothing. He was just there to see the place close down. And, in fact, on the final—the day before—we had felt that because it could come down at any minute, Jerry Dhonau wrote kind of a farewell editorial, a kind of we "fought the good fight" St. Paul editorial. And, you know, thinking we might not get a chance to actually do it with any kind of notice. So we better go ahead and put it in here now. We were that sure of it, you know, that we would be willing to go out on that limb. And I had cleared out. I had my husband and children come to my office that evening and help me carry boxes and things out. This is on a Thursday evening. I left one pencil in my drawer—and that's it—for the next day. And came in that morning—that Friday morning—and a friend of mine who worked in the comptroller's office called me over to a corner and said, "They're getting a bunch of packets together for some meeting over—they're gonna have everybody meet over at the Excelsior Hotel at noon." And I

said, "What?" She—I said, "With severance packages?" She says, "I believe that's what it is," because of something else they were pulling together in her office.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: So I knew, okay, this is going to be it. Then I heard someone else say that they were preparing for some meeting at noon at the Excelsior for everybody at the *Gazette*—everybody. So I went in to Bob McCord, and Bob was sitting there editing one of the—on Fridays, we had to edit the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday editorial pages, you know, since we didn't work on weekends. He was in there hard at work on that. I said, "Bob, what are you doin'?" He said, "Editing one of these pages for the weekend." I said, "Well, you might want to take a break." Well, he kind of knew, because, you know, of—of—the atmosphere around there had been all about the *Gazette* going down for weeks and weeks and weeks. So I didn't have to say why. He just dropped everything, and said, "What are you trying to say, Deborah?" I told him what I had been told about that meeting for today. After that, there might not be a weekend paper. He said, "I'm gonna ask Moe Hickey about this right now." He goes down there. We all know Bob McCord, former president of, you know, of Sigma Delta Chi [Society of Professional Journalists], you know, respected, hard-working, long-term, earnest journalist. Dedicated man, decent man, goes down and asks his boss, "Am I gonna have a job tomorrow?" basically. And the guy tells him, "What are you talking about?" Now, Bob then came back and says, "I have never been so offended in my life." He was furious. And Bob, you know, is an easygoing kind of guy. He

was furious. Furious. I didn't know he could get furious. He was furious, because this man had looked in his face and, you know, and laughed at him. He said, "I couldn't get anything out of them."

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: Sure enough at—not at 12:00 but at 12:30—because word had gotten out about the thing at the Excelsior, and they thought, you know, all kinds of press hanging around there. They quickly changed it to our newsroom. And they called everybody into the newsroom, and Moe Hickey made one of his cameo appearances. And stood there with—with two or three strangers around. We don't know if they were bodyguards or corporate people or what standing around him—and says, "For 171 years, we put out this paper, and it's a great paper, and today's paper was an example of how great it was. But today's paper was the last *Arkansas Gazette*."

JM: Hmm.

DM: So in other words [laughs], you know, where at least in many other cities where they close down, you get a chance to knowingly write your last paper, we were told, "The paper you put out this morning—that was it." And this was a man who an hour before had told a senior person, "I don't know what you're talkin' about." That's how lowdown it was. And when we walked out of that room, I guess, about an hour or so later, it was an armed camp. The place was surrounded by armed guards. Every office, every floor—all entrances except one had been locked. George Fisher, the great, noted cartoonist, wasn't allowed to take his own brushes out, because he didn't have a receipt for the brushes that he's owned for fifty years

to prove that they were his brushes. I mean, it was just awful.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And so, you now, if I sound bitter, I intend to stay bitter about this, because, you know, it's one thing to see a dearly beloved go, but then to see it murdered is—is awful. So, you know, it was—it was a very terrible ending to one of the greatest times of my life careerwise.

JM: Well, you say you're bitter. Who do you blame for that?

DM: I blamed Gannett.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: And, you know, the irony of this—I mean, this is—is they hired me again, twice more they hired me. And they knew how I felt. I never—I said to their face about this. You know, this was awful. But I don't guess they care, because it paid off for them in the way that matters to them. So they didn't care what I thought.

