

Gazette Project

Interview with

Jerry Dhonau,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
3 March 2000

Interviewer: Ernest Dumas

Ernest Dumas: Okay, this is March 3, 2000, and this is Ernest Dumas, and I am talking to Jerry Dhonau, who was the last chief of the editorial pages for the *Arkansas Gazette* and a reporter before that. This is March 3rd, and we are at Jerry Dhonau's home. Jerry, first, I'd like to get your consent . . . and acquiescence for the use of this material by the archives at the University of Arkansas. You realize that this is going to be public information and scholars can access this.

Jerry Dhonau: I realize that, Ernie.

ED: All right, let's start with the beginnings. Where were you born? And if you could give me a little of your life history up to the point that you went to work at the *Gazette*.

JD: Okay. I'll capsule that. I was born in Little Rock at Baptist Hospital.

ED: Who were your parents?

JD: Charles Mitchell Dhonau and Lura Dhonau.

ED: What did your dad do?

JD: My dad worked for the Cotton Belt Railroad in North Little Rock, just across the

river. He settled damage claims for the railroad. And my mother was a housewife at that point. I had a brother who was about ten years older than I. He was killed in action in World War II. When I was born, we lived at 813 Adams Street.

ED: Was it over near Travelers Field?

JD: Yes. We could hear the crowds all the time; we could hear the lions at the zoo at night. You didn't have air conditioning, so you had to leave the windows up. So that's where we lived. It was quite different then, of course. I went by there recently just to see what it looks like now, and there's really no other word for it except slum.

ED: All these old neighborhoods changed, not only here, but my home, too, in the country.

JD: That's where I grew up, and we went to Lee Elementary School on 12th Street. I think the building is still there. It's no longer an elementary school. I walked to school about eleven blocks. Then I went to Westside Junior High School, which is, I believe, on West 14th Street. Back then, we had electric streetcars, so we would travel everywhere by streetcars. When I started to go to Westside, as I recall, I could ride the streetcar within two or three blocks of school. From there, I went to Little Rock High School, which is now Central High School.

ED: When did it change its name to Central?

JD: It changed its name to Central the year that Hall High School opened, whatever year that was. . . . In fact, it might have been the year of the Crisis, but I'm not sure. It changed its name because there was going to be another high school. I

went there and I got in journalism there because I was co-editor of the school newspaper in my senior year.

ED: Who was the journalism teacher there?

JD: Her name was Edna Middlebrooks.

ED: Edna Middlebrooks, I've heard of that name. Middlebrooks, right? With an "S"?

JD: I am not certain. She was from, I believe, Hope. In any case, she was a legendary figure there. A character. Sometime during the spring of the year, the question came up about naming the new field house, who it would be named for. And I wanted to name it for Riley Johns.

ED: Who was Riley Johns?

JD: Riley Johns was African-American, and he was the maintenance guy, very popular with the students. He looked after Tiger Stadium, and he had a partner — his wife. He was a father figure to some of the athletes there, and I got to know him pretty well. . . . One year, I was student manager, so that's how I got to know him.

ED: You were the student manager for the football team?

JD: For a while, but I got to know Riley Johns and had a high regard for him. Somehow, I thought they ought to give him recognition for all he had done through the years. The very idea, I think, of naming a building after a black man just gave them shudders. And the principal, Jess Mathews, a nice guy, was really nervous about that with the school board.

ED: Did you write an editorial about this?

JD: I wanted to write an editorial, but . . .

ED: You were editor of the paper, right?

JD: Yes. In any case, I wrote a column, and they wouldn't print it. She wouldn't print it. I was incensed by that. She didn't state that was the reason, but everybody knew the reason was that they weren't about to name or even propose to name a building for an African-American man.

ED: This was in 1953? '52?

JD: '52. In any case, we had a confrontation, and I told her, "Look, I'm the editor," and she said, "Well, I'm the publisher." So, she nixed the thing, and I resigned. So, the last part of that semester I was no longer co-editor of the paper.

ED: Did you continue to work for the paper? You were in journalism class, I guess. So, technically, you were on the paper.

JD: I think I was, technically, but I refused to be editor because it was just a matter of principle.

ED: Was there any indication that the principal directed her to do it?

JD: All my direct contact was with her, but she mentioned something about the fact the principal and the school board wouldn't hear of that. I got the distinct impression that it was extremely uncomfortable all around. I don't think they ever named it for anybody.

ED: I don't know.

JD: I forgot how that came out, but it was hushed.

ED: Did that sour you on journalism a little?

JD: No, it made me more committed because early in that year, my senior year, the

Arkansas Gazette and its sports editor, Orville Henry, had a practice of covering as many high school football games in the state as they could. One way they did that was to have two or three journalism students from Little Rock High School work there on Friday nights. Maybe she mentioned my name, but whatever, I went down and two or three others and worked part-time for the *Gazette* on Friday nights, taking information from high schools from all around the state and writing short pieces that got in the next morning. So I already had gotten a taste of real journalism, and that's what really was exciting. During the course of the fall, I was lucky enough that Orville asked me to come in on Saturday nights to do things like the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference games. As I recall, I did the same thing on basketball later, so I was involved as a senior in high school working on weekends and nights at the *Gazette* doing sports. That brings us back to the relationship at the high school. I don't want to leave the impression that I thought Jess Mathews was a racist. I liked Jess Mathews and saw him in subsequent years and thought a good deal of him, but the climate at that time, in '52, was not even as advanced as it was in '57, and we know what that was. I didn't carry on about it at that point. Before graduation and after, I think, a copy boy job opened up. We called them "copy boys" then; now it's sexist to say that, but back then you were a copy boy. So, I worked there some as a copy boy my senior year in high school. I would work in the evenings, then go home and go to high school.

ED: What did a copy boy do?

JD: The copy boy did just about everything anybody wanted done, particularly, the city editor, Bill Shelton. One of the things you did was go down to the bus stations and pick up copy that was sent from stringers around the state. There were three bus stations - one at Markham and Louisiana, one at Markham and Main, and there was one at Sixth and Broadway. So, you had to make the rounds of the bus stations. You'd carry copy from the newsroom back to the composing room. You would fill in on the switchboard, too, when the switchboard operator, Mary Grace, was gone.

ED: I remember Mary Grace.

JD: She was highly knowledgeable about everything going on in the building.

ED: She was legendary. She could track anybody down when you needed to get them on the phone.

JD: She could.

ED: I mean if you were a reporter and you were trying to track somebody down, Mary Grace would get on that thing, and she could, she would find them someplace.

JD: She would.

ED: She had ways she could do that, and nobody else could.

JD: And she would find you, too.

ED: She would find you, too.

JD: [Laughs]

ED: You couldn't hide from her. If Shelton needed you, or whatever, if you were on your day off, she'd, by God, find you.

JD: That's exactly right. So, anyway, the copy boys would go in on the switchboard, too. One of the other copy boys, by the way, was a fellow by the name of Eddie Kane, who later became president of the biggest bank in town. I stayed for journalism, he went with the money! [Laughs]

ED: Good training ground.

JD: Yes, it was a good training ground. There were miscellaneous duties you had to do - sharpen pencils and all that sort of thing. A.R. Nelson was managing editor. He told me, "Now, If you'll keep your ears and eyes open and your mouth shut, you'll learn something here." That was pretty much the philosophical approach that I had for a long time. Some of these dates may be a little muddled, but it was shortly after graduation from high school and I decided to go to Little Rock Junior College, where years later I taught part-time when it was UALR. A sports writing position then opened. So . . .

ED: At the *Gazette*?

JD: At the *Gazette*. So, what I did was go to Little Rock JC in the daytime and work at the *Gazette* sports department at night. And . . .

ED: What were you doing, covering games?

JD: Covering games, sometimes I'd work on the copy desk, editing copy and writing headlines. After I'd been doing general sports for a year or so, it occurred to me that one thing lacking was coverage of outdoor sports of any kind. There was none. I was fishing back then and I noticed there were thousands of fishing and hunting licenses, which was an indication of the interests of our readers. So, I

went to Orville and proposed that we start a Sunday page on outdoor news, so they helped me start doing that. I did other sports, too, but at least I got them started on that kind of coverage, which they continued. But I didn't do it but a year, a couple of years. When I finished at LRJC, a way to get a bachelor's degree was to go to Fayetteville. So I went up there, but it turned out that the *Gazette* had been using a fellow named Tom Dygard as their sports correspondent for the Razorbacks. He had just graduated and left.

ED: He later went with Associated Press, didn't he?

JD: He did and very successfully. At one point he was Tokyo Bureau Chief, as I recall, with AP. In any case, I did that at Fayetteville while I was going to school, which helped pay for things.

ED: You were the Razorback correspondent is what it amounts to . . .

JD: Yes, that's what it was. Of course, Orville was the main Razorback man, always has been. But I would file daily reports on football and basketball and whatever and be the daily correspondent. On game days, I would be the color guy. I would write the dressing room and the sideline stuff. Orville, of course, was writing his great pieces on the game up in the press box. That went on till I finished at Fayetteville.

ED: Tell me a little bit about Orville Henry. What kind of guy was Orville to work for? He, of course, was a legend. . . .

JD: Yes. Orville was nice to me and was one of those people who gave me a start. Orville was pretty exacting in his coverage, but he didn't say a lot; he just worked

a lot. Didn't visit a whole lot.

ED: Orville was very fast, wasn't he?

JD: Oh, Orville was extremely fast, typed with two fingers — peck, peck, peck — hunt and peck. I've never seen anybody that fast.

ED: Anyway, you did that the better part of two years . . . ?

JD: I did that all the time I was at the university, and I didn't finish until January of '57. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't take journalism there. I took a double major, history and English. I only had two journalism courses the whole time, and those were two electives.

ED: Did you work on *The Traveler*?

JD: Yes, I worked on *The Traveler* for a while. I was sports editor, I think. But I had to give that up because I just had too big a load, carrying a college load and working for the *Gazette*, and I just couldn't do it anymore, couldn't do it right. So I turned it over to somebody else. I worked a little bit on the yearbook. Arkansas had a game against Ole Miss at Oxford, and we were trying to figure out how to cover it, so the *Traveler* editor said, "I know what I'll do. I'll just charter a plane." In any case, I said, "Okay." So we got on this little plane. The editor, I remember --- really got a kickback from that later from the administration because he'd chartered an airplane to go to Oxford. I remembered the trip because it was just a cow pasture where we landed and took off. You had to make sure the cows got out of the way. I covered the Razorback games in Texas as a color guy. Also, during that period, the NBC broadcast people asked me to serve

as spotter. The toughest job of all was at Texas A&M because the press box was so high off the field that just seeing the number on a jersey was difficult, to try to spot those games. After I finished there, I just thought, “Well, maybe I’ll be a sports writer at the *Gazette*.” It turned out that Orville didn’t have any openings at that point. It turned out that Nelson had an opening on the city staff. So, Nelson said, “Why don’t you do that?” In fact, it was Nelson who steered me away from sports.

ED: Well, had you contacted them for a job before you graduated?

JD: Yes. I had talked to Orville, I think, and, as I recall, Nelson, too. Nelson proposed to give me the city reporting job. He said, “Well, we’ve got an opening on city side, why don’t you do that?” I said, “Okay.”

ED: Did you talk to Shelton? Did you first interview with Shelton?

JD: I’m trying to remember that. I remember that Nelson seemed to be the main figure. I’m sure I did talk to Shelton, but I don’t recall it. Anyway, I went to work as a general assignment reporter. General assignment meant anything. For example, a few months later, a fellow named Gene Fretz who put out the Sunday Section . . .

