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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Randy Tardy
Little Rock, AR
11 February 2006

Interviewer: Garry Hoffman

Garry Hoffman: Okay, this is—what is today’s—February 11 . . . ?

Randy Tardy: February 11, 2006.

GH: 2006. This is Garry Hoffman, and I’m interviewing Randy Tardy for the oral history of the *Arkansas Democrat*. As a disclaimer, the Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History is a non-profit organization based at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville] dedicated to collecting the history of the state. Randy, the Center will transcribe a tape of this interview and send me a copy and you a copy to review it for any corrections. Then they will send you a release for your signature, which will allow the transcript to be used by the Center. It will be made available to others primarily through the Internet. So the first thing I have to do is have you agree to this interview and agree that the transcript could be used for dissemination to others.

RT: I do agree. I appreciate the opportunity and thank you for taking time out to do it.

GH: All right. Well, let’s just start with a little intro on your life. Tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised. Talk about your parents, if you wish, and

what your interests were growing up. Let's just go from there.

RT: Okay, thank you Garry. The byline named Randy Tardy actually came into this world on July 8, 1932, with the full name of Thomas Randolph Tardy. I didn't use Thomas, never have very much, and Randolph evolved into Randy. This was in Phillips County in Helena. I grew up in West Helena. My parents were the former Marian Louise Hicks of West Helena and Ralph T. Tardy of Helena. My mother was born in Phillips County; my dad was born in Virginia to a family that had lived several generations—came to Helena by way of Alabama. He was in the ice and coal business. My mother's father, my grandfather on her side, was a cotton ginner and planter in Phillips County. [He] operated at one time three cotton gins and quite a few hundred acres. I grew up in West Helena [and] went to a Catholic school in Helena—Sacred Heart Academy. [I was] taught by the same order of nuns that operated, for a long time, St. Vincent Infirmary at Little Rock. They were the “Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky.” After graduation from there in 1950, I enrolled and was accepted at Springhill College in Mobile, Alabama, which is one of two sizable Jesuit institutions in the South. The other one being Loyola University in New Orleans [Louisiana], which is just now getting on its feet after the hurricane [reference to Hurricane Katrina, which hit the U.S. Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005]. Before I graduated from the Sacred Heart, I founded and edited a little mimeograph school paper. The sisters would run it all. We did it in our spare time on who had a birthday, and who got what for Christmas, and who was going with who, if we could get away with it and the nuns would approve it and all of that. I don't even remember the name of it, but it was mimeograph, and that was kind of my first little dipping of the fingers into the so-called

printers, or mimeograph ink. While at Sacred Heart, I had a job after school on a paper route carrying the *Helena World*, which was family owned, at that time, by the Young family. They hired me on the spot and they said, “We need somebody to deliver route 2A.” Route 2A hadn’t had a carrier in a year, so we had people that were no longer there or anything like that. But when I got through with it, we had about 200 customers and it was a money-making little round. After that, [I] went on to Springhill and became a staff writer for the weekly college paper, *The Spring Hillian*. [I] became a news editor—I believe my second year [or] maybe my third year—the start of the third year. I became editor the latter part of my junior year and my senior year. What made that very interesting was that I was the first non-Catholic who edited that paper. Everybody else had been born a Catholic, but I was Episcopalian and I guess they figured that was kind of close at the time. We had a good time, and what was very important about what we went through, and which we now accept, was that our school accepted the first coeds. It was an all-boys school—I guess like Notre Dame. I do remember that when I graduated on May 25, 1954, Father President’s topic was the recent Supreme Court decision on Brown vs. the Board of Education. He announced that the Alabama—that Springhill—would begin accepting African Americans that were qualified to pass the exam tests [that] everyone else did to get in there. And that made big headlines at that time. Now that everybody has always taken for granted that a goodly number of African Americans, a large number of females of all races, and a lot of foreign students from central and south America down there, as well as all over the country. When I got out of there, I went to graduate school at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and became active in the College of

Business Administration magazine which was called the *Guild Ticker*. G-U-I-L-D. T-I-C-K-E-R. It was kind of a little mini-annual report on activities at the College of Business that year. What I found interesting that the editor, when I went on board, was a young man by the name of David Pryor.

GH: Really.

RT: I was his assistant. David dropped out. He had eye surgery in Detroit, and he recommended that I take over. They said, “Well, we don’t allow graduate students to run an undergraduate newspaper.” Well, [there] wasn’t anybody—there wasn’t a backup, so to speak, so I ended up editing the *Guild Ticker*. It came out—I guess it would have been around May of 1955. It was very well received and I remember that I did one interview with a gentleman by the name of Winthrop Rockefeller that had come to Arkansas around that time. I talked to him about—what were his plans for Arkansas? What would he like to see? Where would he like to see Arkansas go? It was just one of those little interviews that you think about over the years. I mean, your very early one that I wished I had recorded, like we’re doing this one. Having finished that, I came back to Helena. [I] did not have anything to do at that time, so I was having coffee one morning with a friend in Helena, and a Radio station manager came in to join us. He said he was looking for a newsman. He said, “I have no news department; all we do is read the local paper. Would you like to give it a crack?” That was probably on a Thursday or Friday. I started on Monday and stayed there from December 1956 until July 1958.

GH: And the name of the radio station?

RT: KFFA, which was, and is, very well-known for the King Biscuit Blues, or what-

ever they call the new name of it now, since the name problem came up.

GH: Right.

RT: Back then it was a *live* King Biscuit group. We had W. E. Clay and Peck Curtis and Dudlow on the Piano. What made it interesting with my so-called news-room—and put the “newsroom” word in quotation marks—was also where they stored their musical instruments. My noon news was on from noon until 12:15 and King Biscuit was on live then, and still is, at the same time—12:15 to 12:30—which meant that on more than one occasion, while I was on the air reading some kind of maybe doom and gloom story to the radio audience, one of the King Biscuit boys would maybe drop the drum in the background. You would hear all kinds of roaring and all that. What I wouldn’t give to have some pictures and how valuable that would be today, but what’s happened to that legendary program. I left there in July 1958 and came to Little Rock at the invitation of the news director of KTHV, Channel 11, and KTHS radio. His name was Bill Neel. N-E-E-L. Bill hired me, and one of the early stories that I had that first week was to—this was the year that the high schools were closed because of the integration situation [in] 1958—my assignment was to go out to a brand new high school, by the name of Hall High School, way out in an area that was barely developed—beautiful school, still is—and interview a coach by the name of C. W. Keopple on what kind of year that the football team was looking to have. This was a year the schools were closed, but this was also the year that the football teams, as I recall, played a schedule. They didn’t have a home [because] the schools were closed, so they played all away games. They had a brand new football practice field out at the side there, and we talked about that. That was one of the very early stories

we covered. There were a lot of them that happened at Channel 11 when I was there. I left as news director [and] did the last radio newscast on radio station KTHS before it was sold and became KAAZ—one of the legendary rock and roll stations in America, I think, and a lot of other things that came out recently with the death of Pat Walsh, who was there a long time as general manager. Several stories stand out that I worked on at that time. One was the missile silo explosion up at the Searcy area that killed, what, fifty [or] fifty-four people, something like that.

GH: Right.