JM: Okay. Okay. We're gonna go back to—we'll go ahead to your future employment in a minute, but I want to go back now to—to Channel 11. You said that you were still at the TV station there, say, between the time you first reported about the war and until the time it sold out to Gannett. Were you aware of what was going on in—in the newspaper war at that time and . . . ?

DM: No.

JM: And could you tell what was . . . ?

DM: Not really. I mean, you know, just again, just as a reader, we knew—well, some things. I knew about the big court case. Of course, you know, and about the whole argument over—over circulation and inflated numbers, all these things,

and—and I knew that the *Gazette* had lost that. And I knew that it was, you know, not good news for the—the *Gazette*. But, you know, I didn't follow it that closely. I have to say I didn't realize how serious it was. I guess I just had naively always assumed that we were gonna have two newspapers. You know, it had been that way all my life, and I just thought it always would.

JM: Yeah, yeah. I understand. Okay. So you weren't aware of—you had—you don't know what you would consider to say the pivotal piece in the—in the war—why the *Democrat* won against the—against Patterson?

DM: Well, I came to know this: I don't think—even though there were certain landmarks in the war like when the *Gazette* lost the case in court. And when Gannett bought the *Gazette* and certainly when Dillard's—when Gannett—the *Gazette* lost the big Dillard's account, its largest advertiser, over a humbug—over some total bullshit about a business story—a small business story that had been written. Dillard's claimed that it was unfavorable to it, but it didn't have any impact. It didn't seem to have any impact otherwise, except to them.

JM: Is this about the headquarters?

DM: I don't even remember. I remember that Jim Hopkins wrote the story. And I know that it angered the Dillard's people. And I remember that, by every account, it was an extreme overreaction to the story. The story itself wasn't that much.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: You know, and so maybe they were looking for an excuse. I don't know what had happened, but I know this: despite all those landmarks which may—I don't know—I can't measure the significance of each one, but I know this: I think none

of that would have mattered without the one thing that I know made a difference, which was Walter Hussman's absolute marriage to the idea that he was in it to the death. And he was willing to the point where even his own sister sued him over blowing the family fortune on—on, you know, this newspaper war. He was—he was bound and determined to either win it or die trying.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And the *Gazette*, you know, the *Gazette*, because it was no longer home owned, because now it was another cog in a corporate wheel, and because there was no spiritual fidelity or connection to what the *Gazette* meant, it was just another name on the ledger sheet. I knew we did not have that going for us. And it is really hard to beat somebody who—in their—at the cellular level—is determined to win. You know [laughs], it's just really hard to beat that kind of person.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Ah, you mentioned your first interview with Mr. Patterson and about how confident he seemed to be. Did you discern anymore as time went on? I've had people say some of them may have been a little arrogant and—and dismissive of the *Democrat* as time went on.

DM: Yeah, I—I think. Well, I just think, you know, not that I necessarily discerned it, but in hindsight, I can see how there was a—there was always a certain haughtiness about the *Gazette*, but the difference was—is that it—it could back it up in earlier days. Because the *Gazette* was far, far ahead of the *Democrat* in readership, you know. We know that in circulation. We know that. And, you know, it—it had to be because of the morning/afternoon thing, because the quality of work at the *Democrat* was excellent.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: So I'm sure that, you know, being an afternoon paper is what hurt the *Democrat*. And, you know, being second in line, too. The *Gazette* had the marketplace when the *Democrat* came along. That—that's in any business, you know. It's the first-mover advantage, I think they called it.

JM: From the late 1940s–1950s on, the afternoon newspapers really began to struggle across the country.

DM: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

JM: But . . .

DM: So—so here we go, you know, I think that they had, you know, I can understand their conceit in some ways, because the numbers backed it up. But once you see your competition beginning to move up and make strides, you know, a smart business will say, "Well, you know, maybe we need to at least keep an eye on this and make some other changes ourselves in order to stay ahead of this." But I think they just thought, "We don't have to do a thing. Don't have to do a thing." And, of course, when—when—when Gannett came along, they overdid it. They thought we had to do everything.

JM: Uh-huh. Yeah. [Laughs] And—and—and spent, spent a lot of money tryin'.