ED: It’d be called the Sunday magazine section, but . . .

JD: Sunday magazine.

ED: . . . but, actually, it was a . . . feature section.

JD: It was a feature section, exactly.

ED: Gene Fretz, F-R-E-T-Z, as I recall.

JD: Correct. Gene Fretz. Tall guy with a speech impediment.

ED: Yes.

JD: . . . Anyway, he had to go on vacation or something, and they needed somebody to fill in back there. If you're on general assignment, you get sent everywhere. I happened to be back there working that week when there was an opening in sports. And Orville said, "Well, here it is." Nelson came back and he tried to steer me away from it. I guess he felt there was better opportunity. I haven't regretted it since, but I think Orville got a little ticked about it. He was never as friendly to me since. That was the end of my sports writing. No, it wasn't the exact end of my sports writing, come to think of it, because that fall, they pressed me into service, doing some color on some football games. I remember going down to Rice, in Houston, to do that one for them because they were shorthanded and I had done it before.

ED: Did you still have to write Friday night football? Because when I went to work there as a reporter in 1960 on Friday nights for years and years and years a lot of us on the general assignment staff and even after I went to the Capitol, we went down on Friday nights and wrote up those high school games.

JD: Yes. Right. You'd get a hour or two overtime.

ED: You'd get about two hours overtime.

JD: I've forgotten how long I did that. I did it for a little while.

ED: I did it for fifteen years.

JD: The challenge there was thinking up enough verbs.

ED: Yes. Yes. Sometimes, we got to making up nicknames for players and got Orville upset.

JD: [Laughs] Now, I didn't do that!

ED: Our ethics sometimes wavered and . . .

JD: You may have been doing that a little after I did. Anyway, I remember the verbs, because sometimes I did a little desk work, too.

ED: You were a general assignment reporter, starting in about January '57.

JD: Yes.

ED: Do you recall who the other reporters on the staff at that time were?

JD: Yes. Some of them were Jerry Jones, Ray Moseley, . . .

ED: And Jerry Jones had come over from Channel Four, I think; he'd been a tv reporter or something?

JD: One of the channels. My recollection was it was Eleven.

ED: Maybe it was Eleven. Yes.

JD: But . . .

ED: But he was a general assignment reporter also?

JD: Yes. And so was Moseley.

ED: Had Jerol Garrison started yet?

JD: I'm not sure that Jerol had started yet.

ED: I think he came a little later.

JD: I think he may have.

ED: Roy Reed, probably.

JD: Roy was there then or came later?

ED: I think he started about '56.

JD: He was there then.

ED: He was probably covering North Little Rock.

JD: He covered North Little Rock, I remember, for quite a while there. They had some older guys, too. Gee whiz. Ken Parker was there, but I've forgotten whether he was reporting or if he was on the state desk at that time. Some names may come to me . . .

ED: Matilda Tuohey.

JD: Matilda Tuohey was there. Sam Harris was on Capitol, I think.

ED: Okay.

JD: He had earlier been city editor before Shelton.

ED: Ernie Valachovic?

JD: Ernie was there, I think, at that time.

ED: He was probably pretty new himself.

JD: I don't know specifically if he was there the exact time I went in the newsroom, but I think he was. I think he was.

ED: I think he'd come up from the *Texarkana Gazette*.

JD: That sounds right. Sounds right. A guy named Jim Meadows. But let me go back just a little. During the Friday night football period and my senior year in high school, one of the others was a fellow named Wes Pruden, who is now editor of the *Washington Times*. And his father was Rev. Wesley Pruden. So, Wes and I

were two of the young ones doing that stuff on Friday nights. I've forgotten exactly what pattern he followed after high school. It seems like he was a reporter for a while at the *Gazette*.

ED: I think I've seen by-lines. He was a reporter for a while, maybe, in '56 or so. I think he had left by 1957.

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

ED: His daddy, Wesley Pruden, Sr., played a big role in the desegregation crisis. He was one of the leaders of the segregationist forces, the White Citizens' Council.

JD: Yes, he did.

ED: In '57, '58, '59 . . .

JD: My recollection is that Wes had gone to the *Commercial Appeal* then.

ED: I think so. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, and then, I don't know where he went after that. He wound up at the *National Observer* . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . . when it was a national newspaper published by the Dow Jones Company.

JD: Lasted a few years.

ED: Wound up later as the managing editor at the *Washington Times*.

JD: And now editor.

ED: Yes.

JD: Yes. So, he was there about that time. Let's see . . .

ED: Jim Standard, was he there?

JD: Jim Standard, yes, he was. He worked in sports, and he was also a copy boy. He had somewhat the same pattern that I had and ended up in Oklahoma.

ED: Did he work as a general assignment reporter, too, for a while?

JD: I don't recall. He could have. One of the reasons I remember Wes was that when he was at *Washington Times* as managing editor, I got a large envelope in the mail one day. It was from Wes Pruden, whom I hadn't talked to in years, and it had a photograph in it with a note. It showed us in a fishing boat on Lake Conway. Somebody had taken our picture and he'd had that back in his files. He said he was cleaning out his files and moving to a new office when he came across that photo; he thought I might like to have it.

ED: You had proof that you knew this famous man.

JD: Oh, yes [laughs]! . . . Subsequently, I've seen him in a couple of places around the country, a hotel lobby in Salt Lake City and perhaps St. Paulo. Let's see, that brings us to what?

ED: You were a general assignment reporter during that first six months or so of 1957.

JD: That's right.

ED: And then that fall, of course, was a pivotal time in your career . . .

JD: Absolutely.

ED: . . . as well as in the history of the state. When Faubus called out the National Guard to prevent the integration of Central High School.

JD: That's right.

ED: Tell me about your role in that coverage. You were, as I recall, stationed at

Central. You went out to cover Central High itself, the activities at the school.

JD: Yes. Every day.

ED: How did it come about that you got that assignment?

JD: Well, I don't know. My father was building a lakeside cabin out at a lake west of town, and I'd gone out there to help him on that Labor Day weekend. When I got home late that afternoon, I got a telephone call from the office. I think it was Shelton.

ED: Would this have been on a Sunday?

JD: This would've been Monday.

ED: Monday.

JD: Labor Day.

ED: Labor Day itself.

JD: And he said, "I would like for you to come to work. We have a report or an indication that the Ku Klux Klan may burn a cross at Central, on a lot at Central High School tonight. And I would like for you to go out there and remain out of sight, very low key, and see what happens. If nothing happens, just come on in the office."

Ed: Now had it already been divulged that Faubus had called out the National Guard?

JD: No.

ED: That happened on Labor Day?

JD: I was out there earlier that evening.

ED: Okay.

JD: So, as it turned out they assigned a photographer, Gene Prescott, and a reporter, me, to stake it out. We were in separate cars and didn't call any attention to ourselves. I parked on Park Street across from the school grounds, facing north, and just sat in my car in the dark, keeping an eye on things. I may have even driven around the school once or so. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. They were supposed to, I think, start school the next day, but nothing out of the ordinary happened that evening. Nothing happened. So, following my instructions, along about 9:00 or 9:30, it must've been about 9:30, I said, "Well, I'll just go back to the office and see what's what." Just as I walked in the office, Faubus was coming on television, telling about calling out the National Guard to Central High. Either I did it on my own or somebody told me, "Get on back out there," which I did immediately. They were still rolling in.

ED: So, the National Guard was coming up to Central High School? The troops were coming up to the school?

JD: Yes. Still unloading.

ED: What time of the evening was this?

JD: This would've been 10:00 or 10:30, something like that. It was amazing. I tried to talk to the National Guardsmen there, and I tried to talk to Jess Mathews, who happened to be there. And who was his deputy principal, Harry Carter? I knew them, of course, having been a student there just a few years before. There wasn't a whole lot they either knew or could tell me, and the National Guard wouldn't say much. But the very fact that they were there was self-evident. To verify that

for the paper — we didn't have the communication then that we have now — there wasn't a phone anywhere around. So, there was a two-story house there on 14th and Park.

ED: 14th and Park? I lived there for two or three years.

JD: So, you're familiar with it, then on the north . . .

ED: 1960, '61.

JD: . . . northeast corner . . .

ED: Northeast corner. . . next door to a greenhouse.

JD: Yes, right. I went up and knocked on the door and asked them if I could use their telephone. They said, "Yes." I don't know if it was upstairs or downstairs, but, anyway, they let me use their telephone to call down to the *Gazette* and give them the first bulletin on it. I reported what I could. I don't know if it was directly to Shelton — it must have been directly to Shelton or somebody doing rewrite. So, they got that quick early lead in the first edition, as I recall. And I stayed out there to get information and went back in the office and wrote a more complete story for the final edition. At that point, Shelton said, "Well, go out there tomorrow morning," which I did, and I was told to stay out there from then on every day. There were some hairy experiences.

ED: So you were out there every day for what period of time?

JD: Several weeks.

ED: It would've been till after President Eisenhower federalized the troops.

JD: Oh, yes. That was a chilling day when the 101st marched in.

ED: Tell me about that.

JD: The whole complexion of the thing changed then because, boy, you knew the 101st Airborne was in charge. I mean, there was no nonsense. There were police barriers placed at different places at 14th and 16th. And these guys did lower their bayonets and march down the street. People had to get out of the way real fast. Everybody knew they meant business. It was a different ball game after that. The crowds knew it, too.

ED: Were you there the morning when Elizabeth Eckford did not get the message? Elizabeth Eckford was one of the Little Rock Nine, the nine black students who were the first African-American students at the school. She apparently one morning did not get the message that they were not supposed to go to school that morning, and she went up to the school all alone in the crowd of hecklers. Were you there that morning? I think I've seen you in photos . . .

JD: Yes, I was there, and it was one of the most chilling experiences I've had in journalism to watch that. She came, you know, just a little girl, walking up and there where, for lack of a better word, a lot of rednecks were. She walked up to the corner of 14th and Park, and there was no way for her to cross the National Guard line, so she started walking down the street or the sidewalk. I forgot where they set up the lines, but, anyway, she started walking south on Park, which bordered the front of the school. Every once in a while, she'd turn to her right as if she could go on in the school; each time, they'd close ranks. She just kept going. It wasn't very far down the line where the hecklers started. I was walking

along with her, but off to the side so I wouldn't be part of it. The heckling continued, and they just would not let her into the school.

ED: Were they shouting things like "Nigger" and . . .

JD: Yes. A lot of epithets. And the girl who was in the famous picture of the heckler, she was very visible.

ED: You know that she has now recanted, and she and Elizabeth Eckford are friends.

JD: I saw that. In fact, I saw Elizabeth Eckford, here a couple or three years ago and had a brief conversation. In any case, I followed her all the way down. She appeared to not know what to do, so she went over to the bus stop at 16th and Park, on the northeast corner . . . There was a bench for people waiting to catch the city bus, and so she sat down there. A lot of the crowd was getting even rougher and shouting. I think that was the only time I lost a little bit of my objectivity. This was just outrageous. Several of us cared for her safety as she was waiting for that bus. There was a woman, a white woman, who came up and sat down with her. Her name was Grace Lorch. As they were sitting on the bench, the hecklers weren't relenting. So several reporters, including me, gathered around them, which formed a little bit of a shield. I remember Paul Welch of *Life Magazine* and Benjamin Fine of *The New York Times*, and two or three others. We formed a little bit of a barrier. Eventually, the bus came and she got on the bus and left. So, that was a dark moment in my view for the community.

ED: Was there the same sense when the black journalist from Memphis was beaten

up?