TD: Including the husband of someone who worked at Channel 11 at that time. There were all kinds of other things coming along—the announcements of the new buildings downtown, lot construction, the Arkansas River project, which I was mightily interested in. [These] were coming along, and we covered ground breakings for the start of the David D. Terry Lock and Dam, the Murray Lock and Dam, the Port of Little Rock, and all of that.

GH: What did the news program amount to then? When was it aired?

RT: When I started, the news program that I had to do with was 6:15 to 6:30 [p.m.]. CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] had a network newscaster by the name of Douglas Edwards. Douglas Edwards and the news would come on 6:00 to 6:15 [p.m.] and we would be on from 6:15 to 6:30. It was real capsule of a little bit of—not much of anything, and a little bit of everything, but what Channel 11 did do—they came out in 1960—I'll have to check the date for you—they came out with one of the early, at least in our market, half-hour news formats which we take for granted today. It was called “The Living Journal.” The news director at

that time was a gentleman by the name of Bob Fuller who handled the national, state, and local news—mostly state and local, because CBS had gone to thirty minutes with Walter Cronkite. On the weather, I believe, there was Steve Stephens and sometimes Bill Mitchell. I handled a business report, which was about three minutes, and it was primarily what happened on Wall Street, the stock market, NASDAQ [National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations], Dow Jones, oil, natural gas—because part of the newscast was sponsored by Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company, or ALG, as they called it. Benny Craig, the legendary Colonial [Bread] sportscaster, handled the sports end of it.

GH: The old bread man.

RT: “The old bread man with a little bit of this and that from the world of sports,” was always his introduction. Let me backtrack just a minute. On the weather there was also a gentleman by the name of Bud Dancy. Bud was his nickname, but that was his on-the-air name. Bud went on to become John Dancy with NBC news. John Dancy covered the State Department and the White House and I don’t know where else, but you would see him just about every time you turned on NBC. He’s retired now, and I do not know where he is—somebody might—but that was one of the people we worked with. And, let’s see, going from there . . .

GH: Who were the owners of Channel 11?

RT: Channel 11 at that time was owned by a conglomeration of people and the *Arkansas Democrat* at that time had an ownership—Mr. [K. August] Engel, the *Shreveport Times*, the Ewing Family, Clyde Lowry with, I believe, National Old Line Insurance Company, B. G. Robertson, who was general manager and my boss. They were ownership, and that was before they sold to—was it Combined

Communications out of Phoenix, Arizona or somewhere? Then they, in turn, sold it to Gannett. There may have been somebody in between. I can't remember, I think—I know that at one time Gannett owned Channel 4 for a while. Maybe I got it wrong in there somewhere, but when B. G. sold—when the owners that I worked for sold that station, it may have been to Gannett. I may have had that—because Gannett did at one time own Channel 4 and then other people acquired it later on. They were in the Arkansas market. I remember that was brought out when Gannett had acquired the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*—at whatever time that was—that they had at one time previously been in the Little Rock market as the owner of Channel 4; they currently own Channel 11. I went from there—I kind of got out of the actual news work into handling of public relations end of it, and this would have been on the staff of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce. That began in January of 1966, and it continued almost through October of 1974. We were very busy with a lot of major projects coming along at that time. One of the big ones being the actual realization of navigation on the Arkansas River, and the opening of the port of Little Rock, the interstate highway system and the working to keep federal funds coming for it—the completion probably one of the bigger things, which is really paying off now and taken for granted by so many people—the merger of [the] then private Little Rock University into what is now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock [UALR]. And you had some industrial programs that were going on that—Teletype for instance—after the Central High School integration situation there was kind of—it scared a lot of economic and industrial development away for a while. We began picking back up, and I believe that Jacuzzi was one of the early industries that came in after that, along

with Armstrong Rubber and—the one out on Lonoke highway—DuPont, Remington Arms, and somewhere in this rambling I'm doing right now was the realization of the Little Rock Air Force Base, which the Chamber was active in along with Fifty for the Future, and a number of other committees. I'm not that familiar with that part of it.

GH: What was your position at the Chamber?

RT: I was Director of Public Relations and Governmental Affairs. Those were my two hats. We had a campaign that was very popular—and you may remember it—called “Talk Arkansas Up.”

GH: Yes.

RT: Because it was to dispel the negative image that we perceived the world—the community having around the country and around the world. We took a look at all the Arkansas—all the industries in the Greater Little Rock area that sold nationwide and worldwide. We began arming them with facts and figures about what's right about our town and what—“Did you know that we did this?” And, “Do you know that we got one of the lower unemployment rates?” And “Do you know we got all these training programs available for business and industry?” And “Did you know that we've got a central location, we've got a navigable river, we've got major railroads in what had been the Missouri Pacific railroad and the Rock Island, and the Cotton Belt running through central Arkansas, we had an airport that, for a city of our size, had some of the big names in air service and a lot of other cities our comparable size did not?” We began pushing that, and I think it had a degree of success. I still see some of the old “Talk Arkansas Up” arrows every now and then. Somebody will have them put on the wall, or some-

thing like that. Those were the—we saw the completion of the bank buildings: the Union Bank building, the Worthen Bank building, the new Federal Reserve Bank coming downtown. We saw the opening of many, many, many residential developments west of University [Avenue]—and University used to be the end of the road, as far as Little Rock went. It was Hayes Street when I came to Little Rock, and part of it wasn't paved. And a two-lane street. We saw that coming along, and I've gone that far and haven't mentioned any of the real big names in Arkansas which really were just getting started around that time. I'm thinking specifically of Mr. Hunt, J. B. Hunt, and I'm thinking of Sam Walton—and all of these were from Northwest Arkansas. Mr. Hunt got his start, I believe, over in Stuttgart and worked his way on up. It was a good year for growth. It was a good year for getting things done. It was a good era for leadership, too, because you had so many people, particularly in the financial community, that were in home-owned banks and now they are just a big bank absorbed by huge conglomerate of banks based in Alabama, or North Carolina, or wherever. I'm not saying they're not still active in the community, but it was just [that] you had the local leadership at that time. People change, situations change, [and] all that.

GH: So from the Chamber back to—did you go back to Helena?

RT: No. There was a quick year in that I had a very fun job. I left the Chamber in October of 1974 and, I'll be frank about it, it was not of my own doing. We had a new manager come in and he wanted to clean house. He wanted his own people in there, and those who had been there the longest were the first to go. I was one of the first to go. I ended up—landed on my feet as Director of Information for the Arkansas American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. We were head-

quartered in the “West Wing,” as I liked to put it, of the Old State House. The Lieutenant Governor was our elected man in charge of it. It was a federally-funded and state-funded program where we created a great deal of interest and attention in the history of the nation and the history of each state. We went around all the counties with special programs handing out flags [and] handing out seed money for projects—oral history projects, or monuments, memorials, placards, anything that would further create interest—local interest in Arkansas and individual counties. It came after the great big to-do on July 4, 1976 at Arkansas Post State Park.

GH: I was actually there.

RT: Were you there?

GH: I was working for the *Stuttgart Daily Leader* at the time.

RT: It was very humid. It had been raining. It was hot as the dickens. All the ladies were dressed up in their period costumes, and a lot of the men were. Governor Pryor spoke. All the bigwigs from Washington [DC] with the Arkansas American Revolution Bicentennial spoke. If you were at Stuttgart, you may remember that no less of a notary today than John Warner came to Stuttgart to officially dedicate the—what was then called an “Agricultural Museum” which was a Bicentennial project. A lady by the name of Mrs. Pollard was the ramrod in putting that thing together. That was a fun job [and] I enjoyed doing it. The only thing about it was that the funding ran out at midnight on July 4, 1976. In the meantime, Bob McCord, who was editor of the [*Arkansas Democrat*—was he managing editor or was that his title “managing editor” or just . . .?]