DM: Oh, my goodness.

JM: Yeah. Okay, so—so after the *Gazette* closed in October of 1991, right?

DM: Yes.

JM: So then what did you do?

DM: Well, roamed around for just a few months, living off my slight severance pay.

And I did a lot of interviewing. I got a call from *The New York Times*. They wanted me to start on the metro desk, and I wasn't interested. And, plus, I thought moving to New York didn't sound appealing for a family with young children, or it didn't to me anyway, especially knowing what I knew of New York and knowing what I was used to in terms of space and quiet and all of that for children. So that was kind of out of the picture. A paper in Wichita, Kansas—I talked with them. Walker Lundy [laughs] called me at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in Minnesota. Let's see, *Sacramento Bee*. I—I had several calls from papers, and then I got a call from a man who had been a friend of mine. He had been a reporter for—[laughs]—for one of the papers owned by Hussman's organization. He had been a reporter for the *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* and was now managing editor at the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* in Mississippi. And had been a friend of mine and called me and wanted to talk to me about coming there. Well, I knew good and well that I wasn't going to Mississippi. I—I, you know, even coming from Arkansas, we look down on Mississippi. I wasn't thinkin' about that.

JM: [Laughs]

DM: But I thought I at least owed him the courtesy of having dinner with him since he was in town and talking to him. And I came back from dinner that night and told my husband, "You're not gonna believe this, but I wanna go to Jackson, Mississippi." Because of what the paper was doing. The paper's mission is—it's—the power it had, the voice it still had, its determination to investigate and pull up the weeds and say something. I—I just loved that. And I went and I took the job. I went there in January of 1992.

JM: Okay. Was that—was the *Clarion* already owned by Gannett by that time?

DM: Yes.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: It was owned by Gannett.

JM: Okay. Who was the—who was the guy from Hot Springs?

DM: It was Benny Ivory.

JM: Benny who?

DM: Ivory. I-V-O-R-Y.

JM: I've heard of him. I don't know him, but okay.

DM: And the executive editor was a man named John Johnson, who I just fell in love with. He was very quiet but smart as a whip—really knew his stuff. And I loved them both, and I loved that paper. And I loved the people at that paper. And, uh, I immediately found out that unlike what I was accustomed to—writing a column—I was the only staff columnist in the—only staff opinion columnist. I mean, there were sports columnists and that kind of thing in the only statewide daily newspaper in Mississippi. And I found out that rather than just writing things that people might talk about on their radio talk shows or over the water cooler or clip out and send to relatives around the country, that column made a difference in legislation—in there—oh, my gosh. I had no idea how much power it had. The governor would call news conferences to respond to my column.

JM: Hmm.

DM: And it scared me, you know. [Laughs] I thought, "I really got to be careful here." But it really had an effect. And I quickly, quickly, I mean, within a couple of

weeks, I was a hot property in Jackson, Mississippi. And people were—former governors and current state officials and business people were all asking to take me to dinner, to take me to lunch, to get to know me. Everybody wanted to know me. And it was just amazing for me. And, of course, the governor, Kirk Fordice—all these people are dead it seems—[laughs]—Kirk Fordice, who was a lout and an idiot, just was just a gift to me. He just gave me just nonstop material to write about. And I took him up on it. And I'd write about it, and he would be furious, and he would tell his staff that no one in his administration—nobody from his administration was to talk to the *Clarion-Ledger*—anybody from the *Clarion-Ledger* under any circumstances. And finally one of our reporters cornered him one day and asked him about that, and he says, you know, "Yes," he did that, because "you hired that woman to vilify me." You know, it was just—[laughs]—it was exciting. It was very exciting and very gratifying in—in a lot of ways.

JM: Okay. And so you were writing how—how often a week were you writing in the column?

DM: I wrote three columns a week.

JM: Okay. It ran on the editorial page, op-ed page?

DM: Yes. On the op-ed page.

JM: Yeah, okay.

DM: And they were—they're still some of my best friends of my life, the people I met for that. I was only there for one year, and it was during that year—I had been there about two months—when my column went into national syndication.

JM: Uh-huh. Okay.