JD: Yes, was it Memphis or Baltimore?

ED: I'm not sure.

JD: There may have been two of them. *Baltimore Afro American*, I remember was there. I was down there at 16th Street at that time. I saw them chasing him, going east, . . . and I saw one of them swinging at him. I saw him just before and just after. I didn't see much of the actual beating in that area.

ED: Will Counts was there and got some great photos of that incident.

JD: Yes, he did. Gee, a lot went on there.

ED: How was that personally for you? As a reporter, were you widely identified as being a *Gazette* reporter or did anybody know who you were out there?

JD: Some of the Central High mothers did, the same ones that Bob Considine wrote were "slatternly housewives." They took great offense at that and gave him a tough time particularly. Yes, they knew who I was.

ED: Did they give you much grief?

JD: A little. A little, but they gave more grief to the out-of-town reporters.

ED: Considine was writing for the . . .

JD: International News Service.

ED: . . . International News Service at that time. Famous journalist, I guess.

JD: Oh, yes. He was a world famous figure. Right after he wrote that, they got so ticked at him. There was a bank of glass telephone booths that the telephone company had set up on the corner of 16th and Park. Oh, I don't know how many,

at least four. Anyway, he was in one booth and I was in another booth and Relman Morin from AP was in another booth, and somebody else. The crowd was so incensed at that point about reporters that some of them came over and started rocking these booths. I think that may have been as a result of “slatternly housewives,” but I’m not sure at this point.

ED: Now, were you in one of the booths then? They were shaking your booth as well?

JD: Well, yes, they were attached.

ED: Oh, I see. You didn’t get any calls at night, abusive calls or threats or . . . ?

JD: I did get two or three, yes. They would call and say something real quick.

ED: And hang up.

JD: Yes. The FBI wanted to interview us. I was at one intersection, and Ray Moseley was at the other intersection. He was more down at 14th and I was down at 16th, but There were allegations at one point about Benjamin Fine inciting the crowd. A lot of people were saying, “Well, Fine is inciting all of this trouble.” He was trying to get them to do this, get them to do that. I got a call late at night, and it was the FBI. I didn’t know whether I should talk to them or not, but it turned out they had checked with A.R. Nelson first to see if it was all right. So I checked with Nelson. Nelson said, “It’s all right. You can talk. Go ahead and talk to them.” Their main inquiry at that point was whether I had observed Benjamin Fine inciting any trouble. I told them, “No, none whatsoever.” There’s no truth to any rumors or allegations that he was. I remember that much. And then they interviewed me again down at the *Gazette* office, back in the library,

maybe twice, though I'm not sure. It was only on what I observed out there, so I wasn't giving anything away. I would have written the same thing and had written the same thing. But each time Nelson said do it, so I did it. At one point, I was assigned to cover some kind of gathering the Central High mothers were having at a house. It may have been Mrs. Jackson's house, I don't know . . .

ED: Margaret Jackson of the Central High Mothers' League.

JD: Yes.

ED: President or something.

JD: Right. So I got out there to cover it. It was really more of a meeting to lambast and try to embarrass the *Gazette*. I've forgotten the particulars of that time.

ED: So, they harassed you a little bit?

JD: Yes, there was harassment. Yes. But beyond that, there was nothing.

ED: Now, Margaret Jackson was the one who came up to the *Gazette* and socked Bill Shelton twice.

JD: Right. Right.

ED: Same woman.

JD: Yes, same woman and, I guess, had I been a little belligerent, she might have done it at the house that day, I don't know. One of the things I was able to do during the coverage period, I would always be in touch with Shelton during the day when we got telephones out there

ED: So you'd call Shelton periodically . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . . during the day and tell him what's going on

JD: Right. And I remember at some point in the very early days, Shelton said, "I got a call from so and so at *Newsday*. They want to see if they can interview one of the students." And I said, "Well, they've not been available for interviews on anything."

ED: These are one of the black students?

JD: Yes. So, I found out where one of them lived. And it wasn't too far from the school. Right after school, I went to his house, knocked on the door, and . . .

ED: Was this Ernest Green or . . . ?

JD: No, this was Robert, uh, what was the name?

ED: Terrence Roberts.

JD: I believe it was Terrence Roberts. I told him what I was doing, and that we'd like to get his version of things. All he had to do was tell me, and I would put it down pretty much as told to, but he was very quiet. He wasn't very talkative. He'd talk a little bit, but as a high school student, he'd been through a lot, so I was surprised he would talk that much. Anyway, I did a piece "as told to," and we ran it on the high page.

ED: Which was page one of the B section.

JD: Yes.

ED: The second section of the paper.

JD: Right.

ED: And *Newsweek* also . . .

JD: *Newsday*.

ED: *Newsday*, okay.

JD: Later, Bill McIlwain served a short period as editor of the *Gazette*.

ED: Was he at *Newsday* at that time?

JD: He was at *Newsday*, and he, I think, was the guy who even instigated the interview.

ED: McIlwain, by the way, is spelled M-C-I-L-W-A-I-N. He comes along in the 1980s as the editor of the *Gazette*.

JD: For about a year.

ED: . . . for about a year as the editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*.

JD: Editor, I think.

ED: But that time he was an editor of some sort at *Newsday* on Long Island.

JD: Yes.

ED: So.

JD: One of the things that gave the crisis flavor for the *Gazette* was a lot of out-of-town correspondents were there, and they used the *Gazette* newsroom as a central place. When one of the staff members wasn't using a typewriter, they'd come over and use that typewriter. We didn't have laptops then; they hadn't been invented. But outside reporters worked there a lot. Across the street in a building on the second floor was more or less a press club. That also was a center. People would retire there at night. That was also a center for the *Gazette*. They later may have called it the Press Club, I'm not sure.

ED: Well, you had some famous names along there.

JD: Yes.

ED: You mentioned some already - Bernard Fine, who was the education writer for the *New York . . .*

JD: No, Benjamin Fine.

ED: Benjamin Fine, education writer for the *New York Times*, Bob Consadine of the International News Service, Relman Morin of the Associated Press. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage there.

JD: Right.

ED: You had Sander Vanocur, I guess.

JD: Sander came a little later.

ED: Sander Vanocur of CBS. Was he with CBS?

JD: No, he was NBC.

ED: NBC.

JD: Now, just before him was John Chancellor.

ED: Okay.

JD: NBC. I remember him well because we were around each other quite a bit during those times. He was the first NBC reporter there. When this crisis first broke out, there were no facilities in Little Rock for direct transmission of television live. So what NBC did, the first few days anyway, was fly Chancellor to Oklahoma City on a daily basis, late in the afternoon, so he could be over there and be on the Huntley, or whatever the nightly news was then, to give his report.

ED: The Huntley-Brinkley show, I guess.

JD: Yes. Was it Huntley-Brinkley then?

ED: I don't know.

JD: It probably was at that point. Yes. But it was the same thing that Brokaw does now. It was a little later that Sander Vanocur took over from Chancellor. Which reminds me of another little aside. A lot of them hung out at the press club. One night, we were talking about what had been happening out there. And Jimmy Karam, who was a local clothier and friend of the governor, was out there and some people thought he was inciting the crowd. There was some controversy over what was going to happen, whether he would be indicted by the Grand Jury for inciting riots. Chancellor and I got in a long discussion about all of this, and we ended up making a \$5 bet. I bet that he would be indicted, and Chancellor bet that he would not be indicted. I lost. But . . . Chancellor was long gone then. I never saw him after, so . . .

ED: You never had to pay up?

JD: I never had to pay up. I would've paid him if I had seen him.

ED: So, the *Gazette* newsroom was a nerve center for the coverage.

JD: Yes.

ED: You had a lot of national press . . .

JD: Oh, yes.

ED: . . . in the building all the time, and . . .

JD: Oh, yes. Frank Reynolds of ABC. There was . . . Harry Reasoner of . . .

ED: CBS.

JD: CBS. All the major papers. *New York Herald Tribune*. Oh, Homer Bigart from the *Times* was there.

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

ED: So, Homer Bigart from the *New York Times* was around here?

JD: Yes, and I'll try to recall some others if I can. I remember their papers more than I remember, maybe, some names. There was Bill Somebody from the *New York Daily News*; there was, I don't know, *Toronto Star*. All the big papers had people here.

ED: You were at Central High School every day, covering events from early in the morning till school was out and things subsided for the day. You kept Shelton informed during the day and then you came back in late afternoon and knocked out your story.

JD: Yes.

ED: The principal coverage, I guess, would've been you and Ray Moseley handling the developments. By that time, Ernest Valachovic was at the Capitol. He was covering Faubus at the Capitol.

JD: Most of it.

ED: Everybody, I guess, got roped in. This story was so large that . . .

JD: Oh, yes.

ED: . . . other members of the staff covered aspects of this thing, but I think you and

Moseley and, to some extent, Valachovic were the main reporters?

JD: Yes. As it was winding down a little bit, Moseley was less out there than at the Capitol.

ED: The Capitol and, I guess, in the courts, too.

JD: When things subsided enough, I was probably the only *Gazette* reporter there. So, at that point, I guess you'd say that Ernie and I covered the bulk of it. But other people were involved, too.

ED: When did you stop going to Central High every day? I know there was a story every day for some months.

JD: It was not terribly long after the 101st Airborne got there because things really quieted down after that.

ED: There was no point in being out there to report that nothing happened today.

JD: No. They were not out in the streets rioting or anything like that, and there was at least some sense of normalcy at that point. Although we might have been out there a short time after that. That's generally the end of it.

ED: So, you come back to the newsroom and you were a general assignment reporter. After that, you began to write other things, I guess. You were no longer just a desegregation crisis reporter after that?

JD: That's correct. Of course, I covered it on certain occasions. For example, there was an explosion at the school board office. General Walker was still in charge of the federal operation here.

ED: General Edwin A. Walker.

JD: Edwin A. Walker. I remember covering an explosion at the school board office and going to Walker's office that night to get information, talk to him. Let me regress a little bit. This is something I'd wondered about and had intended to ask Bill Shelton about: what the *Gazette* actually knew, what Ashmore knew, and how much he may have passed on about events leading up to the events. In retrospect, I've wondered because some weeks before this happened at Central High, in the summer, I was assigned to go down to Fort Polk, Louisiana to do some stories on the Arkansas National Guard training. I wondered if it wasn't to get some reporter familiar with the National Guard because something might be coming up. Anyway, as far as I was concerned, the city desk got the information that Faubus was going to close the school or something like that, take some kind of action. The rumors were rampant, but they hadn't been able to talk to Faubus. So, Shelton told me, "Go out to the Governor's Mansion and ask him about this."

ED: This would've been before Labor Day?

JD: Before, yes. Apparently, some intelligence had come in to Ashmore or somebody, which I was not made privy to. I was to go talk to Faubus. Well, at the Mansion, I knocked on the door or rang the doorbell. Security was not what it is now. One of his aides came to the door, and I told him who I was and that I needed to see the governor a few minutes to ask him these questions. I was from the *Gazette*. He said, "Well, I don't think the governor will see you, but just wait here." So, he shut the door and went back in. When he came out, he said, "You can't see the governor." I said, "Well, my instructions are to sit here on the door step until he

does see me.” That’s what Shelton told me, so I did. I told him that. He came back and said, “Well, he’ll see you a few minutes.” So, he let me in and we walked back. You walk in the foyer there, and then there’s kind of a living room on the left and then there’s a door, and you go on back to a library or something.

ED: Yes.

JD: That’s where he was. He sat down, but he was very, very tight lipped. He wouldn’t confirm or deny anything.

ED: You were asking if there . . .