GH: I think he might have been executive editor. I’m not sure he was ever managing

editor.

RT: Was he? Okay.

GH: McConnell, Jerry McConnell was the managing editor.

RT: Okay. And when [John Robert] Starr came on, he took over both jobs, and Lyndon [Finney] became Starr's assistant. But anyhow, Bob was in there and I told him—he said, “How long is this going to last?” And I said, “After July.” And he said, “Call me. We might have something available on a temporary basis at that time.” I mean, on a permanent basis. So—I have a gap in what I have been telling you. Can I insert that gap right now?

GH: Sure. Go ahead.

RT: When I left the Chamber of Commerce in October 1974, I sent out some notices saying that I was out of work and needed—if anybody knew of anything. One of the letters went to Bob McCord. Bob called me and he said, “We need some temporary help over here at the newspaper in writing something. Can you be available?” And I said, “Yes.” What had happened was that two ladies at the paper were running the business section at that time. One was Bobbie Forster, who was the business editor, [and] the other was Inez Hale McDuff, who was a business writer. And they had a gentleman by the name of Jim Flowers, and Jim was—I don't know what—someone was sick and somebody's mother was sick or something. Bob said they needed some help in putting out what was called the “Progress Edition.” So I came over and put out the “Progress Edition” with their help. They were all writing heading stories and all that, and handling the ads that would come in from the ad agencies; writing nice things about the advertisers and all that.

GH: And this was at the *Democrat*?

RT: This was at the *Democrat*.

GH: Fall of 1974?

RT: It would have been in the Fall of—well, it would have been right after Christmas.

GH: After Christmas [of] 1974.

RT: Yes. That was—I had a couple of months there with nothing to do. It extended into early January—the “Progress Edition” would come out the end of January. They had a garden [tabloid] to come out and they said, “Will you help with that?” So I did. I left there, and my former boss at the Chamber of Commerce, Bill Henderson, was then Director of Parks and Tourism, and the Bicentennial fell under his bailiwick. So he interviewed people [for] the job as information officer and I started work over there in July of 1975.

GH: Okay.

RT: That brings us all the way through July of 1976. Bob McCord had mentioned that—when this job ran out at the bicentennial—would I give him a call. I did, and as it turned out Jim Flowers had left the *Democrat*, and they had an opening there. I began working there on, as I mentioned earlier, July 20, 1976—sitting between Inez Hale McDuff and Bobbie Forster. The first day I came in there was very technical, because I was to do something called the “oil report.” I didn’t know what an oil report was, and I was to get it on some kind of a machine that copied something and came on a reel whirling disk out of our *El Dorado Daily News* or [*El Dorado*] *News-Times* or what—by a gentleman by the name of Curtis Butterfield, who I think is a county judge down there now, or something—all it was, was fractions and I didn’t know what it was. So I called Curtis and I said,

“What is this thing? Bobbie said she’d be here.” Bobbie ended up being sick, so he walked me through that. And that was the most intense education I think I ever had on any story I ever wrote: how to do the oil report, because except for the lead paragraph there were no more words in it. [Laughs]

GH: It was basically agate, was it not?

RT: Yes, and how many feet in [?]. I said, “Curtis, what does all that mean?” And he said, “You don’t need to know what it means. The oil people know what it means. They’re the ones who read it.” [Laughter] I knew I was in another world at that time. We—there were a lot of stories that came along at that time, but I did whatever needed to be done. Bobbie would need help on the real estate tabloids, and I would call people. We both did phone interviews and we did—when we could—we would go out and interview them, but Bobbie—we were so short-handed that we stayed in a lot of the time. We would go out when we had to, but if we could do it by phone we would do it.

GH: What did the business section at that time—what did it consist of? Was there a business page every day?

RT: No, there was a business section on Sunday called “Business and Finance.” There was a little section called “Real Estate.” “Real Estate” evolved into a little tabloid with a lot of advertising from the realtors. The business section for the longest kind of a time, when I first went there, was just wherever the business news would fit, and sometimes it fit on the obituary page.

GH: Right. Did they put a little header on it, like “Business”?

RT: “Business News,” occasionally. It was not a standard header that had to be on there. Then when we began taking the—doing something with the afternoon pa-

per and turning it around, we all [of a] sudden had a business page, and I think the name was changed to—we figured that “Business and Finance” overlapped a little bit, but “Business and Farm” did not. We wanted the farm audience, and we began going after both of them. I remember that we hired a young man by the name of Audie Ayer, who was the early farm writer. JoAnne Pryor followed him.

Audie is still with the Arkansas Farm Bureau.

GH: As a matter of fact, Audie was actually first hired as an assistant city editor.

RT: Was he?

GH: He worked with me on the city desk. Then when, as you said, they changed or they expanded the business coverage, Audie became the first farm writer.

RT: Yes, and became a very good one. Enough so, I think, that he attracted the attention of the Farm Bureau people, and he’s been out there ever since.

GH: Audie was originally—he came to the *Democrat* from Poplar Bluff, Missouri—from the newspaper there.

RT: Oh, he did. Okay. I remember when his son, Adam Ayer, was born, and I think Adam is what, thirty years old now? [Laughter] That’s nothing, but anyway, I do remember the interest and excitement when Mr. [Walter] Hussman [Jr.] announced that we were going to become a morning paper. As I recall, he said that many people had told him that “If you will ever go head-to-head with the *Gazette*, we will support you.” I don’t want to put words into his mouth, but it was something to that effect. So he had the big announcement that we would be going [to] a morning paper—and I want to say that we went morning—was it first in Pulaski County and second statewide? Or—I don’t remember. I believe . . .

GH: I know it was one way or the other.

RT: Yes. And I still have in my collection the little color from the front page, because color came along about that time. We were able to use color. That's something I didn't get into earlier, but it was a real treat to have color on a chart. Nobody thought about color on a photograph—that just was something unheard of—but color on a chart—like purple for the dollar value of the Arkansas grape crop, or yellow for the wheat or corn crop, or something like that, and white and black for the cotton crop. But things—now we just look at it and take [it] for granted, and, to me, the black and white pictures on one of these 1A [One A] stand out. Anyone will see that if they've had color problems on the early story, or something. I remember, when we did go morning, we began hiring—let's see, Bob McCord left. I don't know the exact date. John Robert Starr came over from—was he with AP [Associated Press] or with *Memphis Commercial Appeal* when he came to the *Democrat*?

GH: I believe he was . . .

RT: Or was he teaching?

GH: I think he was teaching at UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock]. He was no longer with the Associated Press.

RT: Okay.

GH: He had been in Memphis [Tennessee], but I think he was teaching at UALR.

RT: I want to say he commuted weekly to the University of Tennessee [Knoxville] to lecture on journalism, too.

GH: He may have. He and McCord—and McCord was still—when Starr came, McCord was still there.

RT: Yes. He stayed for awhile.

GH: Ralph Patrick, I think, was still there . . .

RT: Ralph Patrick.

GH: . . . as assistant managing editor, but he didn't stay very long after Starr came over.

