Gazette Project

Interview with:

Gene Foreman
St. Davids, Pennsylvania,
4 August 2000

Interviewer: Gerald Jordan

Gerald Jordan: So go ahead and tell us your name. Somebody is going to transcribe this.

Gene Foreman: My name is Gene Foreman, and we're talking on August 4, 2000, from my home in Pennsylvania, 262 Ravenscliff Road, St. Davids, PA.

GJ: Why don't you tell us where you were born and when and all the for-the-record stuff.

GF: I was born November 20, 1934, in Fremont, Ohio. My mother is from Arkansas. She grew up in Phillips County, and my dad is from northern Ohio. Oak Harbor. And my mother, who had relatives in Ohio, met my dad in 1930, I think, when she was visiting up there. They were married March 18, 1931, in Wabash, Arkansas, in Phillips County, twenty miles south of Helena. My mother enjoyed living in Ohio. They lived there eight years, and they had three boys and one girl. She was pregnant with my little sister, Connie, when we moved to Arkansas in July, 1941. In his visits down to Phillips County, my dad had gotten very interested in leaving the postal service, which he worked for in Ohio, and

becoming a farmer in Arkansas. He was intrigued by this particularly because the Chicago Mill and Lumber Company, which was harvesting the hardwood forests in Phillips County, would walk off and leave the land after they cut the timber they wanted. So he was able to buy one thousand acres, I think, for a pretty small price even in those days. But, of course, developing the farm is where the expense came in. He was, in addition to working in the post office, the National Guard commander in our little town in Ohio for most of the 1920s and 1930s, and that was very important to him, too. But I think it must have been around 1939–he failed to order his troops to deliver pamphlets for the governor in his re-election campaign, and they then discovered that he had not gotten a bridge for a tooth that had been pulled, and he failed his physical exam. So he was ousted from the Ohio National Guard. The fact that he no longer had that job, which, as I say, was something he really felt strongly about, kind of cleared the decks so that when it appeared that he needed to be on hand personally to run the farm in Arkansas in 1941, that's what he decided to do. So that's how we wound up in Arkansas, and I grew up in Phillips County, went to Elaine High School and Arkansas State College, graduating in 1956. My first experience with the *Gazette* was in 1954. I had finished my sophomore year at Arkansas State, and I got to report at the *Gazette* that summer. I had worked four summers in high school at the *Helena World*, and it was a great experience for someone starting out there at fourteen years old, working in the summer, six days a week, and Saturdays during the school year making $3 a day. After I graduated from high school, during that

summer before I went to college, they raised it to $35 a week. We were between editors at that time, and so that summer I more or less functioned as the editor of the *Helena World*. After my freshman year at Arkansas State, I was eighteen years old in 1953, and I worked that summer at the *Memphis Press Scimitar*. It was an interesting, challenging experience, but I was not totally happy with the people of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. So when Ken Parker, whom I had done some stringing for, talked to me about coming to the *Gazette* that summer and kind of talked to other people who could make it happen, I was very interested in coming to the *Gazette*.

GJ: Now, the *Commercial Appeal* or the *Press Scimitar*?

GF: The *Press Scimitar*, the afternoon paper which no longer exists.

GJ: Was that a tabloid?

GF: No, it wasn't. It was a broadsheet. It was not tabloid, but it had some bizarre aspects to it nonetheless. But during that sophomore year at Arkansas State, you could say that my contact at the *Gazette* was primarily Ken, who introduced me to other people. He led me down there in the summer of 1954, and that was a great experience. I really had a great time that summer.

GJ: Now, who was Ken again?

GF: Ken Parker. P-A-R-K-E-R. Ken was the state editor for several years and when I was in high school, I did some stringing for him. Tom Dygard, now dead, who went on to be an AP bureau chief in Tokyo and other places, also worked for Ken while he was in college at LRJC. I'd done some dealing with him on the desk, so

Ken and Tom were my connections to the *Gazette*. And I also called in sports. Orville Henry was one of my great idols, but I had never met him. One of the bonuses of coming down there in 1954 was to finally meet, in person, Orville Henry. And I continue to be in awe of Orville Henry and all the things he did. The summer in 1954 remains one of the great experiences of my life in journalism.

GJ: Were there any particular things that happened that year?

GF: One thing that happened was Bill Shelton, who I think had fairly recently been made the city editor and who was my only city editor at the *Gazette*, called me over one afternoon late in the day. He said, "Today is the filing deadline for the Democratic primary for governor, and this former highway director has called a press conference down at the Marion Hotel, and we think he's going to make a last-minute announcement to run against Cherry. You need to go down there and cover that." That, of course, was Orval E. Faubus. That was my first experience with him, so Bill gave me a handful of clips–he would always clip out the paper himself each morning and had his own unique filing system, and he had his own clip file on Orval Faubus–so he handed me the sheet of clips, and I read them quickly and went down and heard the great man in person for the first time [note: this is not said with admiration]. That was a memorable experience, and then also that summer I got to cover some of the primary. That was the primary in which Faubus forced Cherry into a runoff. A runoff was always regarded as a sign that there were more "no" votes for the incumbent governor than there were "yes"

votes. And the opposing candidate who got the most votes and thereby got into a runoff two weeks later during July would be the odds-on favorite to upset the incumbent governor. Before, I think the odds were that Cherry would get his endorsement term. With the two-year terms, the governor was virtually running for re-election the moment he took office. It was very unusual that anyone lost the endorsement term but, as we were to emphasize later, no one since Jeff Davis had ever won a third two-year term. So Faubus, having forced Cherry into the runoff, put Cherry on the defensive, and Cherry resorted to the Commonwealth College expose, which Roy [Reed] documented so well [*Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal*, 1997], and we not at all documented during that summer.

GJ: Was it talked about in the newsroom, or did nobody really know about it?