JD: I was able to see him, but wasn’t able to get anything out of him. The office knew something vague was going to go on, so, therefore, I couldn’t ask something specific. It was more of a fishing expedition, but he was coy, as Faubus always was. At least I was able to get in to see him, but he was not going to tell the *Gazette* anything at that point, although the rumors were out that he was going to do something.

ED: Tell me about Ashmore. Did he have any control over the news coverage at that time, as far as you could tell? Of course, he was turning out editorials nearly every day, but was he directing news coverage?

JD: If he was, he was doing it through Nelson and Shelton. He didn’t come directly to us. There was only one time I recall. It was real early in the crisis. I came in that afternoon, and Ashmore – Shelton may have been there – but Ashmore had me and maybe Moseley and Nelson, back to his office. We talked about what had gone on there that day, and that’s when he laid down the law. He said he didn’t

want us to refer to the people on the streets as a mob. He said don't write "mob" because he felt that would incite them even more if we wrote "mob." So, it was a "crowd." That didn't last terribly long. After more misbehavior, it became a "mob" in the *Gazette*. But that's the only direct involvement I have any direct knowledge of.

ED: When he was writing an editorial, did he come back each day and talk to reporters: "What happened out there today?" – before he would write his editorials?

JD: Not really. Not really. He may have passed the day briefly or something like that, but, no, he didn't. Didn't at all.

ED: Okay, so, forward to 1958. Were you there during '58 and '59 as well?

JD: No. I left. I was gone during that time. I left in September of '58. All right, there's some stuff right up to that, that led up to the closing . . .

ED: That Labor Day bombing.

JD: Yes.

ED: The Labor Day bombings would have been in early September, I guess, of '58.

JD: Yes. And it was a short time after that that I left. I went to Columbia University graduate school. So, I was out of town from about, roughly, mid September on.

ED: So, you go to work on your master's in journalism at Columbia University in New York in September of '58. Why did you do that?

JD: I don't know. I just thought I'd like to do that, and in the spring I had sent in an application. . . . I just wanted to do it.

ED: Okay.

JD: So I just thought I'd like to do it, and they accepted me. About the second day I was up there, they had a reception for the faculty and their students, and some of the local New York news figures. I was there talking to the associate dean, Richard Baker, when Richard Watts, who was from the *New York Post*, came up. He introduced me to Watts and said I was from the *Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock. He said, "You know, in one room here we were considering him for a Pulitzer Prize, and in another room, his application arrived to come to school here. So we decided just to admit him." [Laughs] So, that's how that came about.

ED: Speaking of the Pulitzer Prize, were you in the newsroom when you got the word that the *Gazette* had won the Pulitzer Prize, the two Pulitzer Prizes? Do you remember that day?

JD: I don't remember a whole lot about that day except there was a lot of jubilation. You know, I hesitate to repeat this because I'm not sure, but I think that was the day that Ashmore invited a few of us back to his office and he pulled out of his desk drawer – we weren't supposed to have it in the building — a bottle of Irish whiskey. I'm pretty sure that was the occasion.

ED: Sounds like that would've been the occasion.

JD: Yes, his office was next to J.N. Heiskell's, so he was being very careful about that because Heiskell didn't like liquor. Beyond that, I don't recall a lot.

ED: Harry Ashmore won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing and the *Gazette* won a Pulitzer Prize for Community Service?

JD: It's their gold medal for – yes, it's essentially for news coverage.

ED: For service to the community by its coverage of that event. I suppose you felt a great deal of pride at that point.

JD: Of course!

ED: . . . being part of that Pulitzer Prize winning team.

JD: And the paper, yes, that's right.

ED: Let me ask you, how important to you, personally, and to your staff, was the *Gazette's* editorial stance during that period? A courageous stance that cost the *Gazette* a great deal of circulation, a great deal of advertising revenue. Was that an inspiration to you as a reporter?

JD: It was. That was an extraordinary time. The *Gazette*, then as subsequently, was very traditional in that it separated news and editorial. It's something I am still a traditionalist about. There was very little talk between the two or anything. But I think the news reports were pretty straight stuff. That was something that was really important to me, regardless of what the editorial policy was — to just try to tell it straight and fair, give a straight fair account, which I hope I did. But the fact that the paper also editorially was taking what we thought, at least what I thought, was the right stance was important. Now, there were a couple of reporters there who didn't think so. But, yes, in fact, it was a source of great satisfaction. I think it is what welded the *Gazette* into what it was for a number of years. People felt fiercely loyal to it largely because of what we had done both editorially and in our news coverage. We took a great deal of satisfaction in doing

“the right thing.”

ED: You were at Columbia a year?

JD: Yes.

ED: You got a master’s degree in journalism at Columbia, which would’ve been in . . .

JD: ‘59

ED: And then, what? You did not come back to the *Gazette* at that time.

JD: Well, actually, I did. I had gone on leave of absence to go up there, so they had a job for me. While I was up there, some opportunities came up. One was, I recall, at the Associated Press in New York. They needed somebody to come in and work part time. I went down and talked to them, and they were going to hire me with the idea that when I graduated, I would go regular. When they found out I was on leave of absence from a member paper, they said, “No.” So, that was over. I talked briefly to the *Times*, but all they were interested in at that point was another science writer, and they told me to go elsewhere and get some science experience and then they’d be interested. The *Minneapolis Tribune* executive editor was there recruiting, and he left me with an open invitation. They paid well. But I felt I had an obligation to come back here at least for a while. So, I left that open and I came back here.

ED: May or June of ‘59.

JD: Yes. I stayed here as a reporter for several months. In the meantime, at Columbia I had won the Robert E. Sherwood Award, which was a grant from his will to study or to research and write on national affairs, so I had to use that in some way.

So, I struck a deal with the *Minneapolis Tribune*. I could be in their Washington bureau for a project and pay my debt by covering some stuff for them, too, in Washington. So, I left here and went to Washington for a while for the *Tribune*, and then I went to work for them in Minneapolis.

ED: So you were in the Washington Bureau for the *Minneapolis Tribune*?

JD: Yes.

ED: And the *Star* was . . .

JD: An afternoon paper.

ED: The *Star* was an afternoon paper.

JD: The *Tribune* morning.

ED: And they later merged. You were a general assignment reporter there?

JD: I was on general assignment most of the time; I did some police, and then I went on kind of half and half: . . . half-time police, half-time general assignment.

That's where I first talked to Walter Mondale, I think, on the phone. Joyce and I married in that time. We were married in Little Rock and went back up there. It was in late fall, I believe, that I got a phone call. It was A.R. Nelson, and winter was setting in up there.

ED: Winter in Minneapolis?

JD: Yes.

ED: This would've been in 1960?

JD: Late '60, yes. And he said, "Are you interested in coming back here to the *Gazette*?" I said, "Well, maybe." One plum he held out was that he would make

me assistant city editor.

ED: He wasn't rigid about it. It wasn't an offer, but he talked about assistant city editor.

JD: Yes. That was just one of the things mentioned. I've forgotten the details. Another freezer box winter was about to descend and the temptation got the better of me. I said, "Okay, I'll come back." By the way, my desk mate at Minneapolis was Carl Rowan. Back then, the desks were right together and you had to share a telephone, so he and I shared except he wasn't there most of the time. He was out on some grand assignment.

ED: Carl Rowan, the great African-American reporter and, later, a widely syndicated columnist. The *Gazette* later ran his column.

JD: Yes, we did.

ED: So he was your desk mate there for a while.

JD: Yes, for a while.

ED: So, you come back to the *Gazette* in the fall or winter of 1960. What did you do when you came back?

JD: Went back on general.

ED: Back on general assignment.

JD: And . . .

ED: And then to city hall.

JD: It may have been as long as a year after that I was assigned a beat, city hall, which also meant at that time relief for the courthouse beat and, occasionally, relief for

federal building or even North Little Rock.

ED: Matilda Tuohey had been the city hall reporter, I think . . .

JD: Yes. And, let's see. You came there in '58, I believe.

ED: No, I came in June of 1960. So, I'd been there three or four months, I think, when you came back.

JD: Okay, well, you were at the Capitol some, weren't you then or not?

ED: No, I was general assignment . . . and police and crap desk.

JD: Well, . . . we all did everything.

ED: . . . a variety of things.

JD: I even went out to the Capitol a little.

ED: Yes. I didn't go out to the Capitol until 1965.

JD: But you went on a full-time basis there.

ED: Pretty much, except in '65 I went out to cover the legislature, in January '65, and after that legislative session. Shelton left me out there with Ernie Valachovic full time at the Capitol. Between '60 and '65, I was on the general assignment staff. So, how long were you at city hall?

JD: I was there a long time. It seemed like a long time. Perhaps four years.

ED: Several years.

JD: It was until '65, and that's when an opening came up on the editorial page.

ED: Who left? Was it Joe Stroud?

JD: No, it was Pat Owens.

ED: I think he succeeded Joe Stroud.

JD: And then I came after Pat.

ED: Okay, Pat Owens went to Detroit.

JD: My recollection is he went to Detroit as a labor reporter.

ED: So, how did that happen that you went to the editorial page?

JD: I don't know. I'd never thought about going into editorial; I was always, still am, really news oriented.

ED: The same thing happened to me. I didn't have any idea I was going to write editorials.

JD: Yes, same thing. My instincts are still pretty much in reporting. But, anyway, word was out that Pat was leaving. I got to thinking there may be a little more money in that. [Laughs] In that time that would come in handy.

ED: You were probably making \$135, \$140, \$150 a week?

JD: You know, it may have been. I just don't recall the figure.

ED: Not a lot of money.

JD: Not a lot of money, and I thought maybe it would be five or ten dollars more a week on editorials. So I just picked up the phone and called Jim Powell. I said, "I'd like to talk to you about that." So, one thing led to another, and I ended up there.

ED: Jim Powell was the editor of the editorial page, and Jerry Neil was the associate editor. Was there anybody else?

JD: There was the cartoonist, Bill Graham.

ED: But the three of you were writing editorials?

JD: The three of us, yes.

ED: And J.N. Heiskell was still the editor.

[End of Tape Two, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side Two]

ED: J.N. Heiskell was still exercising at least some day-to-day control of the editorial page, was he not at that point? How much of a role did he play?

JD: At that point, he played a fairly active role. We met every morning, like nine or nine-thirty, in Jim Powell's office. We'd all sit in chairs looped around the room, and Mr. Heiskell would preside. Mr. Heiskell had gone over the paper and made notes to himself about what he wanted to talk about. He would hold forth and sometimes hold forth and hold forth. And somehow something came out of that.

[Laughs]

ED: He would've been ninety-one in '65.

JD: Yes, I think so. I haven't counted it up, but he was very elderly. He was sharp, very sharp. Although he seemed to be somewhat frail physically, he was mentally very sharp. He would have little asides. He would preside over these meetings at which different matters were discussed, some of which were editorial. After that, Jim would get with us and decide who's doing what.

ED: At this meeting, would Mr. Heiskell suggest editorials?

JD: Sometimes, he would. It was a general discussion of what might be an editorial, but as to getting down to "Well, this is the subject; here's the pro, here's the con," none of that sort of thing happened. He was easy going. You could say anything

you wanted to. We went around the room, but not a lot came out of those meetings other than just the idea that you're meeting every morning. He had one great pride. He wrote the editorial paragraphs.

ED: These were the little filler paragraphs that . . .

JD: Oh, but he would never call it – Never say “filler” in his presence.

ED: Yes.

JD: These were little editorials in his eyes.