RT: Ralph went to Atlanta, I think, or somewhere, and then Bill Husted was there.

GH: Right.

RT: But things changed. Things got to be—we got to be going head-to-head with the *Gazette*. And we would always look at both papers in the morning and say, “Well what did they have and what did we have?” And, “How did we treat it and how did they treat it?” It got interesting. It got hectic. It got frantic. I remember the whole newsroom staff we had would be called together about the time the Gannett people bought the *Gazette*. Here was one of the huge, most successful, biggest companies taking over the Little Rock paper, and we were wondering what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. I remember that second floor staff meeting that we had there, talking about, “Are we just going to . . .?”—the word “deep pockets” came out on what Gannett had and all that. We just were going to have to take them on head-on. I'm not going to go in every blow-by-blow, because I did remember the business end of it and what we covered and how we covered it. That is about the time that I evolved into doing transportation. I don't remember the *Gazette* going at it the way that we did, but I always felt—do you want me to get into this a little bit?

GH: Sure. Yes. I was going to ask you how—when we went to morning and the “Business and Farm” became a daily section, not just wherever you could fit it in the paper, but it was actually—there was a “Business and Farm” [section].

RT: And they added a “Monday” section. There was no “Monday” at that time. They added the “Monday” business section, which we had seven days a week.

GH: And they also had the business staff somewhat expanded as well. Right?

RT: Yes.

GH: In addition to yourself as a writer, you mentioned Audie Ayer. Were there any other business writers?

RT: David Smith early on, but I don’t remember the year that he came. There was a whole slew of them that came through and stayed for a while and went on. Jim Lovel—he was there several years before I retired. Andy Moreau and . . .

GH: Andy Moreau, who’s at Alltel now.

RT: He is at Alltel, now. And we went through several business editors. I was actually a business editor until Starr—several months—and he relieved me of that duty when he found out that I could not go out—I couldn’t cover a story and come back and mechanically work the equipment at the same time. It was frustrating. Chuck Jones didn’t want to go out that much. He wanted to play with the equipment and do all of that, so it was a good parting of the way. I was very happy to be . . .

GH: Chuck Jones had been hired when we expanded

RT: He came down from Rogers.

GH: Right. He started out as the courthouse reporter.

RT: Yes.

GH: And moved to—and became business editor, I guess, from the courthouse reporter.

RT: Yes. But when Bobbie Forster retired, Starr asked me would I take over as busi-

ness editor. I said, “Yes.” I was glad to be relieved of that responsibility, because you had to do a lot of things. I just wanted to write. That’s what I did, and felt that I was good at doing it. Chuck was a good guy to work for, and it worked out real well.

GH: So you were back writing full-time. How did the beats of yours develop? How did you develop the transportation beat?

RT: I had always covered bits and pieces of transportation. I guess it started out with the [Arkansas] River and the opening of the Arkansas River to navigation, which would have been in 1970—1968 for Little Rock [and] 1970 for the entire system up to Catoosa, Oklahoma, and the Tulsa [Oklahoma] area. I had covered the barges and the traffic at the Port of Little Rock, [and] was out there when the first barges came in. Began getting reports from them on, “How are you all doing?” And, “What are you handling?” That got them used to knowing what I was going to ask. Pretty soon they were letting me know what they were doing, particularly if they had done better than what they had done last month. That took care of the river end of it. On the railroad end—I’ve always been kind of a train nut myself, so I was very interested in what Missouri Pacific was doing here. About that time they were putting in a multi-million dollar diesel overhaul depot and diesel repair shop in North Little Rock, called “Downing B. Jenks Shop” named after the chairman of the board of the MoPac [Missouri Pacific].

GH: That’s J-E-N . . .

RT: J-E-N-K-S is Downing B. Jenks, and it is still over there under that name operated by Union Pacific, which acquired Missouri Pacific in December of 1982. The Rock Island Railroad was financially troubled for many years, but they were also

providing competition for Missouri Pacific. So you had a little bit of a freight rate competition there. Truck lines—the big truck lines—were headquartered in Fort Smith and in Northwest Arkansas. They all had operations here. I did a little bit on that. I did not do as much on truck lines as I did on everything else, because we had somebody in Fort Smith at that time that watched over ABF Arkansas Best Freight and USA truck. And we had whoever was in Northwest Arkansas [that] took care of JB Hunt and Willis Shaw and [what] those were doing up there, as well as Arkansas Freightways over at Harrison, which is now part of FedEx [Federal Express] Ground. The airlines—I’ve always been interested in air line service. I remember when I was with—let’s see, it would have been Channel 11 when—trying to think—July 6, 1965 was the arrival of the first pure jet service in Little Rock on a scheduled basis. We had jet charters in and out for different reasons, but that was the very first scheduled jet service for American Airlines. This would have been when I was at Channel 11, and we made a big deal out of that. Pretty soon Delta [Airlines] was flying jets in here, and an airline called “Trans Texas [Airways],” later “Texas International [Airlines],” [and] now “Continental.” Everybody began upgrading equipment. They began talking about where you can go from Little Rock on a non-stop basis. One day James Rogers and the gentleman who was his predecessor, Bob . . .

GH: Crisp.

RT: Bob Crisp.

GH: C-R-I-S-P.

RT: Sat down with me and said, “Let me tell you what we got going on out here in addition to the commercial service. We’ve got people at Falcon Jet and we’ve got

the predecessor company of what is now Raytheon, and what they are doing.”

And Jimmy Woodard had—I believe it was called Arkansas Aviation at that time—now Raytheon. And we got to talking about the number of jobs and the payroll that we had out there. One thing led to another, and I just began covering what they did—expansions, and when they got contracts, and how the new Falcon jets were taking off. As other businesses expanded, they were able to buy a corporate jet. They would call and say, “We are coming out with a new model, and we are going to have one of the models out there at our Little Rock modification plant. Would you like to come out and look at it? We’re going to be down here from our headquarters in New Jersey.” So I would come down and just little by little I would pick up on it, and begin thinking how much this area had in the way of jobs related to transportation.

GH: Right.

RT: You go out to the port and look at the truck lines that are in that area and the distribution centers there in that area and all [of] that. It just became a fairly comfortable niche. On the waterway group, I remember going in to John Robert Starr’s office back in 1980 and saying, “There is an organization called the National Waterways Conference, which is a collection of port authorities, arch line operators, tow boat operators, [and] government people interested in water transportation.” And I said, “They are having a meeting in Tulsa, which is not very far away. They are going to recognize the Arkansas River, which is right outside our building here, about three blocks. They have a Vice President from Arkansas and two or three other people in there who are from Pine Bluff and Little Rock that are going.” I said, “I think I’d like to go and see what it’s all about and see what

we can come up with.” And Starr said, “How much is it going to cost?” I told him. And he said, “Well go ahead, but you’d better make it worth our while.” And I think I wrote about ten or twelve stories from that meeting. The featured speaker at that meeting was an Arkansas junior senator at that time—David Pryor. On that September 1980 date that he was to address the luncheon, he was delayed for one hour because the tip of the—nuclear tip of the missile had fallen off, or something, up in Damascus [Arkansas]. Remember that?

GH: Yes, I do.

RT: And he came there . . .

GH: Titan Missile.