GF: I think that it was more a case of things were happening pretty fast, and it was also, I think, a product of the times that we were reporting what people said and not really doing as much independent research as we should. But what Roy showed in the book was that the transcripts of the Commonwealth College hearings during the thirties were out there at the State House. Either during the election campaign or certainly after, we could have researched that in detail as Roy did for his book, but we didn't do that. What we reported was what Cherry said and what Faubus said. And Cherry did nail him, and, not surprisingly, Faubus lied about it. As I recall, when Faubus was told that Cherry has alleged that he went to a communist college, Commonwealth, he denied ever having set

foot there. And they told him later, "Cherry is now charging that you were elected president of the student body." Faubus said something like, "Well, the election was rigged." [Laughs] But that's the way it went, and I think that because this was the summer of the McCarthy hearings, McCarthy-Army hearings, and people were finally figuring out who McCarthy was and not liking it. They were repelled by McCarthy's tactics that he had used since 1950, of alleging communists in government. I think that there was a backlash. This is my own opinion about that election, that Faubus benefited from a strong anti-McCarthy backlash and people associated Cherry's tactics with McCarthy's, when McCarthy was being discredited at that very time. I also got to cover Boyd Tackett, who was the congressman from Texarkana, who had been re-districted out and was in Cherry's camp. He gave a television address for Cherry and was the heavy on the Commonwealth College issue. He told the TV audience, "Orval Faubus, you cannot deny that you knew this was a communist college. On your way into the building, you had to pass the hammer and sickle." He pronounced "sickle" as "cycle." That was a story I recollect very strongly that I got to do that summer. Bill Shelton and A.R. Nelson, the managing editor, both went over to the TV studio and sat with me as we listened to Boyd perform. I recall on the way back Bill talking to A.R. about the fact that the TV station, I think it was KTHV, would not let our people take pictures in the studio. Bill was raising a very good point: Is this a public event or is it not? If it is a public event, even though it is on private property, we ought to be able to cover it without any

restraints. I'm not sure how that worked out, but I thought it was a very good point that Bill was making and one that was instructive to me.

GJ: Let me ask you about a couple things early that you mentioned. One was that your dad failed to carry political water for a gubernatorial candidate in Ohio. The other is that you would have been, say, around seven years old when World War II broke out.

GF: Yeah, I had just passed my seventh birthday at that point. You asked about the incident in Ohio?

GJ: If that was something that got you to thinking about politics, ethics, about right and wrong, about the little guy getting . . .

GF: Well, in truth, I never knew [phone rings and interview is interrupted] I did not know about the circumstances of why he got discharged. My dad never talked about it to me. My mother made a comment or two that I recall, that she thought that it was an injustice, that it was very important to him that he be in the National Guard, and it was just not a fair thing. I never really pursued that, but when I was in Ohio in the sixties, a cousin of mine who was then the mayor of Oak Harbor, we had dinner, and he told me about the whole story. So I was in my thirties when I found out precisely why he got put out of the National Guard. One can only speculate because he was his mid-to-late forties at the time, but it is possible he would have been in the service for the Second World War. My guess is that he would have been a staff officer if that had happened. He joined the National Guard when he got out of high school and went to Ohio State 1915-16, but was

taken out of school because the President [Woodrow Wilson] mobilized the National Guard to chase Pancho Villa around the Mexican border. He stayed in the Army five years. He was a training NCO in machine guns in World War I. I think he re-upped for a couple of years after the war and got to go to OCS. So in the twenties, he went back home to Ohio and became the Guard commander, which was a very big deal in a town like that in that particular time.

GJ: As far as World War II goes, your being a kid during that time, did that get you focused on news and start to thinking about, "Hey, this is something that probably would make a good career," telling people what is going on?

GF: Well, right, I'm not sure what exactly made me want to be a journalist, but no later than nine years old, I was drawing newspaper pages for my dad and mother. My mother saved a lot of these, and I have one going back to when I was nine years old. So there was never any question as to what I wanted to be. An interesting sidelight there is that my dad had a brother who was a chemist and another brother who was state editor of the *Toledo Blade*. And my brother, John Foreman, became a chemical engineer for Procter and Gamble and I, of course, went into newspapers. Because we moved to Arkansas, neither one of us were around our uncles very much. Given the difficulty of travel, particularly during the war, we never saw them. My Uncle Millard, who was the newspaper editor, died pretty early of a heart attack, around 1946 or 1947. He would write me letters that would encourage me, and I was really impressed with the newspaperman's marking out things and doing copy editing on his letters. I

would save these and study them for a long time, saying, "A real newspaperman did this." [Laughs] Later on, when I started going to the Associated Press Managing Editors meetings, my early years with them in the 1970s overlapped with some of the editors in Toledo who knew my uncle. I encountered the managing editor of the *Toledo Blade*, who had worked side-by-side with my uncle. My dad always speculated that it was kind of an osmosis thing. We lived in Ohio when I was four or five years old. My uncle, who was then single, would bring his friends from the newspaper to our house at night and play pinochle, and I would sit at the table and listen to them.

GJ: Just absorb it up.

GF: Yes, I can't remember that [laughs], but Dad swore that that was sort of a subliminal influence and maybe I decided I want to be like these guys.

GJ: As you got older, you started to thinking about summer jobs and places to go, things to do. You were close to Memphis, relatively close to Memphis and not to Little Rock.

GF: Yeah, Memphis was the paper we were at, the *Commercial Appeal*. I delivered the *Press Scimitar* and I delivered the *Helena World*. I always put it inside the screen door, too. [Laughs] And there was sometimes a quarter mile between houses. Yes, I remembered during the war studying newspapers, between the ages of seven to ten, when the war was going on. I kept up to a certain extent. My dad was religious about keeping up. He had a map that he use to show me things and, of course, he would draw upon his military experience. I see my dad

as saying everything he needed to know, he learned in Command and General Staff College. He would say, “This is what we’re going to do.” Later, in the Korean War, when we were pushed back to the Pusan Perimeter, he would say, “MacArthur has got to break out. We’ve got to hit them behind the lines.” So when the Inchon landing happened, he said, “I’ve been telling you all along this is what we need.” [Laughs] But, yes, he would really suffer through all the strategy. We would listen to the ten o’clock news on the radio, Richard C. Hottelet and William Shirer and all those guys, and really hear what was going on. That was a big deal. My dad worked all day and into the night at the farm and the store out there, but he’d come in and listen to the ten o’clock news. He’d read the paper before he went to work in the morning. I was saying, one day after I was involved in newspapers, that we had to approach the newspaper as a smorgasbord: “We know nobody is going to read the whole paper.” He stopped me and said, “I do.” [Laughter] I came from a family that really read, was very much involved in current events, and I think that had influence on me.