DM: With Tribune Media Services. I had been talking with a couple of—down to a couple of syndicators—Washington Post Writer's Group and Tribune—before the *Gazette* folded about going into syndication. They were interested. And then when the *Gazette* folded, the Washington Post Writers Group told me, "Well, you know, it's really better for us to try to . . ."

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

JM: Deborah, you were saying that—that you had been two months, and—and basically you're syndicating your column.

DM: Right. And the Washington Post Writer's Group had told me that because the *Gazette* had folded, it was gonna make it more difficult for them to pitch my column to various newspapers—newspaper editors, because basically they wanted me to have a home paper, so when I found a new job, when I landed somewhere, I let them know, and we started up again. Tribune Media told me, "We don't care. If you can write, you can write." So that's who I went with. [Laughs]

JM: Okay. You were with—with—now same—now actually *Chicago Tribune*, huh?

DM: Yeah.

JM: Okay. You went with Tribune Media?

DM: Right. I was writing two columns a week for them.

JM: And that was nationally syndicated?

DM: Yes.

JM: Do you know—did you have any idea how many papers were using it?

DM: Well, at the end, about eighty-something papers. And the first paper that took me

on was the *Mobile Press Register* [Alabama], and I said I will always love the *Press Register* for that [laughs], 'cause that was a leap of faith. They took me and kept me until I stopped writing it. And then—I'm tooling along there and, you know, kind of watching the presidential—exciting—presidential race with this guy I've known forever—Bill Clinton—in the running. And from afar, then lo and behold, he wins, and the *Gazette*—Gannett News Service, which is the wire service for the Gannett chain calls in, says, you know, "We decided that we're going to—to staff the White House beat again. We haven't done that for a while. We're gonna staff it now and wondered if you might be interested." And so I said, "Yeah, I never thought I'd be back in Washington again." But, you know, it some—I wanted to kind of to be in on that action, too, and see this history unfolding. And the town, I came here and just found it absolutely electrified. I mean, I hadn't seen it that way before, except when the night Nixon resigned. Everybody was so—everything was so excited. And I haven't seen it that way since, and I have been here since

1992–1993 now. But I, you know, I get caught up in it and say, "Yeah, I want to do this and talk with my husband and children about it." They said, "Okay," and we move again. And we did. And I came here as, you know, White House correspondent for Gannett News Service in January of 1993.

JM: Okay. And how long did you do that?

DM: Until September of 2000.

JM: Okay, so you—you were there quite a while. You were there until just about the end of the Clinton term.

DM: Yes, I was.

JM: Yeah, okay. Were you still writing a column?

DM: I was, yes.

JM: And still syndicated?

DM: Yes.

JM: Yeah. I—I seem to remember that a lot at that time—that the *Arkansas Times* was running your column.

DM: That's right. The *Arkansas Times*, which kind of became the—the child of the *Arkansas Gazette* [laughs], I guess, anyway.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

DM: Yeah, it picked up my column very quickly, too—very early on.

JM: Okay. So after—after covering the White House for the news service until the end of circa 2000, what have you done since then?

DM: Well, after that, I took a—immediately after that—I took a—a one-year fellowship—two-semester fellowship at Harvard [University], Shorenstein School.

JM: What school?

DM: Shorenstein. It was the—it was the Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics, and Public Policy.

JM: Can you spell Shorenstein?

DM: Yes, it's S-H-O-R-E-N-S-T-E-I-N.

JM: Okay.

DM: And it—it was, you know, perfect for me, because those are my three interests. I mean, I understand how—how those three play into each other so much, you