RT: His opening line was that he had a good excuse for not being there on time, but he said, “It did what it was supposed to do, ladies and gentlemen, it didn’t go off.” I remember that, and that was perfect. I went back to Starr a year later and I said, “That same meeting is going to be in St. Louis [Missouri] and we got several Arkansans on the program, can I go again?” And he said, “Yes. See if you can write even more than you did the year before.” That evolved, Garry, into nineteen out of twenty years I went to that thing and covered it. [I] was recognized for the coverage. It was an area that a lot of people didn’t bother. We would go to St. Louis and we wouldn’t find the folks dispatched there. You would find the *Wall Street Journal* [and] you would find the *Waterways Journal*.

GH: What about the *Arkansas Gazette*?

RT: It never did cover it.

GH: All right.

RT: If AP picked up my story, or a story out of the convention, they might run it. But

they never had a man there, or a woman. So that took care of the river end of it.

GH: Did you see yourself as having a counterpart at the *Gazette*. I don't recall—did they have transportation . . .?

RT: No they didn't, but they had somebody that I would run across or cross paths with by the name of David Palmer.

GH: Right.

RT: David would be at press conferences. I remember one of the funnier press conferences that—a funny press conference was held down at the Trapnall Hall. It was from Falcon Jet, and they were talking about a new model that they were coming out with. They had their chairman of the board from Dassault Falcon Jet in France, and he wasn't speaking English. David spoke French. David didn't know anything about the aircraft part that he was talking about, so we traded knowledge. I told him what he was saying on what the aircraft was going to be like, and David told me what he was saying. [Laughter]

GH: What were your impressions of the *Gazette*? Did you always consider the *Democrat* to be the underdog in the newspaper war?

RT: In many ways we were, particularly at the very beginning. I could see that role changing as time went on. It seems like anytime the *Gazette* made a change, it was always a new name that came in here to run the operation. I don't remember how many editors they went through, but they were always taking some of our people to lunch and hiring them. I remember that. I would say that—I have told this to a lot of people, particularly since I was retired—here was the Gannett company, one of the biggest in the world [and] one of the great names in the world and our business, taking on a south Arkansas family with deep roots in

Camden and Hot Springs.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

RT: . . . media properties at the time and you wondered how it was going to come out.

There were times when I used to confer with Bob Sallee and he [said], “Well, Randy, do you think we’re going to make it?” “Bob, I don’t know.” He said, “Well, I don’t know either.” And I said, “We’ll just show up tomorrow and see what happens.” Then tomorrow would come and we would have what we wanted to have and the *Gazette* wouldn’t have it. I remember a turning point, too, I thought, was when Dillard’s [Department Stores] switched their advertising and dropped the *Gazette*. It seemed like there were a lot of—not necessarily advertising things—I don’t know and am not that familiar with [that] end of it—but stories that came out that we had a more solid approach to the news once the war really got into the height of it, I think. I liked our approach to the news that we had. I think we had more local items. Some of them may not have been, to me, all that significant, but they were local. It beat having a little AP sign on your story, or something like that, which I would see in the other paper.

GH: What was your work space? You want to—we’ll stop for just a second.

[Tape Stopped]

RT: What was the name of that system that we had? Digital?

GH: Digital equipment—was it DEC, or something like that?

RT: Yes, Digital equipment.

GH: Now, when you started—was it electric typewriters when you first started?

RT: Yes, IBM Selectric.

GH: Right.

RT: Yes. They were set especially for—and they would. . . .

GH: Go ahead.

RT: They would space for feeding into something called a scanner.

GH: Right.

RT: And the scanner would do what? It would read it and convey it over to a computerized system.

GH: Right.

RT: And you would go over to a terminal and log in and call it up and edit your story, if all went well. Sometimes the words—the scanner couldn't read certain words on there, and you had to really watch it very closely.

GH: As I recall, if you made a mistake—a typo—you would need to put in a type of pound sign so it wouldn't read that letter. If you made a mistake—put in the wrong word—you would put in two pound signs so it wouldn't read the word.

RT: I had forgotten that.

GH: And if your whole sentence was botched up, you put three pound signs so it wouldn't read the sentence.

RT: It wouldn't read that.

GH: If you ever typed in a delta . . .

RT: It would quit.

GH: It would quit. Yes. [Laughs]

RT: And why? I don't know.

GH: Nobody ever told us.

RT: I often wondered what the delta was on there for anyhow.

GH: Yes.

RT: I had forgotten about that. If you got through typing up a page and you messed up the page—put a pound sign or a letter and it wouldn't read it. Three, and it wouldn't even read the line.

GH: Right. But always you'd . . .

RT: I'd forgotten about that.

GH: You'd type it and you would type in your name—just to show the editor who had written the story—but you'd put three pound signs behind your initial when you read your name so that when it went into the computer system your name didn't appear there.

RT: What I remember most about the [computer] terminals was that everybody needed them at the same time, and there were three people for each available terminal.

GH: Right. Business staff was—who were you battling for terminal space with? Was it sports or . . .?

RT: No. Sports kind of had a couple of their own—with one exception. Randy Moss, when he would come in with something from Oaklawn [Park], wanted an available terminal and [would say], "I need it right now because I got to get over there." We, city desk to a degree, but largely in our area we had society or Betty Woods and whoever else came on after that.

GH: Jane Dearing.

RT: Jane Dearing. I was trying to think of her name. Yes. And the food people and all them . . .

GH: Helen Austin.

RT: Helen, yes. They were all over there. Whoever wandered around from any de-

partment—you know, they could come over in our area to use the terminal if there was an empty—a vacant terminal over there.

GH: Right.

RT: This was the second floor at that time, and we were over in the—as you get off the elevator you’d take a right and keep on going. The mailboxes were right there when you went around, and we were over there in the corner, basically, where Paul Greenberg is on the third floor now—in that area. And there were about four terminals there by the mailbox and four on the other side. I’m trying to think—Betty didn’t have one in her—Jane didn’t have one in her office; she had to come out to use them. So, everybody needed them at the same time. It all worked out, but it got frustrating because that clock kept on moving. I had seen—almost yelling at each other, “Well, I had it first.” Or, “How long are you going to be?” Or, “Can I get in for a minute? I need to make a correction.” Here you are in the middle of trying to remember a quote or something like that.

GH: You would ask the person who was at the terminal to finish what they were doing, put it on hold or whatever, then you would get in—of course calling up a story was a lot of keystrokes involved, as I recall. You’d have to log into a particular system or, I think you’d—thirty, comma, four, bracket, thirty, comma, fourteen, or bracket, thirty, comma, seven, I think, was city desk.

RT: Thirty-twelve was business.

GH: Right.

RT: Thirty-twelve was business. I remember I was editing a story one day—one morning—and Ray Hobbs was over there asking me, “Is there anybody you got—can you get somebody to go cover”—whatever it was. And we were there talking

and they had the monitors on over there—and this would have been in later years—but we had the monitors on and we both said, “Look there.” The Challenger had exploded. There we were working that morning—“Good Morning,” or something like that—and that took care of whatever we were going to do. Because that was—we began getting reaction from people and everything, but it just—how quickly things change.

GH: Right. Right.

RT: It was just the two of us that were there. He was over there asking about—and whatever it was wasn’t that day, it was something coming up.

GH: Ray was the city editor at the time?