GJ: It would seem that the Memphis paper would be bigger and more attractive to you.

GF: Right. And the *Commercial Appeal* was the paper that everybody regarded very highly, and they called themselves the “Old Reliable.” But being close to Memphis and being in the orbit of Memphis, the *Commercial Appeal* is what we read. The *Gazette* we’d get when I’d go to Helena. My uncle, Julian Vogel, was the manager of the Helena Savings and Loan. One of the things I really enjoyed,

particularly, was going in there during the high school football season. He had a *Gazette*, and I could read all about the high school sports. And also, the barber at Elaine, Fido, subscribed to the *Gazette*, and that was a real treat to go in for my monthly haircut and get to read the *Arkansas Gazette*. I remember thinking to myself, and I may have articulated it to my dad or somebody, "Why don't more people take the *Gazette*? We don't have to read about Mississippi in the *Gazette*. It's all about Arkansas, what's important." And it's a great compendium of high school sports in Arkansas. I had heard about this guy Orville Henry and how he put together this statewide reporting system for high school games, and it was a great treat when I was in high school–I suppose I may have gotten started in eighth grade–being Orville's man in Elaine. That was a big deal. My dad would take me to the games. We had to go to a telephone, which was not easy to do on those days, after the game and I'd get out my notes about who made the touchdowns and everything. So on our way out of town, heading toward Wabash, which is six miles north, we'd stop off at the power company, and they had a telephone they would let me use. The roar of the generators kind of made it hard to talk. [Laughter] But that is how I got started. The *Gazette* was very attractive to me, and I regarded it as a much better, if not fatter, paper than the *Commercial Appeal*. That's what I saw. The *Commercial Appeal* tried to serve three different states, and even with zoning you get a lot of dross in there, and clearly they did not have the people covering Arkansas politics and the like as the *Gazette*. For the *Gazette* then, and certainly much more so than we regard it in Pennsylvania,

state government and politics are the big stories. I think we probably undercover that in Pennsylvania. Maybe you could argue that the *Gazette* overcovered state government and politics, but that may not be so because I think state government and state politics are simply a bigger story in Arkansas than they are here in Pennsylvania. Anyway, that was another thing that attracted me, the homogenous nature of the state and the *Gazette's* emphasis on sports, state high schools, the Razorbacks and general news, state government and state politics. I was attracted by covering politics and found that fascinating at an early age. Clarence Taylor, who was the weekly editor, who covered the spelling bee that I won, the Phillips County spelling bee of 1948, found out interviewing me afterwards that I really wanted to be a newspaperman. He let me be the Wabash stringer for the *Phillips County Herald*. Later on, he left the paper and stayed in town and was the state representative. A major event in 1949 was that during the state legislative session, he got me to come over and spend a couple of days, and he introduced me to Sid McMath, and that was a great occasion.

GJ: At what point did you become aware of the history or the weight of the *Gazette*? The oldest paper west of the Mississippi?

GF: I think that I saw that all along, in Fido's barbershop and my uncle's office that these things . . . [Interview is interrupted by visitors] At some point I learned the outlines of what the *Gazette* meant to the state, and I think I sensed that it was a very rare newspaper right from the beginning. Not being familiar with it and having seen *Commercial Appeal* so much, I saw it in Phillips County as an

undiscovered secret. "Why aren't more people taking the *Gazette*?" Interestingly enough, in 1957 during the Little Rock school crisis the *Commercial Appeal* ran an editorial that, of course, supported Faubus and added more trouble for Arkansas. Mr. Heiskell–either I heard him or somebody said he had said–"I told those people to stay on the other side of the White River."

GJ: Really?

GF: Yes, he had conceded our part of Arkansas, recognizing the *Commercial Appeal* would be dominant. But Mr. Heiskell's view was that once they got past the White River, they were on our ground and they shouldn't tamper with our affairs.

GJ: So he took umbrage with that editorial?

GF: I don't think he said anything in the paper, but he was quoted in the newsroom as having the reaction that the *Commercial Appeal* editorial was gross tampering and a violation of a sort of a gentleman's agreement. That's their side of the White River and this is our side. But Elaine and Wabash were on the *Commercial Appeal* side of the White River.

GJ: Now you were there in the summer of 1954, and I'm trying to remember when the Brown decision [*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*] was.

GF: That was in May, 1954. And so there was quite a bit of talk about it and the usual posturing by the Southern politicians, but the fact–as I recall, my impression was the fact that the court said they would meet again to see how it would be carried out. There was sort of a hiatus when nothing was expected to happen.

GJ: Do you recall whether the paper ran the full text of the decision?

GF: I don't recall that.

GJ: Later on during 1957, that was one of the things that the *Gazette* was famous for, for running full texts of everything.

GF: Yes.

GJ: What was some of the thinking on that?

GF: The extent that I was privy to it, we talked about how we're the newspaper of record and when things are important, we ought to document to let people see the exact full text. So I think it just followed there as the newspaper of record. I was impressed as I worked at the *Gazette* during the summers of 1954, 1955, 1956 and then after I got out of the Army and for the next five years. One of the principles was that we are a newspaper of record and essentially it had not officially happened in Arkansas unless the *Gazette* has taken notice of it. So we felt the need to document everything. We also talked about–I still believe in the first-day lead concept that Bill Shelton explained to me, how it is a mistake that newspapers get confused and start a story with a secondary development on the first day instead of telling the whole story. This was the approach to basic newswriting that I learned from Shelton, and nobody has given me a persuasive reason not to follow that now. Yes, the people know from radio and TV and other papers that it happened. But it's still a logical approach, and it doesn't mean you can't advance a story, but you do not start in the middle. That was one of the things we talked about, and it was an offshoot of the concept of being the newspaper of record.

GJ: A lot of things are done at newspapers now by way of seminars, and writing sessions, how did Shelton teach? What did he do, just pull you aside?

GF: I'm trying to think of that. Bill would sometimes show me changes that he had made. Sometimes he . . .