know. The press influences people's perceptions. People's perceptions influence politics, which influence the policy, and, you know, back in a circle again. And I just had always loved that. The older I get, the deeper I wanna go on, on things—on issues and understanding how things work and that. And so it was perfect—absolutely perfect for me, and I wrote—as a fellow, you're supposed to develop a case study. And my case study turned out to be—I mean, I went along not knowing what I was going to write about at first—and then another gift came to me, and that was the turmoil of the 2000 presidential election. And it occurred to me to take a look at all of the news talk shows. And this was in hindsight. This was after it had been settled. I decided this is what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go back and look back at all of—no, this was while it was going on, because I was watching all these shows. I decided to look at all of the—the regularly scheduled news talk shows, whether it's on Sunday or evenings on cable or whatever. As long as it's regularly scheduled—no specials. And take a look at the racial components, you know, the racial makeup of their guests. Because it was a perfectly controlled experiment, because for that thirty-eight-day period, all of those shows had one topic. It was, you know, this—this undecided election. They all had guests on to discuss this—various experts or whatever to talk about it. And so they—so they had options. I took out the ones that were not optional, like James Baker. You can't, you know, James Baker was a principal in the case. And Warren Christopher was principal, so they didn't count, because they had no choice in what race they were. But when they were looking for a constitutional scholar to discuss something or looking for a reporter or looking for a politician or

something, you know, how many times are they goin' to a black person in a story that had, for example, a huge racial component because of Florida? There was a Florida vote and this whole thing about disenfranchised votes and discounted votes and all that stuff. Why, here's an opportunity for media to put its money where its mouth is about diversity and expand its Rolodex and go out and get some sources to speak with—with—with expertise, but most of them again went to white men when they had all these other choices. And so that's what my case study was about. I managed to bring race in there, too, since the media is always holding everybody else accountable for it, and we're lousy at it ourselves.

JM: Uh-huh. So . . .

DM: I did this case study and looked at 138 news programs. Yeah. And Marvin Kalb was my staff sponsor, I guess you would call it, or mentor. And he said, "Why don't we do a conference on this?" And I said, "Okay." He says, "I would love for Bill Clinton to be the speaker." Well, by the time my study was done, you know, everything had been decided. We were into 2001. George [Walker] Bush was in the White House. Bill Clinton was going around the country—around the world making speeches but really stayed away from making any public appearances in the U.S. at that point. And so this was gonna be like,his first big public appearance if he did this. I had some numbers from people, from having covered the White House, had some numbers in, you know, and faxed him and faxed a letter of invitation and all this kind of stuff. And the people at Cambridge—at Harvard found out about this and called me, upset, and told me that I had broken protocol, and nobody was supposed to write on behalf of Harvard

University to a current or former head of state except the president of Harvard University. And I apologized. I—I, you know, I didn't know this. I'm sorry. So they wanted me to retract my invitation. I said, "Well, it's kind of too late now. You know, I've already done that." And they say, "So how did you send it? You know, could you send us a copy?" I said, "Well, I faxed it." And they go—they were horrified, you know. [Laughs]

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: And—and so they tried to stop me by calling me and telling me that several deans at Harvard had extended invitations to former President Clinton and that I needed to retract it, so—because they thought it would be tacky to have too many out—and these were deans and, after all, I was just a fellow. And I just said, "No. I'm not gonna retract it." So Marvin and I worked it out and the next thing we knew, Clinton said, "Okay." Well, Harvard had a conniption then. The next thing I knew I was being told that there was an emergency meeting—all the deans at Harvard and the president were meeting to talk about this [laughs], that he was coming—coming on my invitation. And somebody said, "Three hundred years Harvard has lasted, and you come along and shake everything up this way." I said, "Well, it's kind of par for the course for me."

JM: [Laughs]

DM: And so we—we had this great conference, and it was like everybody who is anybody in Washington was there—all these former ambassadors and Ted Koppel and Tom Brokaw, you know, the media elites—everybody was there.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: This conference. And I invited my daughter, 'cause she was into politics, and I invited her to attend as my guest when Clinton came to speak. Harvard—Harvard had taken over. They basically kicked me out of—of running my own conference and set up all the panel discussions and sent out all the invitations and found the hotel and caterers, hired the caterers and everything. Once Clinton said, "Okay," they basically said, "We'll take it from here."

JM: [Laughs]

DM: And—and they were kind enough to invite me to my own conference.

JM: That was mighty white of them, wasn't it?

DM: Exactly. So we were sitting there, and Clinton says, "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Deborah Mathis." [Laughs] Oh, my God, it was the sweetest thing, 'cause I thought, "Now, try to take credit for it," you know. I mean, it was like he—he had gotten wind of what is goin' on and wanted to fix it for me, you know. And I really appreciate that, and it was a huge success. And Judy Woodruff came to me later and said, "Wow, what a coup to get him back to Washington and speak. This was really a coup." And for free, I mean.