ED: Tiny one-paragraph editorials, sometimes one sentence. A great old editorial tradition.

JD: Oh, yes!

ED: Particularly at the *Gazette*.

JD: Yes.

ED: He would write those things himself sometimes?

JD: Oh, he insisted on writing them.

ED: Did he write all of them?

JD: He wrote all of them up to a point. Right toward the end, I started writing some of them. Yes, that was his great joy.

ED: So, you'd have a stockpile of these little paragraphs of various lengths, some of them one line, two lines; others ten lines.

JD: Right.

ED: At the end of the day, when you made up the page, when you got your editorials lined up, these would fill up the rest of the space. I mean, that's one of the values

of them.

JD: Okay, but there's another point to that. They were so valued as editorials, right at first, at least, they ran at the top.

ED: That's right.

JD: They ran at the top, and then you'd get into the headed editorials. At that point, they were wrapping editorials down one column and then down another. Later, that was changed. That was a traumatic thing, to change something like that. But, right at that point, these were at the top, not the bottom. Later, they were moved to the bottom.

ED: In my recollection, there would be a little humor. One of the objectives sometimes would be humor.

JD: A little humor sometimes.

ED: And sometimes no very strong editorial point.

JD: Very weak, yes.

ED: They did not deal with the major issues of the day; maybe a little barb of some kind against somebody.

JD: That's right. That's right.

ED: But Jerry Neil never wrote any of those, or Jim Powell?

JD: I don't think so. There may have been an occasional one.

ED: I remember when I went there Jim Powell hated them.

JD: Oh, yes.

ED: As I recall, after I went there, you wrote nearly all of them.

JD: At that point, yes, because Mr. Heiskell was gone.

ED: Ninety-five percent of the things. I struggled with them. Well, were there any strong disagreements? The *Gazette* was becoming increasingly liberal . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: In 1964, during the debate in Congress on the Civil Rights Act, Jim had first come out against the public accommodation section of the Civil Rights Act, and, in my interview with him a few weeks ago, he recanted and said he was mistaken about it. He came around on that, and the *Gazette*, editorially, strongly supported the Civil Rights Act, but at the outset it expressed reservations. The *Gazette* had become increasingly liberal over the period, maybe as Mr. Heiskell's influence on the paper waned, and then he left entirely, of course, after his death. I think he was actually fairly conservative.

JD: He was. The *Gazette* editorials became increasingly liberal in the '70s because we didn't have his restraints. Yes, he was fairly conservative. I've never really revealed this before, but they're all gone now. It wasn't too long after I was named editorial page editor. I've forgotten the occasion, but there was a reception of some sort. It may have been a birthday for the publisher, but, anyway, it was up at the Capital Hotel. We were on the mezzanine and, for some reason, I fell into a conversation with Louise Patterson. I'd never really had much of a conversation with her before.

ED: She was the daughter of Mr. Heiskell.

JD: Yes.

ED: And wife of Hugh Patterson, the publisher.

JD: Yes. And she brought all this up about in 1957, how it all came about, of the position they took and stuck with. She told me that they had a family tradition that every Sunday, the family would gather at the Heiskell house and have lunch or dinner. I think at the time they had Ashmore there, too, because this was a big, big topic. When it first came up about what the *Gazette* should do, Mr. Heiskell did not want to take the stand that he subsequently did. He was more conservative. He didn't even want to say, "Let's follow the law. Let's have law and order." He didn't want to get into it. She wasn't explicit about it. Anyway, they had to work on him, she said. Hugh, mainly. Hugh and Harry Ashmore and she talked long and hard to Mr. Heiskell to bring him around on that occasion, and they succeeded. She said that's how it happened. And so, I don't know if she told that to anybody else or not, but I've kept that – she didn't say that was in confidence, but I've kept that in confidence. But it may be good for the historical record.

ED: It is. Okay. So, throughout the time that Mr. Heiskell was there or remained very active, you had the morning editorial meetings and then you'd divide up and talk about who's going to write what editorials.

JD: Mmmm.

ED: Tell me a little bit about Jerry Neil.

JD: Jerry was a great guy. Very good writer. He lacked a little discipline. I always thought if he had gone through a rigorous Ph.D. program, he probably would've

taught literature at Yale or something. He was just a very good writer. At the time I was there, he, well, let's be honest about it, he started drinking. Maybe he had before, I don't know, but, in any case, his pattern was to come to work early, oh, something like seven-thirty in the morning. His wife would always drive him. Jerry would never drive a car. I think that may have gone back to a youthful accident; I never did find out exactly what it was.

ED: But he never drove.

JD: He never drove, not in the time I knew him. There was some allusion to something that may have happened in his wild youth. Anyway, Jackie, his wife, would bring him down about seven-thirty every day, and he would try to get his writing done by noon. Sometimes he would write some in the afternoon. But as the years went by, he would start taking longer lunches. He'd have it done, I mean, great editorials, have it done before he started the martini lunches. Different places, different times.

ED: The Officers' Club is where he would hang out in the evenings.

JD: That was one, and the Flaming Arrow, over at the Quapaw Towers for a while, and then he went to somewhere else, I've forgotten now. He'd have his luncheon buddies, pretty much the same crew. That's why he didn't do much in the afternoons. He'd come back and do a few things. He was never a rip-roaring drunk or anything like that. But he just felt he needed to get most of his writing done, his heavy work done, before lunch. And did. I liked Jerry. We got along fine. Our meetings with Mr. Heiskell — Jerry could not suffer those very well.

Occasionally, he'd just take out his newspaper and start reading it [laughs] during the soliloquy! He could get by with that, I guess. I know that he had offers to go elsewhere. He told me a little bit about this, and I found out, independently, later that they wanted him to come to the *New York Herald Tribune*. Dwight Sargent was the editor there at that time. I got acquainted with Sargent in later years, in other ways, and he brought it up once about Jerry Neil, that he wanted Jerry to come to work for him at the *New York Herald Tribune*, but Jerry wouldn't. I think he just wanted to stay here. I don't know if it was the *Gazette*, or if it was Arkansas, or what it was. He was a talented guy, a real wordsmith.

ED: A beautiful writer. An envy of everybody.

JD: He was also given that latitude to do it, whereas many other editorial pages would not have given him that latitude.

ED: He just did what he wanted to do every day. He just wrote.

JD: Pretty much. Pretty much.

ED: In '57, particularly, he wrote some of the great editorials.

JD: That's what I'm told.

ED: They were unsigned, but Ashmore always got credit because he was the editor of the page.

JD: That's what I'm told, but I don't know. By the way, when I came in, it was kind of a tentative deal. They said, "Look, you come in and we'll see after a year," something like that. So a little over a year after that, they decided I'd stay and be an associate editor.

ED: So, you remained associate editor. Jerry Neil died in 197 . . .

JD: '8.

ED: '8. And then I came to work there as the third man in January of '79.

JD: Right.

ED: Just a few months after Jerry's death. And we were the threesome for a while. I think Leland Duval came to write editorials part-time?

JD: I think . . .

ED: Maybe that was when Jim Powell retired as page editor, I'm not sure.

JD: No, that was before then, I think.

ED: Yes, Leland had already been there before Jim. That's right.

JD: And he had done some part-time. He was doing some relief on the editorial page. Somebody would be gone . . .

ED: Yes. And then he would come up a day or two a week, in addition to writing his business and farm columns. When Mr. Heiskell left, shortly before he died, there were no longer meetings. Jim Powell found those meetings deadly.

JD: Oh, he did, and I agreed with him.

ED: Thereafter, you just had individual meetings every day.

JD: Right. Let me go back just a little. We were talking about Mr. Heiskell. When he was alive and real active, we all came in on Saturday morning because he came in on Saturday morning. And he meticulously edited all our copy. He did some during the week. If Jim wasn't there or something, he'd do it. And he wielded a heavy pencil.

ED: What did he do to copy?

JD: He slashed. He would take an editorial and cut it by as much as half or more. I mean, he really wielded that strong pencil and scissors. Sometimes he'd scissor them apart and paste them back together. You didn't know what you were going to get back. He would do that on Saturday mornings, too. So, we worked a five-and-a-half-day week.

ED: Was he picky about grammar and style, form?

JD: Absolutely.

ED: . . . or just didn't like slang or . . .

JD: No, he didn't like slang.

ED: . . . or clever wording.

JD: If there was a new word, he was very suspicious of it. I remember once using the word "notion," as an idea as opposed to a product. That really set him off. We had a long discussion about whether that was legitimate. I used the word "empathy" once. It was a newfangled word for him, you see. And so you had to watch that sort of thing.

ED: That was the reputation of the *Gazette*, I guess. It took great pains with the King's English . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . . and it was very conservative in form and style.

JD: Now, if it was a 19th century form, it was okay. [Laughs]

ED: All right. After Mr. Heiskell died, the *Gazette* became more and more openly

liberal, in particular about national policy. It supported civil rights legislation and was liberal on economic issues. Jim Powell was editor of the page. What kind of editor was he?

JD: Jim was a fairly light editor, I thought. There were a few things that he didn't abide, but he was fairly liberal in a sense, not so much politically, but in editing. He let a lot of things probably go through that maybe some other editor wouldn't have. He was pretty open to most things. But, like all of us, he had certain things that he was more sensitive to than others and he was a good editor.

ED: Let's see, in about 1985, Mr. Patterson decided that it was time for Jim to retire as active director of the editorial page.

JD: He'd have been about sixty-five at that point.

ED: Yes, I think he was sixty-five. He became senior editor and wrote a column two or three days a week. And you became the editor of the editorial page . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: Leland Duval, then, if he was not already, became a full-time editorial writer.

JD: Correct.

ED: Leland was also a kind of a legend. Tell me about Leland.

JD: Great guy. Great guy. I admire him greatly to this day. He was the most productive editorial writer I've seen, including myself. You always knew you could always depend on him to have an editorial and . . .

ED: And it would always be long.

JD: You knew that. He had it all figured out, I think, how long an editorial was

supposed to be. And he would write for that almost to the line. I think that came from the time when he was writing that column, when he had to write to fit the space. Nevertheless, he was highly knowledgeable about just about anything under the sun.

ED: Although he had very little formal education.

JD: Very little formal education, but widely read, very intelligent guy, a hard worker, never complained about anything. Just a dream, really, for everybody, I thought.

ED: He was always right about things. He was the first, maybe the only person in America early on, to write about the impending doom of the savings and loan associations when they got cut loose during the Reagan administration.

JD: Exactly. As a result of some of those editorials, I remember, some of the federal officials from Dallas said they wanted to come in and talk to him and me. Which they did, and Leland just laid them flat. You are absolutely right.

ED: The S and L regulators were promoting . . .

JD: That's right. Exactly.

ED: . . . telling the S&L's that they needed to get out there and diversify their investments, get out of this strict home mortgage lending, get out there and make some risky investments. They came in to try to talk Leland out of it?

JD: Yes, and say it's really not that way. It's blah-blah-blah-blah, whatever the particulars, I don't recall. We would politely listen and then Leland would just tell them the way it was, you know, low-key. It didn't faze Leland at all.

ED: Smoking the old pipe.

JD: Yes, that pipe, that pipe would curve down. [Laughs] But Leland's a great guy. He did a great job and when he retired, he came in and told me, "I want to tell you how . . ." You know, my heart sank. Actually, I tried to talk him out of it, but he was ready to go. I couldn't say I blamed him; he was eighty years old and he'd paid his dues.

ED: He said he had nothing else to say.