RT: Yes. He was. He would always come over there and stand there a minute and say, “Excuse me. Do you have anybody available over there? Anybody that can go cover this?” Or, “Do you know anything about these people?” He’d come over and ask us questions about stories that they got something on that he didn’t know much about.

GH: Sandy Miller Hays had become business editor by then?

RT: Sandy Miller Hays was business editor. There were several ladies that were there at that time—Angie Peters was one of the writers, Dave Wannemacher, Bruce Kinel. K-I-N-E-L. Wannemacher. W-A-N-N-E-M-A-C-H-E-R.

GH: That’s right.

RT: And others. A little fella—I can’t remember his name, but what I remember about him—at one time, he was the news editor of a business publication over in Memphis. Owen. Owen. Owen. Owen Proctor.

GH: Yes.

RT: It was Owen Proctor. Owen asked me five questions while I was writing a story [one time]—we were seated next to each other on the terminal—five questions. I said, “Owen, such, such, such.” [He said,] “Okay, thank you.” [I said,] “Owen, what about so and so?” And he said, “Hush. I’m trying to write a story.” [Laughter] I don’t think he realized it, but anyhow, that was—we went through three systems while I was there. I remember what a luxury—what a godsend it was to have your own terminal and your own desk. Where you didn’t have to get up and go anywhere to use somebody else’s terminal. All you had to do was get up and go find somebody to see why the thing wouldn’t log in.

GH: Right.

RT: Or something like that. They would say, “Well, do so and so,” and, “Do so and so.” Sometimes it would work, and sometimes they’d have to come up there. They would get underneath and they’d do something and all [of a] sudden it would work.

GH: You talked somewhat about your relationship with Bob Starr. What were your impressions of him and his impact on the newspaper war?

RT: I could say that probably he was a key player in that newspaper war. I don’t think—I’ve always had very high regard for Starr. I knew him long before I came to work for him, because I was—the radio station over in Helena was an AP member. Many, many times we would have something over there—a fire, a murder, a court case, or, in one example, an airplane crash that I put on the air about the missing airplane. Some fisherman down below Helena had found wreckage from it, and that became a very big story, regionally. Starr was the AP man over there that would take all of my stories. Yes, I had a pretty good relationship with

him when I came over there. I got along well with him. I had disagreements with him. I think one time he said he wanted to know why we didn't have a particular story, and the *Gazette* had it that morning. I said, "Well, one reason we didn't have it was because I had it about a week ago." And he said, "Oh. Okay. Well, Walter [Hussman] didn't see it." I said, "Well, it was there." Then he said, "Well, Walter wants a copy of it." So we went back—Chuck Jones was there, and we went back and dug out the story and sent it on by way of—you remember how the chain of command had to go? I had to find the story and send it to Chuck and Chuck would say, "Here is the story," and would send it Starr and Starr would write on there, "Walter, here is what you wanted." Mr. Hussman sent one of them back and it said, "The *Gazette* Story was twelve inches and Randy's was only nine inches." [Laughter] It wasn't funny then; it's funny now. And Chuck looked at it and he looked at me. He wrote on it—"We wrote a tighter story than they did." [Laughter] Sent it back and we never heard any more out of it.

GH: Now Mr. Hussman took a special interest, as I recall, in business.

RT: Yes he did.

GH: And he would—get what I think we used to be called "Waltergrams," or little notes . . .

RT: They were called "Waltergrams."

GH: I think business got more of them per-capita than any other . . .

RT: The one that that landed at my desk was what is still around now as "Arkansas Economic Indicators." If I still have a monument in that newspaper, it is that chart, because Walter had been somewhere and he had picked up the *Dallas Morning News*. He wrote a lengthy memorandum to Starr, at that time, and he

said “We need to start doing something like this.” It had consumer price index. It had gasoline prices. It had retail sales. Things on a monthly basis—real estate transactions—all of the categories, and they’re mostly still in there—interest rates and certain bank rates and all that. The last paragraph in there said, “We need to assign somebody in the business department, somebody like Randy Tardy, to put this thing together.” I just kind of took that as an order to do it. It took a while to line up contacts. “Can we get this on a monthly basis? Do you put out—do you distribute these numbers? Can we get on your mailing list?” And really get this thing going. They were fairly generous with going along with that. I would send memos—“We got these lined up,” and, “these lined up.” and all that. The thing came out and was very popular. When it first came out it took about the entire top part of the page and [was] maybe eight inches deep. It was “Arkansas Economic Indicators.” Then we began figuring out how much space was costing us and paper was costing us and that’s when we began cutting back a little bit. I think the “Monday” section went to four pages, which it still is now for the most part—or was it eight to six pages? I’m trying to remember. Maybe it was eight to six.

GH: Eight to six, I believe, because the bankruptcies took a couple of pages.

RT: Oh, yes. That’s all they had in there for a while before the new law came in.

GH: The weather map, I think, was on the back.

RT: We revised it and cut it down, but still left most of the things in there. I still look forward to it. Believe it or not, in four years or so of retirement, I still cut that out every Monday and file it. I will pull it out every now and then and contrast whatever certain numbers are now with what they were a year ago, or something like that—particularly gasoline prices, consumer price index, and things like that.

GH: In the stories that you wrote, are there any particular stories that you are proudest of? Are there any particular newsmakers that you found to be the most fascinating people that you had an opportunity to cover, or anything along those lines?

RT: Walking up after a luncheon [and] talking to a gentleman in a baseball cap that said “Wal-Mart” on it. Sam Walton was talking to some kind of education meeting. I said, “Can I have just a minute of your time?” He said, “Yes, sir. I’m Sam Walton. How are you? Glad to have you from Little Rock”—or something like that—“Thank you for taking the time.” I asked a couple of retail questions and all that. Wal-Mart was growing, but Wal-Mart was not what Wal-Mart ended up being. That was one of them. Another one that won all kinds of awards and it was an [Arkansas] River story was—I still get interest on it now, and still find the copy of the front page hanging in offices—several offices. It was a story I did about nine or ten years ago on why towboats hit bridges. We had a picture of the Greenville Bridge, which had just been hit by a towboat. They are replacing that bridge now with a new one.

GH: That’s right.

RT: Incidentally, I don’t know whether we’ve had a picture on that lately, but that might be—my son tells me it’s going to be a beautiful bridge. The new one is going to be one of these tall—going to look like the Golden Gate [Bridge].

GH: I had seen a picture of that somewhere with another picture of the other bridge in the foreground, but I can’t remember where I saw it.

RT: Well, it was in our paper, and it has been months ago, but it’s an architect’s rendering of what the new one is going to look like versus the old one.

GH: Okay.

RT: We had a picture of the Greenville bridge, which I happened to be down there with a camera and took the day I had been interviewing the old towboat pilots, and working with the Coast Guard on how many bridges had been hit when—this, that, and the other. We got into the currents in the river, and all that. I had just a big reaction to it. The thing I remember most was talking to people that were, back then, really just getting started. Everett Tucker was talking about the industries that were in the Little Rock Industrial District and when, years later, it was practically full of industries that had come along, and he had opened another one, “Little Rock South.” Another one was talking to the Port Authority people on when they just got going and they received their first few barges, and now they [have] 1,600 or more people down there directly related to the river. Things like that. I remember going out and watching them break ground on the new Baptist Hospital. Look at the size of that right now. I remember talking to the Sisters at St. Vincent’s Infirmary on where they had come. I can remember when my son was born at St. Vincent it was just the original building and now it’s a huge complex over there. I remember the airline people I talked to and how proud that people like [Glenn Halsted?] and [Bob Beebe?] were of American Airlines when the first jet came in. Then they went on to be all jet, where you could go to so many places non-stop that you couldn’t then. When I left there on July 20, 2001, it was two months before 9/11 [reference to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC]. That changed the airline [industry], and it changed the world, really. It changed our country, but the airline industry was hit so hard at that time, so terribly hard, and they began cutting back. What I missed—I began seeing the dawn of it and the aviation end of it was how the little

regional and the baby jets had changed things, because instead of having the big 727s and the 737s, the bigger airplanes, we got the smaller fifty seaters, forty seaters, and what have you. We got probably even more flights to more places, they just don't carry that many people, but that was a big change to come along.