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[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

GF: . . . journalistic theory of the time. Very methodical, very committed, dedicated to doing what he was supposed to do. It was a time of more objective reporting in which, as I say, during Commonwealth we pretty much were reporting, "Here's what Cherry says; here's what Faubus says." As I've noted, Roy demonstrated many years later that all we had to do was go out to the state capitol. We could have told the whole story about Commonwealth ourselves and not rely upon Cherry and Faubus to present it with their own spin. That practice came to the surface later in the school crisis, Central High. Today, if we had a staff of fourteen reporters–this is what we had at the *Gazette*–and something like that happened, we'd probably send ten or twelve of them out there and station them at different places around the school. Bill's approach, which was the practice of the day, was it's a big story; therefore, one person, Ray Moseley, would go out there and observe and would write the main. And Jerry Dhonau, who had graduated from Central High four years earlier and knew a lot of the characters and was a good reporter, would write the color. So you had two reporters. Bill did split people off, and I did some sidebar material and things not involved at Central

High. Bill Lewis was assigned by Shelton to do a telling story. Faubus said on Labor Day night, when he announced that he had sent out the guard, that caravans were descending on Little Rock and the sale of guns and knives in the city had gone up. Bill immediately sent Lewis out on Tuesday to check all the gun and knives stores, and Bill wrote a story saying that business was going on as usual. That's the sort of thing we do more of today, but Bill certainly did it then. Basically, covering a story, Bill did the main and color, and I think we would have benefited by having six or eight more pairs of eyes at different places that could have fed into Dhonau's story and Ray's [Moseley] story instead of just relying on them to do all the reporting. But I think that I learned more from Shelton by observing what he did rather than him teaching me or telling me different things. Later on, I went on the desk with him, when he asked me to become the assistant city editor. I learned a lot from him then as he would give me asides as we were going through the day. That was very instructive. I don't recall getting that specifically as a reporter, but I do recall him being a very conscientious journalist who would brief me carefully as a reporter going out on an assignment, as he did on that Faubus thing, to try to give me all the background, recognizing that I was off at school and may not have kept up on the blow-by-blow. So sending you out on a story, I recall, he would give you enough information so that you pretty well knew what he was looking for.

GJ: Was there, as in a lot of morning newspapers, a split personality there among the staff? A lot of folk who come in and cover government and things during the

daytime wear–in case of men, coats and ties–appropriate business dress. Then in the evening when the late-nighters, the people who work from five to one, or six to two [o'clock], when they come in, they kind of come in and bring a different demeanor. They are more casually dressed, tend to be more prone to pranks and quips around the room. What do you recall about the staff on the *Gazette*?

GF: Well, the shift change is not as pronounced as at the *Inquirer*, where we have a whole bunch of people come in much later to run the desks at night. At the *Gazette* I think that the people on the copy desk who really saw it to the end came in around one or two [o'clock]. They were more laid back, but very few of us dressed up to report. As I recall, it was all pretty much casual dress.

GJ: [Whispers] Except for Mr. Heiskell.

GF: Except for Mr. Heiskell. [Laughs] You have the story about Mr. Heiskell's suits?

GJ: No.

GF: You haven't heard that? Well, we must talk about that. Particularly late at night, when I was around there, around say ten or eleven and on, Douglas was the wire editor, and I think he'd come in at noon.

GJ: This is Bob Douglas.

GF: His relief, then, would be to make sure that if the world blew up, it was reported in the *Gazette*. [Laughs] And so one of the relief people, as it worked out, was overjoyed to have the opportunity to be the late-night wire editor, standing at Bob's table. Bob stood up all day at a high table and spread all the copy out, and

cut with a straight edge and sorted things out. He was very meticulous and nothing escaped his eye, but he would brief the copy editor who would be assigned to be his relief and then go home. This must have been about ten o'clock. And so Pat Crow, who is now an editor at the *New Yorker*, as he has been for thirty years up in New York . . .

GJ: Is this Crow with an "e" on the end?

GF: It's spelled C-R-O-W. He had graduated, I think, from the University of Missouri. I believe he did, not sure, but he's a Little Rock kid. A big, hulking red-headed guy, and he said, "I am King of the World." This may be apocryphal, but something came up that Crow was supposedly criticizing the city desk, looking over their list of stories and said, "With a city of 100,000 people these are the best stories you could do?" And somebody on the cityside said, "With a world of two billion people, this is the best that *you* could do?!" [Laughter] Crow was overjoyed to be Bob's understudy and called himself the King of the World, and I think we called him the King from then on because that's what he wanted to be called.

Mr. Heiskell and his suits–to my recollection, he and Harry Ashmore were the only ones who wore suits. Mr. Heiskell was a paternalistic boss of the old school, and he had these suits that he found to be surplus. So he brought about a half-a-dozen down to the office and hung them up on coat hangers in his office. He asked Mary, his secretary, "Isn't Mr. [Charlie] Allbright about the same size as me?" I think Mary realized that Charlie was bigger than Mr. Heiskell, but she

also knew not to argue with him. She said, “Send for Mr. Allbright.” He called us all Mr. So Charlie Allbright came back, and Mr. Heiskell said he had these suits which he thought were in good shape, and he didn’t want them to go to waste. Why didn’t he try them on? Charlie tried on the first suit coat, and to his great relief, the cuff came up to the middle of his forearm. Mr. Heiskell was crestfallen. He said, “Somebody needs these suits. Is there anyone in the newsroom who is my size?” Charlie Allbright said, “Mr. Foreman is your size.” [Laughter] Next thing I knew, I was back there trying on a suit which fit perfectly. [Laughter] The first one fit perfectly, so Mr. Heiskell mercifully said take them all and wear them in good health. I went over there–I was so embarrassed–grabbed the suits off the coat hanger, and it was time to go home to lunch. I passed by the Goodwill Industries on my way home on Seventh Street, and I thought, “I really ought to drop these off, but I’m really pressed for time, so I’ll do it this weekend.” When I got home, Jo Ann said, “Where have you been? You took Mr. Heiskell’s suit coat that he wore into the office today.” So I rushed back and thanked my lucky stars that Mr. Heiskell was not yet back from the library Board of Trustees luncheon, which he is the chairman of.

GJ: He had to go without his jacket?!