JD: Had nothing else to say. And then I suggested, "Well, if you don't want to, you know, I hate to see you going, but if you want to write something from time to time . . ." He said, "No." That's when he said what you are saying. He said all he had to say, and I doubt if he's written anything since. I don't know; I haven't talked to him, but nothing I've seen. So, a fine, fine guy, a fine gentleman, and I have a high regard for him. He was a real addition to the paper.

ED: He was a biblical scholar.

JD: Biblical, absolutely.

ED: He was a great biblical scholar, and so many of his editorials would begin with some parable.

JD: Yes.

ED: He always had this way of starting the editorial that would pull you into it.

JD: [Laughs] That's right.

ED: He'd start it off with some obscure biblical story. At the end of the editorial, he'd all tie it back together. It was as if this was the Word of God.

JD: Yes. [Laughs]

ED: We took it as such as well. When he retired, gosh, I don't know when that would have been, about '89?

JD: Probably along about then.

ED: He was there into the Gannett years.

JD: Yes, that didn't help matters any.

ED: Yes. Of course, Leland would never say, but I wondered whether the Gannettoids had anything at all to do with his decision to retire.

JD: Ernie, I've wondered the same thing.

ED: Although Leland would say, "Never complain about anything."

JD: No.

ED: Nothing could bother him.

JD: No.

ED: Always cheerful.

JD: But you knew he knew.

ED: He looked at everything as if he were an observer of all the folly around him, and he seemed to be amused at everything.

JD: Mmm.

ED: He knew he was not terribly harsh in his judgment about things. He knew what was happening and what was going to happen.

JD: Yes. I'd like to talk to him now; it's been years since I saw him.

ED: I'm going to try to talk to him next week or so. He's had some heart surgery, last fall, I think. So I don't know what kind of condition he's in. So, when he retired,

Doug Smith came up. He'd been at the state Capitol, and he came up to write editorials that last couple of years.

JD: Ernie, my recollection is a little different. I recall that Doug had come up before that.

ED: Maybe so.

JD: When Leland left, I thought we needed an editorial writer. Lundy pretty much said that Deborah Mathis would be coming in. I like Deborah and everything was fine. It's just that I thought she was an op-ed columnist and not an editorial writer. We needed an editorial writer, I thought, more than we needed an op-ed columnist. And so, my recollection is that she came in at that point.

ED: Yes, you're probably right about that. Doug was already there and she came in and also Bob McCord, who was the editor of the op-ed page. At some point, maybe the last year, he was made a part of the editorial page staff itself.

JD: There are a lot of things that went on the last year or two under Gannett, and that was one of them.

ED: Neither Deborah nor Bob McCord ever wrote many editorials.

JD: No. Not really.

ED: Occasional editorials in each case.

JD: Occasional, yes. That's the way that was. Anyway, I think Doug Smith had already been up.

ED: Like Leland earlier, he started as a relief editorial writer. He would come up on vacations to spell me or Leland or you and moved into it full time.

JD: Yes.

ED: Well, let's go into the more unpleasant history of the *Gazette*, 1986, when Gannett bought the paper. Before that, we had the handwriting on the wall that the *Gazette* was going to be sold. A guy named Ingersoll had been up there to buy it.

[End of Tape Two, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side One]

ED: In 1986, the Gannett Corporation buys the *Gazette*, and Al Neuharth comes in the news room on a fall day, and we were all assembled. Hugh Patterson announced the sale, and Neuharth, the president and CEO of Gannett at that time, told us how proud he was that Gannett is going to own the great *Arkansas Gazette* and that his company had deep pockets. What do you recall his saying?

JD: I recall him saying, "We are with you for the duration." Standing behind him was John Curley.

ED: What was your feeling at that time? Were you depressed or did this give you a feeling of confidence that this giant corporation had bought the paper? Did you have any hunches about it?

JD: I was accepting the inevitable. The paper was going to be sold to somebody. Some weeks earlier, I knew that Hugh Patterson had talked seriously with, I believe it was Ralph Ingersoll. Hugh brought Ingersoll to my office and introduced us as if this was a "get-acquainted for the sale" meeting. Nobody else was ever brought by, but, obviously, that negotiation must have fallen through. In any case, it was not a shock. Enough rumors had circulated by that time, and it

was generally recognized that the paper was for sale. Most of us had hoped that the sale would go to Knight-Ridder or somebody else. Gannett may have been down the list. Pretty much down the list, to tell you the truth. I tried to look upon it in a positive way because there was no other way to look at it and hope that things were going to be okay. From my point of view and I think from an editorial point of view, and I think maybe you will agree, it did go okay for a while. Carrick Patterson was left in as editor, and no major changes were made, certainly not in news and editorial staffs. It turns out that during the transitional period, John Seigenthaler was a point man for the Gannett Corporation, guiding it or, at least, monitoring. He talked to a lot of people under a lot of circumstances, and I kept wondering when is he going to call me or come by, make some kind of contact. At the very last, when they were ready to leave town, he called me and wanted to have breakfast. I met with him at the Capital Hotel and had breakfast. Nothing really ever came up, except one thing, that indicated to me that the pressure was already on, not from him. He mentioned that he had met with a number of movers and shakers, the fairly conservative people of the community. They had talked about all of this. They were very concerned about our editorial policy. He said he told them, "Look, that's the editorial policy; that's not going to change. Everything's going to be the same." At least according to Seigenthaler, we were okay. So it was no problem. As a matter of fact, it didn't change those first few months, as long as Bill Malone left Carrick in place. Carrick, I know, was under terrific pressure. We were allowed to keep going the way it had always

gone. After Carrick was replaced, Malone then . . .

ED: Let's go back to Carrick's replacement. Wasn't there a period where Carrick was essentially relieved as editor of the paper, was told he could go up and just be on the editorial page, so, in effect, he joined you as editor of the editorial page in some kind of vague capacity?

JD: It was extremely vague.

ED: For a couple of months, maybe.

JD: It was a little longer than that, but it was extremely vague. His title was to be editorial director, and, actually, it was just the way of easing him out. I talked to Carrick about it, and he said, "Look, just go ahead and run it." He didn't want to be involved in that at all. He knew he was just biding time, and he didn't want to do it. He didn't want to take over the editorial page.

ED: He wrote a few editorials, as I recall.

JD: He may have written just a few.

ED: Three, four, five.

JD: Something like that. It was so obvious that this was such a short-term thing. Then he moved on out. There was supposed to be some shared responsibility, which we never ended up defining. Then Malone had his publisher's meeting. He met with department heads once a week, as I recall. At first, he kept up the tradition that news was one department; editorial was another. I went to those meetings under that arrangement, just as a representative of the editorial [page]. Carrick and, I believe, David Petty came, Carrick as overall editor and Petty, as I

recall, as news. It must have been fairly early the second year, in the spring, when Carrick was gone and Malone hired Walker Lundy. He turned everything over to Lundy. I believe Malone was in Hawaii when that announcement was made.

ED: That Lundy was going to be the editor?

JD: Yes, he sent a message to me from Honolulu, and he relayed a message to me that he would talk to me when he got back. When he got back in a few days, he just opens the door and comes in. No “how do you do” or anything like that, which was his way. He just opened the door, walked in and said, “Effective immediately, you report to Walker Lundy.”

ED: No preface?

JD: No preface . . .

ED: No “how do you do”?

JD: . . . no nothing. And I said: “Why? This guy has no editorial experience; he doesn’t know how to write an editorial; he’s never done any editorials.” He said, “Well, he knows more about it than I do” and turned around and walked out. I think he was ticked off for a number of reasons, among them that I had resisted his entreaties that we not endorse in the ‘88 presidential race. The editorial board did not take a formal vote, but there seemed to be a consensus that we wanted Dukakis, though not enthusiastically. Malone apparently had been in Washington that weekend and had seen the *Washington Post*, in which it came out with this no endorsement editorial. He had walked in that Monday morning and plopped it down at my desk in front of me without saying anything. This editorial page from

the *Post*, wondering why we couldn't do that.

ED: His wife had been on George Bush's staff.

JD: I found that out subsequently. Yes.

ED: Subsequently.

JD: Yes.

ED: That was when he was in Washington as the circulation director of *USA Today*.

JD: No, he was at the *Gazette* at that time.

ED: I know, but when his wife was on Bush's staff, when his wife was on the payroll. His wife was on George Bush's staff in Washington while Malone was at *USA Today*.

JD: Yes, okay. Right. Well, he had gone up for a Gannett meeting that weekend. Anyway, ever since that time, my relationship with him really cooled. That was the way Gannett operated in trying to change things.

ED: Maybe we could refresh each other's memories about the 1988 endorsement. I have a recollection that we had all met about it and Malone had wanted us to endorse George Bush and there was no sentiment for endorsing George Bush.

JD: No.

ED: Leland was there at that time, I think, and nobody wanted to do that. Lundy was at the meeting down in the publisher's office where we talked about that, and Lundy probably expected to vote for Dukakis himself, but he was trying to push it over into the no-endorsement thing. We were all saying no. We didn't take subtlety very well, and they were trying to subtly influence us to do that.

JD: Yes.

ED: And we wound up writing the endorsement of Dukakis, and it sat there for a good long while, did it not? He wanted Lundy to look at it, pass on it, and Lundy disappeared in Florida.

JD: That's right. He did.

ED: Lundy went to Florida, and days and days passed. The election was creeping up, and Malone did not want us to run that editorial, but he did not want to order us not to.

JD: That's right. Exactly.

ED: He wanted Lundy to do that.

JD: Yes. And Lundy was going to.

ED: Lundy disappeared, and Malone couldn't get him on the phone, apparently.

JD: And I told him, "Look, if we run this editorial at all, it's going to have to run this Sunday because it's the Sunday before the election." He never then told me, "Don't run it." When he didn't say, "Don't run it," it ran. Although Walker was gone and, obviously, Malone didn't want it to run.

ED: I had the impression that that's when he soured on Lundy as well. I think he thought Lundy ducked out on that.

JD: May be. Could be.

ED: Of course, he later fired Lundy.

JD: Yes.

ED: I always thought it partly went back to that. He couldn't depend on him to carry

water for him in that little dispute with the editorial page. I don't know if that had anything to do with it or not.

JD: I don't either, but you're probably right. That was one episode. Anyway, there was another one four years later.

ED: Well, yes, in '90, '91, I guess, but Lundy did begin to exercise a lot of efforts to influence the whole section after that, although he never did write any editorials.

JD: No.

ED: But we began to meet with him on a regular basis, once a week or something.

JD: Well, occasionally.

ED: Occasionally.

JD: Then he dropped off on that. We knew that wouldn't last.

ED: Yes, he met with us a few times and then wearied of that.

JD: I don't know if I ever mentioned it, but he came down pretty hard on me on one or two of our editorials that he didn't agree with. He thought we should run it by him first. It may have been parental notification, I am not certain. Luckily, if there's any good part about any of this, nobody ever stayed there long enough to make a permanent difference.

ED: Yes.

JD: But Lundy was a strange guy.

ED: He had all these bizarre ideas. We thought they were bizarre, anyway. A lot of people would've thought they were creative. At one point, he decided he wanted to have a better mix of columnists, and he wanted local columnists. And he had

this . . .

JD: Yes, I know.

ED: . . . contest to pick a whole bunch of local columnists.

JD: Yes, we called them community columnists. He had all these ideas, and he dumped them in my lap, in all of our laps, to execute. We had a contest where we invited readers to write two columns that would be ready to print and to send them to us. We divided them up. You and me and Leland, I've forgotten who all was involved, took a portion of them and read them and picked out quite a few that we thought might be okay. It was thirty or so. We notified those people that they were community columnists that we would run one of theirs every two or three weeks.