JM: Yeah.

DM: We didn't pay him a dime, so there were some nice moments in that whole mess. So I finish up there, and, you know, they published it—my study—and it's part of their library at the Kennedy School now and all of this and—and then I moved on from there to do a lot of freelance work. I did some writing, some media consulting, trained some people in public speaking, wrote some reports and brochures and speeches for different types of people. And then I went to—I—I got

a kind of a full-time consultant gig with—with a public-interest group called the Advancement Project, which is very much like the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] Legal Defense Fund. They do civil rights litigation. And I was handling communications for them on a consultant basis. And while I was there, I got a trip to Africa with another client that was doing something on AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] in Africa. And I went to—with them for some program that they were launching and help write their report. Came back from there and—and got an invitation to go make a speech at a global business conference in Istanbul, Turkey . . .

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: . . . and about the role of the media in democracy, and agreed to go do that, thinking, "I really don't feel like another long trip, because I had just gotten back from Capetown." But I thought, "How many times will I get to go to Istanbul, Turkey, first class and all that?" So I went—fell in love with the place. Went back ten days later on my own dime, because I had made some quick friends there. I had a—I had a longtime friend that used to work at Gannett who lived there. So I wasn't completely in the woods, but just enjoyed it so much. And then, uh, a few months after that, when my son was off to college, and I'm an empty nester and everything—picked up and moved to Turkey. [Laughs] Moved to Istanbul, Turkey. A girl from Pulaski County, Arkansas. [Laughs]

JM: You moved to Istanbul?

DM: Yes.

JM: Okay. So when—when was that?

DM: That was in 2002.

JM: Well, okay.

DM: And I stayed there until 2003. And because the war thing was scaring my kids to death back home in the States. And, you know, I was—I knew I was fine, but they didn't. And I didn't want to scare them to death, so I came back and went, you know, came to Washington and went to work then for Northwestern University as assistant professor of journalism. They had a Washington program for graduate students. I taught grad students for two years.

JM: Okay. So what are you doing now?

DM: Now, I am director of communications for Public Justice Foundation. It used to be, formerly for twenty-five years, Trial Lawyers for Public Justice. And they, too, they're a public interest law firm. They really again specialize in public interest litigation, environmental, civil rights, consumer rights and, you know, that sort of thing—toxic tort, that kind of thing. I handle their communications.

JM: Okay, very good. So, quickly, tell me about your books.

DM: Well, my first book is titled *Yet a Stranger*: *Why Black Americans Still Don't Feel at Home*. And it is really kind of my bow to W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote the great work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, that was published in 1903. It was a kind of assessment of where black life in America stood in the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. So I thought it would be a good thing to do to take a look at where we stood as we turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. And so it was kind of my assessment of that. It did very well. It was published in 2002. And my second book was *What God Can Do*[*: How Faith Changes Lives for the*

Better] It was published in 2005, and it was—it's a collection of stories—mine and other people's stories about things that we often think of as coincidences, but in culture and especially people of faith, you know, it doesn't make any human sense the way these things happen, and there had to be a divine hand in there, and my point of that book is to make people see God in just kind of ordinary ways. It's not always parting the Red Sea. Sometimes it's just a drop of water. And my third book is being published this month, and it's *Sole Sisters:*—S-O-L-E Sisters—*The Joys and Pains of Single Black Women*. [Laughs] It's also a collection of stories of how black women—and I'm laughing because some of it is so funny and some of it really hilarious. Some of it is scary and all of that, but it—it's really about the different ways—I interviewed 125 women—and it's about the different ways that black women of all ages and economic levels and education levels and parts of the country and all are dealing with this—this phenomenon of severe shortage of available black men that is being exacerbated by our incarceration policy in this country, guns, drugs, and just kind of the evolution of the way the society thinks about men and women anymore. You know, and all of that is conspiring to really hurt to, you know, to extinguish, in effect, the black family. See of all these beautiful, wonderful, educated, financially secure black women who have no mate, and for the first time in our history as a country, fewer and fewer of them have any hope of having a mate. I mean, it was not until 1980 or something that the number of black women who were not married, of marriageable age were not married, surpassed the number, the percentage who were married. And now, the percentage of women—of black women—who have never been and never will never be

married is about to surpass the number of married black women.