GF: Mary said that he had been pretty apprehensive about going without a coat, but Mr. Heiskell came back, and I went to him and apologized profusely for taking his coat. He said, “It’s all right, Mr. Foreman. When I got to the library Board of Trustees Luncheon and they saw that I was not wearing a suit coat, they all took

their suit coats off, too." [Laughter] So all was well that ended well.

GJ: Setting the tone there. You got to meet Orville [Henry]. Tell me a little bit about him.

GF: He was legendary. People who knew that I was interested in newspapers and who knew the Orville Henry story had long before told me that when the war was on and men were in short supply, the sports editor was hired away to be the sports editor of the *New York Daily News* or the *Post* or the *Mirror* or one of the tabloids in New York. Orville was just out of high school and was answering telephone at the newsroom switchboard. Somebody knew that he knew a lot about sports and said, "This guy is gone and you're the new sports editor." He's something like eighteen, and he's the sports editor. He was legendary both for covering the Razorbacks and for developing–this is more of my interest–developing statewide high school sports coverage. I was either in junior high or high school and was fascinated by high school sports. The fact that the *Gazette* was the almanac and the bible of the high school sports in Arkansas was really important. So Orville was the architect of this empire, and it was a great experience meeting Orville Henry.

GJ: At that time pictures did not run with columns, so you had no idea what he looked like?

GF: I'm not sure whether there was a photograph or not, or drawing. I think I had some idea of what he looked like. He was impressive in person as well.

GJ: You mentioned the sports editor who was sort of . . .

GF: Seems like his name could be Ben Epstein, but that could be wrong. I never really researched that.

GJ: It seems like a lot . . . of *Gazette* people went on to New York, Philadelphia. Lots of places. Was the *Gazette* a big feeder newspaper?

GF: My generation, I came after Spider Rowland, and Orville was timeless and bridged all these generations. Mort Stern, who went on to become the editor of the editorial page of the *Denver Post*, I think, was also revered as an alum who had made good. But at that time, Richard Davis, who was kind of on the outside, but a friend of most of us observed that the *Gazette* was a rallying place for young talent from Arkansas, and most of them inevitably went on to other places after learning a lot at the *Gazette*. That is certainly true in my case and a lot of others that I knew. My generation, and I don't want to leave anybody out, but Pat Crow was one who went on to *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune* and from there to the *New Yorker*. Bill Whitworth, who went from the *Gazette* to the *Herald-Tribune,* to the *New Yorker*, and ultimately to serve as editor for fifteen years or so for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Buddy Portis, who was our star–I always admired Buddy Portis, Charles Portis, as a writer and a consummate professional. He is a writer who was so meticulous not only about reporting and writing, but also grammar, punctuation and spelling. There was nothing wrong with anything that Charles Portis wrote, as far as I'm concerned. Roy, of course. Portis went on to the *Herald-Tribune*, and he wrote a lot of human interest stories in New York. When they sent him in about 1963 or 1964 to Europe to report for the *Herald-*

Tribune, they asked him if there was anybody "who writes the things that you do that we can hire," and he said Bill Whitworth. Of course, Bill has a great light touch, also. That's how Whitworth wound up in New York as well. When I got a job at *The New York Times* in 1962 on the copy desk, Crow, the King of the World, saw me off. He said, "I'm going to give you a couple of months to get established, and then I'm going to write up there for a job and give you as a reference." I said, "Sure." Two months later, almost to the day, the secretary to Richard Burritt, who was kind of the recruiting editor of *The New York Times*, came by and said, "Have you ever heard of a Charles Patrick Crow?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Should we bring him up for a trial?" And I said, "Yes." He was hired. He arrived the day that the papers all went on strike in New York. I went back to Arkansas. With two young kids, I could not make it on strike benefits, but Crow hung out for four months. He walked in the first day after the strike ended and got a $5-a-week raise, which was big bucks in those days. I told Crow–based on my four or five months of experience–when he got up there, I said, "It's a great newspaper, but working there is not the best thing in the world. There are a lot of problems." Crow said, "No, that can't be. This is the rarified atmosphere at the top." Crow went to work in March, 1963, after being on strike for four months before he ever got to work. It was later that year that he jumped ship and went to the *Herald-Tribune* because, he said, "It's no fun working for *The New York Times*. The *Herald-Tribune* is where it's at." [Laughter] Later on, he and Whitworth both carved out great careers at the *New Yorker*. . . . Ray

Moseley remains one of the best reporters I've ever worked with. He is still the senior foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, based in London. Even though he is sixty-seven years old now. He's still going strong. He's just written a book, non-fiction, about Mussolini's nephew in World War II, who was executed. Not his nephew, his son-in-law. His daughter made an impassioned plea on his behalf, but Mussolini said he had committed a crime against the state. Ray was an outstanding reporter. He was a reporter with so many gears: light features, the weightiest news story, takeouts.

I remember they had the press bar back across the street from the *Gazette*. It was a pretty nice club, and during 1957, that's where all the national press hung out. Arkansas did not allow the sale of mixed drinks, but that was a mockery because you'd get mixed drinks at the club.

GJ: What was it called?

GF: I think it was the Press Club. Somebody was telling me that it did not spend a lot of time with protocol, but if you did not have your card to get in the door, you could buzz, and the barkeeper would come over and open the door to make sure you were entitled to go into this private club. There was this case where a guy buzzed, and the barkeeper says, "You're not a member. Do you work for a newspaper?" Buzz said, "No, but I read a newspaper." The barkeeper said, "Well, come on in." [Laughter] So Moseley was talking to me one night that he had done a little research on Arkansas laws, and there were a number of private clubs like the Press Club all over town that would have bars. Moseley discovered

that all of these, including our club, were illegal. Moseley ran a front-page story in the *Gazette* that said there was not a shred of legality to these clubs, and a lot of people felt Moseley should not have done that, but it was a good story. He researched things like that.

GJ: Did it shut down the club?

GF: I don't think anything happened. I don't think we galvanized the law into closing down all the clubs, but, of course, we had Hot Springs, where illegal gambling flourished at the same time. So it was pretty much an accepted fact of life, that there may be laws that satisfied people who were concerned about having laws that you couldn't drink and gamble, but drinking and gambling did occur. [Laughter]

GJ: Tell me a little bit about this . . . you talked earlier about how Shelton was meticulous in getting both sides of the story but did not necessarily press you to look for documents or anything like that. Was there much of what you might call investigative reporting going on?