ED: About every three weeks or something. We ran two or three of them a week, or something.

JD: Yes, I've forgotten the rotation. We managed to get a photo of each of them, had a logo made and all that.

ED: The objective was to achieve diversity, we had to have . . .

JD: Oh, yes.

ED: . . . young people. We had to have a teen-ager. We had to have an elderly person.

JD: Right.

ED: We had to have business people. We had to have extreme right-wingers. We had to have a cross section all across the board, women, men, all kinds of diversity.

JD: Racial diversity.

ED: Racial diversity, age, and everything else to represent the whole state. In a way, it sounded good, but, as a matter of fact, some awful stuff got in the paper, some truly dreadful pieces.

JD: Absolutely.

ED: How long did we do that, a year?

JD: Probably a year, something like that. No longer than that. I don't think it was any longer than that. Well, it went right up to the time we folded.

ED: Or pretty close.

JD: Maybe a year, maybe a year and a half. But it just kept going. Some of it was good. People at other papers where he's been tell me it was no different with us than with them. He had all kinds of gimmicks like that.

ED: He was always trying to think of gimmicks.

JD: Yes.

ED: It was the key to everything, and he did that the same way on the news side, too. You had to come up with something different, some gimmick, some eye-catching thing.

JD: Yes, he did.

ED: And he wrote a Sunday column, too, for a while.

JD: Yes, for a little while.

ED: He wrote a Sunday column for our section which was usually chocked full of errors.

JD: [Laughs]

ED: And we tried to screen them for these awful factual errors.

JD: Yes, that's right.

ED: He got upset about that, but . . .

JD: So many of these details on those years are so awful that I've shoved them to the back of my mind.

ED: The editorial page went on in spite of all these subtle and sometimes not so subtle efforts to change the editorial policies of the *Gazette*. We stupidly went on our way, I guess. We didn't recognize these subtle hints. We just continued to do as we always had.

JD: If they were going to present the position that this is an Arkansas newspaper run by Arkansas people and the Gannett Corporation was not going to influence it in any way, we were going to try to live up to that.

ED: Yes. They had said that.

JD: They had said it repeatedly.

ED: And Neuharth had said that at the outset, and that was supposed to be the key.

JD: That's what we were doing.

ED: It was going to be a locally controlled situation.

JD: Yes. But . . . Anyway [sigh].

ED: There was a time when the editorial board had to meet at least once a week with Malone, but it was a vague thing where we just sat around and talked. Malone loved Leland and loved to hear Leland talk.

JD: He wanted to talk business.

ED: Yes.

JD: He was a businessman. Yes, but that didn't last.

ED: It didn't last long either.

JD: It lasted maybe three times and then he started being away or to have excuses, one thing or another.

ED: His big interest in the first year he was there, the only real interest in the editorial page that I can recall, was that he wanted us to editorially oppose any effort to remove the exemption from sales taxes on newspaper sales and advertisements.

JD: Oh, yes. I forgot.

ED: It was an effort within the legislature. Somebody introduced some legislation . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . . to repeal a whole slew of exemptions . . .

JD: You're right.

ED: . . . to raise some money.

JD: You're right. I'd forgotten about that.

ED: He thought that removing exemptions was fine except he wanted us to fight to protect the exemption for advertising and for newspaper sales. He wanted what benefitted us.

JD: He was doing this through Carrick. He really was putting the pressure on Carrick.

ED: Yes. And we didn't do it.

JD: Didn't we publish some editorial that Carrick wrote?

ED: Well, I had written editorials . . .

JD: Did you do one?

ED: . . . I'd written editorials saying repeal the exemptions, and without any specific mention of the newspaper exemptions, which implied that we'd repeal ours, too.

JD: Okay.

ED: Which seems to me to be the only honest position you could take.

JD: Yes.

ED: If a newspaper is going to be independent, it has to . . .

JD: Okay, I remember now.

ED: . . . not seek protections for itself.

JD: There you go.

ED: I thought --- we all did — that that was the only honorable, principled position the *Gazette* could take.

JD: Yes, absolutely.

ED: He was getting stuff from Gannett headquarters in Virginia. They were expressing an interest in it at Gannett headquarters: What were we going to do about it at Little Rock?

JD: Right.

ED: Malone said if it passed in Arkansas, other states would see that as a possible source of revenue as well and Gannett did not want it to spread where it would tax newspaper sales and advertising in other states where it operated. So he raised that, I bet, ten times. Every time he would meet with us, he would raise that prospect.

JD: That's right. He also had leaked some documents or memos from the legal staff at Gannett, too.

ED: Yes, why Gannett should oppose the repeal . . .

JD: Yes, that's right.

ED: . . . and I kept telling him, "Well, look, one, we need to take a principled position on it. It would look terrible for us to argue otherwise. Besides, it ain't going anywhere!" I knew for a fact that the legislature was never going to repeal those exemptions. It was an easy way for us to be honorable. We would never have to pay anyway, and we could take the right position.

JD: Eventually, that blew over as I recall.

ED: It blew over. The legislation died.

JD: That was one time that he was involved with something.

ED: Yes, that and the effort to influence the endorsement of the president in 1988 were the two specific incidences I can recall where he tried to influence *Gazette* editorial policy. Well, eventually, Lundy was fired by Malone and, let's see, John Hanchette was the managing editor. Hanchette was never over the *Gazette* editorial page.

JD: No.

ED: Hanchette was, I think, a pretty good man who liked the *Gazette* editorial policies, liked the *Gazette* and didn't like Lundy. They had some fights, but that didn't affect the editorial page.

JD: No, it didn't.

ED: It was not long after Lundy was fired that Malone was moved aside himself and sent down to Monroe, Louisiana.

JD: Yes, Monroe, Louisiana.

ED: And they brought in Craig Moon . . .

JD: Craig Moon.

ED: . . . as the publisher. Moon had been at Fort Myers, Florida. Moon brought in as editor Keith Moyer.

JD: Right.

ED: So Moyer became the editor and was over both news and editorial,

JD: Correct.

ED: He'd been at the Fort Myers newspaper, a fairly small newspaper, had no editorial background and didn't seem to have any interest at all in the editorial pages other than to carry out whatever punishment the management wanted to inflict.

JD: I really tried, particularly at first, to get along with him because I was so glad Walker Lundy was gone and that Malone was gone. I thought maybe everything will relax a little and we'll do what a newspaper should do. Actually, Craig Moon wasn't bad. He left hands-off, and Moyer didn't know diddly about editorials. He thought he did, but he didn't. One time we had words over something. He thought that he'd learned everything he needed to know about editorials by taking an editorial writing class at the University of Florida. Both Lundy and Moyer had this idea that we should meet as an editorial board every morning and follow a formula, and I said, "Yes, and you ought to be there if you're the editor and you're

wanting to see us.” So he said, “Yes, I’ll be there. I want to be there.” I think he showed up a total of three times.

ED: He was bored to tears and didn’t stay but a few minutes each time . . .

JD: No.

ED: . . . and then he jumped up and took off.

JD: Absolutely. Then he got on a tear where he wanted me or somebody here from the editorial staff to come in and sit in on the news meeting and report to them what we were going to have. I resisted that very strongly and he really got ticked at me. I believed then and still believe in the separation of news and editorial. I felt that would start violating a principle. He didn’t think so. I could’ve been wrong, but, nevertheless, it was done only a few times and then I stopped showing up and all he’d do is snort at me. [Laughs]

ED: So, the editorial page continued to fight this subtle effort at interference.

JD: Pretty much. You got a lot of signals, though, that things weren’t right.

ED: It became apparent, too, that if they were going to make any changes on the editorial page, they’d have to fire people.

JD: Yes, I made that clear. I don’t know if I mentioned this before or not, but I, well, we can get to the next publisher next time. We’re still talking about the Moon era. You know, these guys, Moon and Moyer, just disappeared sometimes. They were going on golfing vacations at Walt Disney World in Florida. They were both golfers, and I guess that’s what they were doing. They would just go out and let the paper run itself.

ED: Yes, they loved to golf. They did a lot of golfing in Little Rock as well. In the afternoons they'd disappear.

JD: Oh, yes.

ED: Moyer didn't work many hours a day.

JD: No, he didn't.

ED: I don't know about Moon. I didn't see too much of him. But Moyer was a more cheerful chap than Lundy, who was just kind of morose.

JD: Yes.

[End of Tape Three, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side Two]

JD: Frankly, I don't think either Moon or Moyer was really up to the newspaper war. They had a real easy time of it in Fort Myers. Florida just took care of itself. That couldn't be done here.

ED: They saw themselves slipping further. The *Democrat* continued to gain in circulation . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . . and advertising and the *Gazette's* losses continued to mount. They seemed to take less and less of a role at the paper. Let me talk about one episode. I'm not sure about the dates and about the particular details, but it reflected the Gannett attitude and might have been a tip-off about when the negotiations for the final sale and closing of the *Gazette* had taken place. Keith Moyer and Craig Moon at some point decided, probably in late December of 1990, that we would have a

Monday morning editorial meeting each week with an expanded editorial board. It would be you, as the editor of the editorial page, Doug Smith and I, Bob McCord, who had been the op-ed page editor for some years, and was more conservative than the rest of us. He was made a part of the editorial board as well, with Deborah Mathis. Every Monday morning we were to gather in Craig Moon's board room along with Keith Moyer. We would bring an agenda of all the topics we proposed to write about the following week, with a little background. That would be passed out and we would discuss, vote upon and collectively decide what our position on the issues of the day would be. Every Monday morning.

JD: Yes.

ED: As I recall, you were particularly grim when you told us about it.

JD: I did. I got everybody's ideas and then I typed up an agenda.

ED: This was on Friday afternoon?

JD: Whatever day it was I don't know, but I remember doing that. We all had a written agenda.

ED: The following Monday morning – I think it was probably about the first week in January, 1991, but I could be mistaken about that — we all trudged from the third floor down to the second floor into Craig Moon's boardroom like wooden soldiers. You had passed out copies of the agenda with the issues of the week, and we waited on Craig Moon and Keith Moyer to show up. It was nine o'clock and we sat there and sat there and sat there until, finally, you went out and asked Moon's secretary where Craig and Keith were.

JD: Yes.

ED: And she said, “Well, Craig was here just minutes before you all came.” And she set out to try to find him, and she couldn’t find him. I went into the newsroom to find Keith Moyer. I saw his wife Marilyn, who was the *Gazette*’s “writing coach,” off in the corner. I asked Marilyn where Keith was because he was supposed to be in a meeting with us. She said, “Well, he was at home, getting dressed, when I left.” So, she calls the house and tells him, “Ernie Dumas is out here, saying you’re supposed to have a meeting with them.” Anyway, the upshot was she said, “Well, Keith says something’s come up; we’ll do it next week.” I think he talked to you or sent you a message, saying “Well, we’ll do it next week.” So, we were all a little relieved for a week, but we were still kind of under the sentence. We did it again that next Friday.

JD: Well, my recollection is that we did it one time and then they didn’t show up again.

ED: Right. So we do it the next Monday morning and exactly the same thing happened.

JD: Yes.

ED: And neither of them show up. You were pretty pissed . . .

JD: Yes.

ED: . . .about having to do it anyway, and then, secondly, being stood up this way.

JD: That’s right.

ED: But the same thing happens. Keith Moyer is not out there. Marilyn just says,

“Well, I don’t know where he is. He’s still at home,” and “Why don’t you just go on back upstairs?”

JD: Yes.

ED: I may be mistaken about this, but my thought was we finally did it a third time.

JD: We did.