JM: Oh, boy. That's amazing.

DM: That's frightening.

JM: Yes, it is. Yes, yes, that is amazing. Oh! Well, so you've—you had a—you had a terrific career and—and I need—I need—I'm gonna go back and see if I can find a copy of that *Yet a Stranger* 'cause it's a . . .

DM: Let me send it to you.

JM: . . . that's a topic that—that interests me very much. I've been reading a bunch of stuff about the 1957 [Little Rock Central High School] integration crisis, you know, some of Harry Ashmore's stuff.

DM: I'm reading a terrific, new biography about Ralph Ellison [*Ralph Ellison: A Biography*].

JM: I know—[by Arnold] Rampersad. Yeah, yeah. I read that, and I hear it—I hear it's good, so that . . .

DM: It's really great, isn't it?

JM: Yeah, I heard it is. And so I just need to go back and go back and—and read that area. I'm gonna go back, I think, and read Gunnar Myrdal's [*An*] *American Dilemma*[*: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*].

DM: Yeah. I—I referenced that in a lot in my *And Yet a Stranger*.

JM: Okay. I would—I would—if you got a copy of that book, I would—I would read it. It would be great if you would send it to me. And autograph it.

DM: It would be my pleasure, Jerry. I'll send that right out to you, because I love—I love to hear what you have to think of it.

JM: Yeah, okay. Yes, I love—I'd love to read that, and so I would really, really appreciate it. When you left the—sorry—when you left to take the TV job from the *Democrat*, what did I say? Did I say anything?

DM: [Laughs] Yeah, you were surprised. You said—you asked me if I was sure if I wanted to do that. And I—and I told you no. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

DM: You know—you know, you were always so kind to me. Always so kind, you know, 'cause I thought I was supposed to be afraid of my managing editor, you know. And I—I had great respect for you, of course, but I wasn't afraid of you. And I was so grateful for that.

JM: Well, that's—well, I'm really pleased with that.

DM: I always knew I could talk to you. And I just really appreciated that. A lot of people were telling me, you know, "Oh, watch those white people, girl. You goin' in there now. You don't know."

JM: [Laughs]

DM: And I was treated so well. And I think, you know, I'm sure everybody's memory of that's it was just not a thing. It was not an issue. The only thing, the closest thing I ever get was—was Mabel [Berry] always talking about "our colored in Redfield." That's the way she referred to the black people. [Laughter]

JM: Yeah.

DM: It was "our colored."

JM: [Laughs] Yeah.

DM: [Laughs] That was about all I had to deal with.

JM: Okay. Well, I'm—now that I've got ya, I've about worn you out here with—but this has been a great interview and covered some really interesting stuff and probably— we probably covered a lot of things that—that you probably ought to be interviewed about later on anyways. Somebody should, but—how did you like Marvin Kalb?

DM: Love him.

JM: Yeah, yeah. I think—I think he's a tremendously smart and . . .

DM: He is brilliant. He is classy. He is—he is a kind person. You know, he could afford to be a little uppity if he wanted to, considering all that he's accomplished. What a good man.

JM: Yeah. I think he's also a really intelligent man, too. And most I see out of him, I really appreciate. That's great.

DM: Yeah. He's been a good friend to me, you know, over the years, so . . .

JM: Okay.

DM: I've been blessed with a lot of good friends like you, and I—I'm just really grateful for that. And thank you for this opportunity to kinda go back down memory lane.

JM: Well, it's been—it's been fun. Okay, Deborah, as I said, I really appreciate this, and I'll just . . .

DM: And I'm sendin' the book, so let me know what you think of it.

JM: I will certainly do that.

DM: Thank you.

JM: Okay, Deborah, and thank you very much. I appreciate it.

DM: Sure.

JM: Uh-huh.

DM: Sure.

JM: Bye-bye.

[End of Interview]

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