GF: Not a whole lot.

GJ: Everybody knew what was happening in Hot Springs, but nobody really made an effort . . .

GF: During the time I was there, I don't think we did any great exposes. Douglas may contradict me, and he would be accurate if he did; he certainly goes farther back. It may have been in the late 1940s when there was reporting done on it. I cannot remember during the time I was at the *Gazette* that we went out of our way to do

that kind of reporting.

GJ: What about the guys who were there late in the evening? Did you talk about stories, talk about moving to New York, talk about hitting it big one day?

GF: There's a great camaraderie, particularly during 1957-59 period when we were "Fortress *Gazette*." Everybody out there was gunning for us. Faubus would denounce us at every turn. The Citizens' Council, Reverend L. D. Foreman–no relation, I might point out–[laughter] was the chairman of the "*Gazette* Ad Too Bad" campaigns of the Citizens' Council. They were trying to drum up a secondary boycott of the advertisers of the *Gazette*, so it was all-out economic warfare against the *Gazette*. Basically, we knew we were right. Great camaraderie, great sense of liberal approach to politics, quite different from what existed beyond the *Gazette's* walls. One thing that troubles me a little bit in retrospect is the feeling that we were better than they were. I have tried over the years to be more egalitarian. We may not agree with our public, but they are our public. I'm not sure there was the kind of respect that I would like to see our [*Inquirer*] staff show, but then again it was a difficult time, and some of the things done by the segs, as we called them, were really dumb. But there was a feeling that we were one level intellectually and the rest of the state was pretty much below us. There's one quote that the *Gazette* people treasured that had been said about the *Gazette* maybe ten, fifteen or twenty years earlier. That is "[the *Gazette* is] one of America's most literate voices in one of America's most illiterate states." That was even trotted out and used purposely in the *Gazette* just before

and after it was sold to the *Democrat*. It's a sort of thing that I don't think we should do. It may make us look good, but it makes your readers look bad, and that's what troubles me about it. But there's no question about the camaraderie and profound wisdom that was here. Mr. Heiskell didn't spend a lot of time talking to us, but Ashmore did regularly come out into the newsroom, and what I can see now, years later, is that what he was doing was bucking up our spirits. He was showing the flag. People would gather around, and he would tell us what was going on, to the extent that he wanted to share with us. The fact that he participated in calling for the Federal troops, he never divulged that to us, but he was just so forceful and so obviously right that what he was saying was logical, fair, consistent with the law as I knew it. People like Douglas and Shelton you really respect in more informal ways–particularly Douglas, who talked to us about things. Camaraderie was very important, and we definitely had very good camaraderie. Particularly among the younger people, just among ourselves. There was Douglas, who was just ten years older, but he seemed like a senior statesman. He and Shelton, they were in their mid-thirties. [Laughter] But just among ourselves, the Portises and Whitworths and Roy Reed. In age, Roy was somewhere in between. We spent a lot of time with each other and talked to each other, and we were very proud of what we were doing and justifiably so.

GJ: Do you think you might have missed any stories as a result of what you said, holding the reader not necessarily in contempt, but somewhat at arm's length?

GF: It's possible. But I'm not sure I would know what that would be at this point. As

I say, I think my experience and the whole experience of the newspaper profession in the forty-some years since this had occurred–we would have tried to record a lot more of the texture. One thing that we would do today that we didn't do then was tell about who these nine kids [at Central High] were, and it probably would have been a mistake to have done it. But I think the more that people knew about them, the more danger they would be put in. So we didn't do that, and I give Bill credit. He may have thought about that and decided that may have put them into too much jeopardy. So all those names, Jefferson Thomas, Melba Patillo, Carlotta Walls–outside of Minijean Brown, who was expelled and was very flamboyant–they were cardboard figures. But also, looking back, I recognize that probably was best, that they probably could have been harmed.

GJ: Did the subject ever come up even in the Press Bar, that maybe we ought to have somebody black–or at the time it would have been "Negro"–working or reporting on the story?

GF: I don't recall it being discussed. I did feel like more of us ought to be out at the high school, but I don't know if I told anybody what I thought because I was just a year out of college. My instincts were that we ought to have more eyes and ears out on the line.

GJ: Were you aware of what the *State Press*, Mrs. Bates' paper . . .

GF: Not very much. I think that's worth noting here. Our view of that, which was not very smart in retrospect, was that you were put off by the amateurism of the Negro press and put off by its advocacy. Obviously, the advocacy was what it

was about, but it took me a long time to recognize how important the black press was in the civil rights movement. At Memphis, last fall at APME, the woman who is the publisher of the *Baltimore Afro-American* talked about how the white press, the mainstream press, did not understand how this big crowd was going to go up there at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, when Dr. King was going to be there. It was a stunning surprise, the huge crowd. But she said, "That's what we did, we passed the word. The white press," which I was guilty of, "was not paying attention to us." We discounted the influence of L.C. and Daisy Bates's paper. Of course, outside of Ozell Sutton, who worked some for the *Democrat*, there were no African-American reporters at the time.

GJ: When did he start, was it 1959?

GF: No, it was before all this happened. I'm not sure he was still there when the Central High thing occurred. He was an oddity, a Negro reporter. While the *Gazette* people were very liberal, none of us thought that maybe we ought to have some black reporters. That seemed not to have entered anybody's mind