GH: You worked at the paper roughly ten years after it became the *Democrat-Gazette*.

RT: Well, let's see. When was that? October the . . . ?

GH: It was 1991 when the . . .

RT: Yes. October 29, or 19—something like that—1991.

GH: 1991.

RT: I was one of the first ones to move up to the third floor.

GH: Okay. I was going to say that—was your role in how you covered your beat changed because there was no longer a newspaper war? Did you approach the job differently? Was there a different atmosphere because the other guy wasn't over there anymore?

RT: Big celebration, if you remember, up there when everybody was—I didn't cheer. The death of a newspaper is always sad, but I was very thankful it wasn't our newspaper. We were by far the better paper in my opinion. I tell people that tell me, "We got a copy in our collection of the last edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*" and I say, "Do you also have a copy of the last edition of the *Democrat*?" Because it came out at the same time; there was no more *Arkansas Democrat*. There was an *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. You had the demise of the paper that we knew. Now, granted, we were still there. We were the surviving paper, but you still lost—and look what has followed since then. I look at Dallas [Texas]. I look at Tulsa [Oklahoma]. I look at the *Press-Scimitar* in Memphis, the other paper in

Jackson, Mississippi. You know, it happened; it did not make the—it wasn't the competitiveness that we had here of the all-out newspaper war. Did our role change? Well, to a degree, I would say there was some—there was a change. The other guy wasn't there. Well, we still had *Arkansas Business* there, which would sometimes come out with things—in fact, would regularly come out with things. We would get little clippings from Walter saying, “Did we know about this?” Or, “Have we had this?” Or something like that. We still stayed on our toes. I think that the hustle and bustle and so much of the expenditure to fund the newspaper war probably changed a little bit. You may know more about the pulling back—you were in advertising at that time, weren't you?

GH: Yes. I was out of the business for ten years.

RT: I do know that we kept going. We kept a full staff there. I mean, we added on—what—we had ten [or] twelve people there, or something like that. Plus the business writers, which we still have in Northwest Arkansas.

GH: Right.

RT: Including a fellow by the name of D. R. Stewart, who was up there for years. I saw his name the other day in a byline in the Tulsa paper.

GH: Did your beat stay the same?

RT: I kept it the same and nobody told me not to. I would always try to find something. In fact, I was very comfortable with transportation, and I found it to be a good challenge. I would cover it very well, as well as one person could. I would try not to overload with railroads or overload with—every time you pick up the paper [there would] be something—I wanted some form of transportation in there. People seemed to be interested in what was going on in that line of—in that par-

tical sector. People began traveling a great deal. I noticed one thing they do in the Northwest edition which caught my eye the other day. I bought one in Northwest Arkansas on the way to Tulsa. They have a map in there of weather conditions for the non-stop flights from Northwest Arkansas. It's a little drawing that they have every day, and it has Cincinnati [Ohio], St. Louis, Baltimore [Maryland], and wherever all the non-stop flights are. Sit you down in the middle of nowhere out there in NWA [Northwest Arkansas] airport; folks coming in to see Wal-mart or Tyson . . .

GH: Right.

RT: . . . those people. I thought I was interested in that. That would not be there if it wasn't for—I think the coming of Northwest Arkansas's newspaper up there was very interesting. And this is another thing: you're talking about the competition, because it heated up again up there.

GH: Yes.

RT: We got the Hussmans, the Stephenses, and the Waltons.

GH: Especially the Hussmans against the Stephenses.

RT: Yes.

GH: Stephens Media Group.

RT: Yes. Yes.

GH: Which used to be Donrey [Media Group].

RT: We kept—I noticed we were—I was on the phone more with Northwest Arkansas than I used to be the last couple of years that I was there. Another thing, too—just thinking about it—Northwest Arkansas's Airport, NWA—my concentration had been primarily on Little Rock National Airport and this, of course, came

along [and] came into operation. I do remember the biggest part that I had up there, before we got the staff up there, was covering the changes that were [made] at Drake Field. You know where—that was the old close end of that old airport right off Highway 71 there. One by one the carriers would leave there and go over to the new airport, even though it was much further out.

GH: Right.

RT: Now I guess it's essentially a private, university airport, and whatever else. There is no scheduled service there that I know of, and I could be wrong, but I think that's the way it is. I noticed, too, you talking about stories I covered. One was the Arkansas homegrown airline—which comes to mind now—Skyways, which evolved into Air Midwest, which is now part of, I believe, Mesa Air Group, or something. They still fly as U.S. Air. They have a contract with them, but I remember when they first got started and they were based at Drake Field in Fayetteville. We were talking about what got them started and what money was behind them and this, that, and the other. They were sold—they sold to somebody else, so there were a number of—not a number, but several companies that I wrote about that got their roots started in Arkansas that ended up being part of another group.

GH: Aside from Starr, are there any other newsroom personalities that stick out in your mind during your time there? A little more interesting folks?

RT: There were a lot of interesting folks in there. A photographer by the name of Robert Ike Thomas. I'd go back down and say, "Robert Ike, I need a photograph of so and so." And Robert Ike would say something like, "What for?" And I would say, "Well, number one because I want it." He'd say, "Okay." He'd say,

“Are you aware that “Style” or “Society” has also got a picture of him? Would that picture do?” And I’d say, “Depends on what the picture is of him doing. It may or may not fit my story.” He’d go get them, and I remember one time, whoever the gentleman was, fit right in. Robert Ike was always very quick to point out that. Sandy Miller Hays went on to be pretty high in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It was a pleasure working with her. We still communicate with each other. I don’t hear from Chuck Jones that often. Bob McCord, of course, I still keep up with directly. I haven’t talked to him in some time. I’m trying to think of who all came along. So many people came through there that—what is the— Tucker Carlson? Tucker lived in Cammack Village when he was here. There were times when I would ride the bus instead of drive my car, if I didn’t need my car that day. Tucker would come by my desk about 6:00 in the evening, bow tie and all, and say, “I’m going home. Are you riding or driving?” And I’d say, “I’m riding.” And he’d say, “Well, I’ll wait for you.” We would—here I was riding home with somebody that we see now fairly regularly on one of these Fox News or whoever . . .

GH: MSNBC or whichever.

RT: MSNBC or whichever. I never thought one way or the other, and the same way with—Lyndon Finney I always liked. He was the good go-between, between Starr if you didn’t want to—Starr stands out a great deal. Meredith Oakley—I saw Meredith the other day at [Pat] Walsh’s funeral. Let me tell you a Starr story. I was sitting over there—and this would have been on the second floor, over there in the corner. He came over, came around the corner there by the mailboxes. He was looking straight at me and I happened to look down and [say], “Oh, Lord.”