ED: We went down there a third time and, again, neither of them showed up.

JD: After that, I called it off. We weren’t going to do it anymore.

ED: You just told us, “Well, let’s don’t do it anymore until they call us and tell us to go do it.” And he never mentioned it again, did he?

JD: No, he never did.

ED: Moon never mentioned it, Moyer never mentioned it . . .

JD: Neither mentioned it.

ED: . . . that they had stood us up or ever again talked about having a meeting.

JD: I had a hard time even talking to Moyer sometimes, just pinning him down and talking to him. We should have some communication. You talk about this as maybe an omen or an indication of what was in their minds. But that January of ‘91, I decided one day to go down and try to talk to him, pin him down on some things we should talk about. And we talked for a while, and that was when the real dark things started descending. He made not too thinly veiled suggestions that our editorial policy needed to change, that is, become conservative and that we needed to reflect the views of the railroad worker in North Little Rock. Apparently, they had done reader surveys or something, and he had some

interviews that showed that we were just out of sync. I was aghast at that. But it was clear that he didn't care. All he cared was doing what the bigger boys wanted to do. I just flat resisted that. I knew that if we did that, the game was up, that this was no longer the *Arkansas Gazette*. We were not going to do that. I expected from then on that they were going to relieve me for resisting that. About that time they must have been negotiating the sale. I sensed that. Later that spring — it was May, I'm not sure --- Moon was shifted to Nashville and the hatchet man came in.

ED: Moe Hickey came in as the publisher.

JD: As the publisher. Moe Hickey had the reputation, deserved the reputation, as the hatchet man. A friend of mine at the *Denver Post* where Hickey had been couldn't stand the guy and the damage he had done to the *Denver Post*. When the word got out that Hickey was going to be our publisher, a pot of black carnations arrived to me. This was my friend out in Denver. He had heard the news and was offering his condolences because Moe Hickey was coming in to do us in. He was right. I knew something was going to happen. A real chill settled between him and me. Hickey had a reputation of being a liberal ideologically. Actually, he just didn't care is what it turned out to be. Of course, the rumors were that John Curley gave him a million dollars to come down here and shut us down. He commuted from his ranch out west, had a condo over here in Treetops, furnished. He lived there during the week and moved back to his ranch on the weekends. Another reason that I knew something was coming was they didn't evaluate my

job that year. It had always been done religiously by Gannett; that's a big deal with Gannett. The crowning blow came in August. Moyer and Hickey wangled lunch with Clinton; maybe it was the other way around, I don't know which, but, anyway, they had lunch with Clinton. As a result of that lunch, word was sent to me that we were to have an editorial telling Clinton, encouraging Clinton to run for president.

ED: And virtually endorsing him.

JD: Virtually endorsing him. That was almost a direct order. I turned that one down, too, saying that the editorial board doesn't do that and never has. The *Arkansas Gazette* has never done that, never told somebody to run or not run. We had been over this, by the way, in '88.

ED: Bob McCord wanted us to do that, by the way, he . . .

JD: Bob McCord wanted us to do that, yes, but he's the only one.

ED: Yes.

JD: He's the only one. I traded some emails with Moyer over that, saying, "We haven't done it. The editorial board does not wish to do that, and it would fly in the face of all traditions of the *Arkansas Gazette* to do this." The reason they wanted to do it was they wanted to curry favor with the next president for Gannett. It wasn't put that way, but it sure sounded that way. Anyway, I thought the traditions of the *Gazette*, and you did, too, I think, was that the editorial board should prevail. That's the way it should be. That's where the decision should be made. In any case, I've forgotten the tenor of our emails back and forth, but I

refused to do that. He stormed up, in August, I think, and threw open the door and shut it and started just really raising hell. “Why won’t you do it?” I tried to explain to him that you don’t do these things, that the *Arkansas Gazette* doesn’t do these things. It didn’t make any difference to him. It was clear that he was getting orders from Hickey, who, obviously, was trying to curry favor with Clinton because of Gannett and the presidential possibility. We had extremely sharp words, and, at the end of that, I expected it at any time. Of course, it was only a few weeks later that the paper went down anyway, so it became academic. But that was just one episode. But, you’re right, in ‘91, there were just so many signposts that something was going to happen. I thought it would happen to me, but I didn’t know about the paper itself.

ED: The rumors hit in late August, or sometime in August, that the *Gazette* was sold to Hussman, that it was pending. They say it was pending in the Justice Department. Hussman publicly said that it’s a lie, that it was a rumor started by the *Gazette* circulation department. Gannett said nothing. Their editors down here, Moyer and Hickey, I guess, ordered the *Gazette* news room not to cover it; there was no story. “We don’t write about rumors,” Moyer said. So the *Gazette* did not write about it for a good long while, although it appeared in the *Democrat* and the other papers. The *Democrat*, I think, carried several stories about it. We shortly learned that that was indeed the case, despite Hussman’s lies, that indeed it was pending at the Justice Department. We confirmed with sources at the Justice Department that it was there and would go through after a certain time if there

were no willing buyers. So there was a little effort by some people to act like there might be an employee buyout, which probably postponed it for a few weeks. Finally, it came down to a Thursday afternoon when some of us had our lawyer, Walter Davidson, fax a letter to the Justice Department saying that we were no longer able to be viable candidates to buy the *Gazette*.

JD: Right.

ED: You had, I think, that day, written a farewell editorial, a very eloquent piece in my mind, maybe the best piece that you've written. But you had written a farewell editorial on a hunch that we would not know, that we would not be given a chance to run it because we would not be told in advance that tomorrow is the last day of the *Gazette*. But, somehow, that Thursday afternoon, I guess October 17th, you decided to run that editorial the next morning. Was that just a hunch?

JD: It was an absolute hunch. One thing that had bothered me throughout all those last few weeks was that nobody at Gannett would even speak to us, would not let us know anything. We were non-existent. So, you had to put things together, as you did and I think I did and other people that it was really coming down to the crunch. You had mentioned this thing on Thursday, and I was trying to find out. I went to the guy who was . . .

ED: Evan Ray?

JD: Ray, that's his name, the finance guy.

ED: The controller or whatever he was. Yes.

JD: Yes. And sat down with him, trying to get him to level with me. He wouldn't,

but I got from him the impression that probably the closure was going to happen immediately.

ED: We had talked about waiting and running it in the Sunday paper.

JD: Yes, running not particularly this editorial, but one similar to it as a farewell editorial. Yes. I talked to Hickey at that time and he wouldn't say anything. He just wouldn't even reply. So, I went back up and I wrote that editorial, which I showed you and passed around to other members of the editorial board. I had decided that unless you all had some strong objections to it, thought we shouldn't do it, that I was going to run it. We just about had to run it the next day. I took it downstairs to Hickey, and I handed it to him. I said, "This editorial is running tomorrow," giving him the full opportunity to say no, that it's off. "Well, can you make a tiny little modification one or two places?" That's what he said. He handed it back to me. So they knew it was coming, and if it had been off, they could've said something.

ED: So that editorial appeared the next morning, and on the front page was this lucky picture. Somebody had gone out to [?] cemetery and hung a wreath on William Woodruff's grave.

JD: Right.

ED: We had the picture on the front page of the *Gazette*. We had a farewell editorial on the editorial page, and, sure enough, at noon, they shut the computers down and called us all out in the newsroom to announce that the *Gazette* was no more. The paper had been sold and would be closed and we were all to clean out our

desks, and be out of the building by five.

JD: They had guards all over the place to make sure we did.

ED: Yes. To make sure we didn't cart off any of Hussman's property. By the way, we didn't cover that. You had been president of the National Conference of Editorial Writers.

JD: Yes, that's right.

ED: '88 or – You've been very active in that organization for years . . .

JD: and '89 and 1990. I served on the board for ten years.

ED: And you were the national president of the National Conference of Editorial Writers.

JD: Yes, in 1990, which might have been another reason that they didn't fire me any sooner than they did. I don't know.

ED: Could've been. At any rate, after that, you were around Little Rock for a while and, eventually, went to work for the Daytona Beach newspaper.

JD: That's right. I was around here for a while. I wrote a syndicated column for a little while, which I sold to a number of papers for about six months. And then an opportunity came up to go to *Daytona Beach News Journal* in Florida.

ED: As an editorial writer?

JD: As an editorial writer and editor of their "World Focus" pages. I was to write national and international editorials and produce an international page. Subsequently, I also took on the whole Sunday section. So that's what I did there. At one point, I also taught part-time at Stetson University in Deland, Florida.

ED: You did that from sometime in '92?

JD: Till just now.

ED: Till January 2000, when you retired. Tell me about that paper. Was it like the *Gazette* at some point? A lot like the *Gazette* in some ways, right? It was a family-owned paper with a liberal tradition.

JD: Yes. There were some similarities, and that's one of the things that made it possible for me to go there. We were kind of in sync, particularly at first. It's family owned. Well, I'll put it this way: it's at least 51% family owned by the Davidson family. Cox owns a substantial minority interest. Some say as much as 49%. But Cox stays out of it and lets the family run it. They have been liberal Democratic, particularly nationally and in the *Gazette's* mold. The *Gazette* was the statewide newspaper. The *Daytona Beach News Journal* covers only east-central Florida. They compete directly in the west part of the circulation area with the *Orlando Sentinel*, which is nearby. On the north is the Jacksonville paper, and on the south is *Florida Today*. Internally, it's set up somewhat differently. But it's a local paper. It's gotten more local in the past couple of years. It was more internationally and nationally focused until the last year or two. So, of the major newspapers in Florida, it and the *St. Pete Times* are probably the only generally Democratic liberal papers in their editorial policies. The rest of them are pretty much to the right.

ED: You have worked at several major papers, the *Daytona Beach News-Sentinel* as an editorial writer, a reporter at the *Minneapolis Tribune*. You've been back and

forth at the *Gazette* over the years. You were a sports writer, a general assignment reporter, editorial writer, editorial page editor. Was there something special about the *Gazette* as a newspaper? Did you have a sense then and now, looking back, that it was a different kind of place, a special place to be in journalism?

JD: Yes. Both as a journalist and as a citizen. I remember when I was living in Minneapolis how tight space was. You'd go out and cover something that you'd think was worth several paragraphs or maybe even fifteen or twenty inches. You'd come back to the office and be told you've got three inches. I got to thinking, "Well, at the *Gazette*, we didn't do that." I mean, we wrote the story. Whatever it was, we wrote the story. We did have a pretty big news hole and we'd fill it.

ED: There were far more times when I would write something I thought was in great detail, and Bill Shelton would want more details. He wanted more information. "Give me further explanation for this."

JD: Yes. That was wonderful for a reporter.

ED: So we had these stories that would just go on forever. A major story would be thorough. Now, in the latter years, there was an effort to cut back.

JD: You're right.

ED: . . . "Tight and Bright" was the phrase. They'd break stories into smaller stories and not jump them from the front page. You covered the news and the paper would make economic adjustments accordingly to see that the news was covered.

JD: I always felt that the *Gazette* had the pulse and the heart of the community. That

meant some people hated it, but they were engaged with it. People waited to see what the *Gazette* said. It was a good paper. A thorough paper. Something you could count on. And a paper that had integrity. Here's a paper that spoke well for the state it's in, for the community it's in, although it might scold the community as well as praise it. But it was connected. I think the *Gazette*, particularly the old *Gazette*, was connected with its readership, and it had integrity. The people who ran it, for the most part, had integrity. If you worked there, it made you feel good about yourself. All the people who worked there, had respect for everybody else who worked there.

[End of Tape 3, Side 2] [End of Interview]