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

GF: The *Gazette* did not say in its editorials that desegregation was morally right. We said, "It is the law of the land, and you have a history of constitutional law in this country, and you obey court orders. The court has held that the schools should be desegregated." That in itself was enough to alienate twenty percent of our circulation in September of 1957. The *Gazette* had segregated obituaries and

segregated various other news columns. There was not a whole lot of remarking about that. Some of us, I think, as time went on into the late 1950s and 1960s, started murmuring about "isn't it time we did not have a separate obituary for Negroes?" But it was not until Mr. Patterson, Hugh Patterson–some masseur at some athletic club he went to talked to him as he was giving him a massage: "Mr. Patterson," or "Mr. Hugh, don't you think you ought to not . . . ?" And so Hugh–I remember he came to the city desk and I think he said to Shelton, "Why don't we just stop having separate obits for Negroes, and just have one." You need to document that, but that is my recollection of how it changed. Various other people wondered why we continued to do this. The so-called Southern traditions were pretty well imbued, and they died hard. Even though the *Gazette* was liberal by the day's standards, you could find a lot of fault and allege hypocrisy against it, but at the time we thought we were the intellectual folks of the state. The *Gazette* had problems, of course, being so far out in front of its audience as it was–even though not professing to be integrationist in philosophy–that if they had said what we would say today, maybe we'd have lost one-hundred percent of our circulation. And would we have been taken seriously? The times are so drastically different, it's hard to even imagine. But in 1957 it was incendiary to say that the Supreme Court orders ought to be obeyed in Little Rock. Having said that, I think that had it not been for Faubus's opportunism– if he had acted in a statesmanlike manner, which is, of course, saying a lot–the Citizens' Council's effort to rabble-rouse could have been rebuffed. I think that when Faubus put the

weight of the Governor's office behind the obstruction, that changed the picture overnight. The people who were inclined to rabble-rouse before Faubus's action would not have been enough to carry the day. They would have been seen as the underclass, a lower class of people than what ran the community. What happened was the so-called community leaders were so intimidated that the *Gazette* was the only voice–well, there were a few others, but generally speaking, the civic leaders went underground. Woodrow Wilson Mann, the mayor, took a stand against Faubus, but he was seen as a discredited politician, a lightweight, and he was on his way out when he took on Faubus. He was pilloried for trying to make a name for himself, to ingratiate himself with the Eastern press and take on Faubus to draw attention to himself. He was relatively ineffective. However, as the mayor he was instrumental at urging the federal government to intervene.

I would just mention that when I would interview people like Amis Guthridge, the lawyer for the Citizens' Council, these people were all very friendly and affable with us reporters off the record. So at one point after having a press conference–and Amis knew I was there–he said, "I know that whatever I said today is going to be totally distorted by the *Gazette* in tomorrow morning's paper." On his way out, he said, "Don't take this personally, Gene. I know it's Harry that's going to do all the changing. You'll write a good story, but Harry will do all the changing." What's remarkable was that Harry had never changed anything! If he read any of my stories, I'm not aware of it. A.R. Nelson, the managing editor, said to a group of us one time, "The deal I have with Harry is

that he runs the segregation coverage, but I run everything else in the newsroom." That's good enough for me, but rarely did Harry really do anything on the news side. He was concerned with his editorials, which were marvels of clarity and persuasive argument. I wanted to tell you about an incident two years later. [Phone rings in background.] Many years later, I think during the seventies, when [David] Halberstam wrote the book *The Powers That Be*, one of the powers was the *Washington Post* and Phil Graham. At the time a lot of the segregationist leaders were saying that Harry Ashmore was responsible for the Federal troops being here, which, incidentally, I thought was a good thing, but I have never seen any evidence that he was. I discounted it because people like Amis Guthridge would say he was going to re-edit my story and he never did. I thought it was speculation, self-serving speculation. But I was on the beach in New Jersey in a summer in the seventies and reading *The Powers That Be*, and I came across the part where Phil Graham was in touch with Harry Ashmore throughout that thing, and they both concluded that troops had to be brought in. Phil talked to Sherman Adams, who talks to Eisenhower, and eventually the troops come in, so he did have a big part to play. The sort of participatory journalism, we generally don't practice these days. But I'm not sitting in judgment of Harry, who I think is great. It was a different time, and there was a vacuum of leadership there. He stepped in and did more than what an editor these days would do. That was public journalism in a different sort of way. But two years later, I was working on the city desk–this was during the recall election campaign. You may

remember that in Spring 1959, the tide started to turn with the dedication of a couple of new elementary schools in west Little Rock. The parents who were there knew that people who had said something against segregation were intimidated and silenced, but after two years of this, they were starting to speak up. Also, a lot of them had repeated that this was just a high school issue: "If our kids were junior high or elementary school or in pre-school, we don't have to really worry about it yet." The high schools were now closed for a year. And so at these two dedications, people started speaking up and murmuring–this was not a part of the program–and saying, "Why don't we do something to get our schools open? We don't care if it means the end of segregation." There were three school board members out of the six who felt that way, and there were three dead-end segregationists. And so they had gone for about a year at an impasse, but at one school board meeting one of the moderate members did not show up, for whatever reason. There was a quorum, and now the segregationists had a 3-2 majority, so they whipped out their list of all the teachers who had been known to be civil to black students at Central High or who had been known to have said something that was less than hard-line segregationist. So they had their purge list, and they fired all of them. That really galvanized the community. Now here were some of the elementary school teachers being fired for having said something moderate at some point. That was the Pearl Harbor; they realized now that it affects all of us. And so they organized a petition drive to recall the three school board members who had purged their favorite teachers. The segregationists responded by

circulating a petition to recall the three moderates. So the stage was set now in the spring of 1959 for a showdown vote. The school-closing law was on its way up to the Supreme Court, where it was eventually thrown out as a subterfuge to prevent the carrying out of the 1954 decision. So the anti-purgers, the moderates, had their campaign, STOP, "Stop This Outrageous Purge." The opposite was CROSS, "Committee to Retain Our Segregated Schools," so STOP and CROSS went into action. I was the city editor for the Sunday paper one Saturday, and the STOP people, our people, sent over a news release. Shelton had told me that most news releases were not really news, but you do check it. I looked over this, and it was all self-serving drivel, so I spiked it. I threw it in the trash, as a matter of fact. Then that night I was there when the first editions of the two papers came out. It must have been about 10 o'clock. Harry Ashmore was looking at the two papers, and the *Democrat* had–bang–on the front page, verbatim, the news release from the STOP people. Harry came over and said, "We don't have this story." I said, "But, Harry, it's not a story. It's all old stuff, regurgitating what we've been reporting." He said, "We can't have this. These are our people." Then, "the lousy, no-good *Democrat* is running their story verbatim, and we don't have it at all." He said, "Where is their copy?" I said, "I threw it away." I looked over there, and they had emptied the trash [laughs] and I said, "Well, they sent it over and maybe I can try and go over and get their story." He said, "Never mind." He took some scissors, started cutting out the *Democrat's* first edition, and pasted it up. So they sent the *Democrat* out to our composing room, so in the later editions

we had the complete text of their self-serving news release as well. That's the only time that I observed that Harry intervened in the news process. He was probably right. I was applying normal news standards to something that was an abnormal situation.