He got over there and he put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Thomas Randolph”—and I thought, “Oh, God, he never calls me that.” He said, “You’re the only person on this floor that should know this answer, and you better.” And I said, “Well, what?” He said, “Walter wants to know, when did Missouri Pacific Railroad become part of Union Pacific Railroad? When Did UP acquire MoPac?” He just stared at me. I said, “December 22, 1982.” His mouth kind of dropped open and he tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Good Man.” And I said, “I’m not through yet.” [Laughter] I said, “The merger was officially consummated at 2:22 p.m. Washington time.” He went away just shaking his head and I thought to myself, “Don’t let him ask me anything else.” [Laughter] It was one of those dates I remembered like Pearl Harbor, or like setting foot on the moon, or something like that. There was some kind of deal that they had about a rate that the paper had gotten for moving paper, or some kind of rate—whether or not Union Pacific was going to honor the rate, or something like that. Somebody, somewhere legally wanted to know that.

GH: Right.

RT: I often wonder how much I saved the paper with that answer. [Laughter]

GH: So you worked there just almost exactly twenty-five years?

RT: Full-time, yes. That’s not counting the little part-time with the—it was twenty-five to the date. Griffin Smith asked me, in March of 2001, had I given any thought to retiring, and I had. I had a health problem that wasn’t going away and my wife had not been real well. I was fully vested. I told him yes, so he sat down and talked to me about it. I talked to my wife over the weekend and talked to my son and his wife. I told Griffin, “May I do it my way?” And he said, “What is

your way?” I said, “This is the end of March, could I retire in July, specifically July 20?” And he said, “Why? Why that date?” I said, “That would be twenty-five years to the day that I set foot in this place.” Griffin said, “I don’t see why not.” That’s the way that worked. I just said I wanted something very distinct, you know, in there.

GH: In your twenty-five years there, did you ever give any thought to going anywhere else?

RT: Yes. I remember—I am trying to think of the editor’s name who was sent down here from Gannett. He was here a couple of years and then he was gone, but he was forever taking some of our people like Dave Wannemacher and . . .

GH: [Walker Lundy?] or . . .?

RT: No, it was before him. [I] can’t remember.

GH: McIlwaine came down . . .

RT: Yes, Bill MacIlwaine, I remember him.

GH: John Hanchette was over there for a while.

RT: Anyhow, Bob McCord introduced me to him in the lobby of Worthen Bank. It was payday and I was there depositing my check. He introduced me—they were on their way up to the Capitol Club, I guess, or something like that. And I said, “I’m the only one over”—I said, “I’m disappointed. I’m the only one over there that you never have invited to lunch.” Or something like that. He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well, you’ve hired everybody else, it seems like.” Bob made the comment that “But you didn’t hire the one you really need.” Or something like that. I had an offer or an inquiry about would I be interested in going to Memphis and working with the *Commercial Appeal*. I was not at that time—I

was pretty well settled here and liked what I was doing. Not making a whole lot of money, but I was happy with what I was doing. My wife had a decent job at the time. My son was in school, so I elected not to. There were frustrating times, as you well know. “Why did I get into this?” Or something like that. But I loved the newspaper work. I loved the newspaper. I still miss that part [of] it where when you hear a siren [and] you wonder what is going on. Just the other day I thought about that when we had that tragic fire, less than a block away from here, where this sixty-nine-year-old lady either suffocated or—they had two pictures in the paper of her about a week ago [or] a little over a week ago. I still miss the contacts day by day. In fact, I don’t know what it is about them, but I ran into somebody not too long ago at church and they said, “I haven’t seen your byline lately. Have you not had anything in the paper?” And I said, “No, I haven’t. I retired four years ago.” I still do some writing for the *Waterways Journal*, and I still do some writing for a couple of their river magazines. I am working on what we hope will be a small book on the Arkansas River since—not the development end of it, but what it has been like with the—what had it done for Arkansas and Oklahoma. We hadn’t fully decided how we are going to approach it yet. I’m just going back through some notes and talking to some people that are still around that can tell me what this river has meant, not only for people who use the barges, but for people that use the railroads that are getting you [a] very good rate because there is always the competitive presence of another carrier there that if that river wasn’t there, they’d be paying more for their goods and services than they are now, see.

GH: In wrapping this up, this is what you showed me before we started this interview,

I believe you said the first story you did for the *Democrat* was . . .

RT: It was a Sunday story. There may have been something little in the meantime.

GH: July 25, 1976, page 1D.

RT: Yes.

GH: The headline “Record Cargo Tonnage Moves on River in First Half of Year,” by Randy Tardy, *Democrat* business writer. It has a spot color graphic.

RT: Yes.

GH: And now, where is your last story?

RT: Well, let’s see. It would be. Yes.

GH: The last story is . . .

RT: It was also on a Sunday.

GH: July 21, 2001. This was Saturday.

RT: Saturday, Okay.

GH: Headline “Arkansas River Barge Shipments Drop Nine Percent Through June Corps Said,” by Randy Tardy, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Now, there is continuity there.

RT: There’s continuity and in-between there’s an interesting career. [I] covered a lot of bases. There was a story in the paper—if I may close out with this—in the paper a day or two ago about Boeing Company closing out a plant in Melbourne [Arkansas].

GH: Melbourne, yes.

RT: I did an early story on that plant and what they were doing up there. The plant has been there for years. They used to make doors for DC-9 Jets that McDonnell Douglas came out in. They were put there for a couple of reasons. The McDon-

nell Company—the McDonnell family in McDonnell Douglas was an Arkansas family. One was in banking here in Little Rock; the others went into the airline business and settled in St. Louis. Sandy McDonnell and a couple of the others—but they were native Arkansans, that company. The story that I reported at one time was the fact that they were appearing before a congressional committee headed by Wilbur D. Mills, who was then the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and represented Arkansas’s second congressional district. Somewhere along in the testimony the comment came out that the chair would favor if that company would put a plant somewhere in Arkansas. Lo and behold, McDonnell Douglas ended up with two plants in North Arkansas, one in Melbourne and one in Mountain Home, which was absorbed into the Melbourne plant many years ago. I remember going up there, traveling up there going up to—on vacation. I stopped by the plant, which was in a Quonset hut at the time. I went by to see the manager, because I had talked to him and he had said, “If you ever get up this way, stop by and I’ll show you around.” I stopped by and walked in there. I told [them] that I was from the *Democrat*, and I said “Is Mr. Clyde”— [I] can’t remember the man’s last name, Wheeler I think it was. I said, “Is he in?” And he said, “Yes. Now, who’d you say you were again?” I looked up on the wall and I said, “Tell him, I’m the one that wrote that story.” He had the story framed over there. I used a montage of all the little doors that they made up there—and they were for the bathroom door—the landing lights that get covered up when the airplane takes off, and anything—the doors that the landing gear wheels were on. They made the doors for the aircraft—interesting little story. They had trucks going two or three times a week between Melbourne and Long

Beach, California, which is where they assembled the big jets, but there is a little bit of Arkansas in all those jets. That was kind of my angle on the story, too.

And for a little town like that, that's a huge loss.

GH: Yes it is. All right, I think that about wraps it up.

RT: We've got about another thirty minutes, if we want to go two hours.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Geoffery Stark]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]