GJ: You were aware of the only time . . .

GF: The only time I saw Harry actually intervene in the editing process, to my great embarrassment.

There was an event–this is another story–there was a Bishop Tomlinson from Long Island, who declared himself king of every state. Do you remember that? Bill Whitworth, later for the *New Yorker* in the sixties, wrote a profile of the Bishop. I think his name was Tomlinson. He would crank out news releases saying, "I'm coming to Little Rock on such-and-such a day at ten a.m. At the state Capitol steps, I will crown myself king of Arkansas." As he worked his away across the country, some stories would get into the wires and papers about this character who was termed the King of the United States in each individual state. His church was the Church of God. There was a Church of God denomination of a number of churches in Arkansas, and they were not Bishop Tomlinson's Church of God, so they would write news releases saying they were not associated with Bishop Tomlinson. So Shelton was not too impressed with Bishop Tomlinson. To the dismay of people like me and Portis and Patrick Owens–Patrick Owens is another character, a brilliant writer–but Shelton was not going to cover it. Shelton would run the news releases from other churches that

said the guy who was going to proclaim himself king of Arkansas was not one of them. So I think that Portis may have intervened and asked Shelton, "Can we cover it? Just go with him and observe what happens?" Shelton said we were not going to cover it. We reported all this to Douglas, who said, "Shelton is on to this guy. He knows he's not king of the world." [Laughs] But Portis by then had a column, and so he and Owens spoiled Shelton by Portis's writing about him in the column. They went down to the Greyhound bus station two blocks from the *Gazette* and met Bishop Tomlinson when he rolled in on motorcoach, and they gave him a ride to the state Capitol. This is probably seen in my news media ethics classes as not keeping arm's length from a source, the subject of a story. But as I recall, Portis sat in the back and interviewed Bishop Tomlinson while Patrick Owens drove. So Portis wrote a column about it even though Shelton had correctly deduced that this guy was a fraud. [Laughs]

GJ: Douglas said he was on to him, that he wasn't the king of the world.

GF: Larry Obsitnik was another character of the time, the chief photographer. He was a high school graduate, and he always called us the college kids. We had a great respect for Obsitnik. He was a fine photojournalist of his era. He did wonders with the Speed Graphic and black and white. I first saw him in person–even though I'd seen his credit lines and admired his pictures for a long time in high school and college. Until I worked with him, I never knew how to pronounce his name. I met him when he came to Helena and covered the Miss Arkansas pageant, so I got to see Larry in person. Later on, when I was at Arkansas State,

the college hosted, in my sophomore or junior year, the state high school basketball tournament, the highest level, and Larry came up to cover that. He sat at the end of the court, crossed his legs and positioned a Speed Graphic under the basket, and got all his shots. I noticed that all the other photographers were gravitating to the end of the court, crossing their legs and positioning their Speed Graphics in the same way. I don't think that Larry's reputation in the state was monumental, but those who did what he did realized that he was the master. I really enjoyed going on assignments with "The Chief." That's what we called him. The Chief decided about 1957 that he would take a picture of everybody in the *Gazette* newsroom. And as people came and went, he would keep their pictures. The turnover, given a paper of that size, was fairly significant. So a lot of the people on the wall a few years later were people who were no longer there. One guy who went to college with me and now works at the copy desk of *The New York Times*, Jim Barden from Pocahontas, was a year behind me at Arkansas State, and he majored in journalism. Barden and I are still good friends, and I told Nelson about him, and Nelson gave him a shot as a reporter there at the *Gazette*, so he and Moseley and I shared an apartment. Barden had been there only about two or three months when he got his draft notice and was called for a physical and he knew the end was near. So I rushed to a reserve unit I knew and got Barden an appointment in the public information detachment, and he was going to go to Fort Slocum, New York. But first Barden had to go to basic training at Fort Chaffee. The day he left, I realized while we were down at the

Greyhound station seeing Barden off to Fort Smith, Obsitnik had never got around to taking his picture. So I ran the two blocks down the street and up the stairs into the photo office and said, "Larry, you don't have Barden's picture." He said, "Yes, you're right, I've got to get to it." I said, "Get to it? He's leaving on the bus for Fort Chaffee!" So he grabbed his Speed Graphic, and we ran down to the station. The bus is pulling out and Barden stuck his head out the window and waved, and that's the picture that went on the wall. [Laughs] It probably was still on the wall when they took it down, but I remember for years looking at the growing gallery of pictures and Barden with his head out of the Greyhound bus. [Laughs] Barden liked the St. Louis Cardinals–with Harry Caray announcing back then, later for the Cubs–Barden had to listen to every Cardinals game. It drove Moseley crazy. This was our apartment in Pulaski Heights. Barden would listen to this station in Morrilton where, when there's atmospheric interference, there was terrible static. That would really annoy Moseley. The unadulterated Harry Caray was bad enough for Moseley, but when he had to listen to Harry Caray and static, it just drove him ballistic. One night Moseley came in from work, and Barden had fallen asleep listening to a static-filled Harry Caray broadcast. Moseley turned the volume up and put it right under Barden's ear and he snoozed on. [Laughs]

GJ: It wasn't bothering him in the least.

GF: It was good background music for him to sleep by. Harry Caray and static.

GJ: There were a couple of characters we mentioned earlier before started taping, and

you said you'd missed one at the end of the era . . .

GF: Joe Wirges. Joe was the legendary police reporter who covered everything. I occasionally had to fill in for him, as did a lot of other summer interns, when he was on vacation. You would go to the fire station, and a sign would be posted: "In the case of a major fire, call all the TV and radio stations, the *Democrat*, and Joe Wirges." Not the *Gazette*, but Joe Wirges.

GJ: They had everybody by institutions.

GF: Except him by name, and he was an institution. I was young, and I looked a lot younger, and I introduced myself to the police sergeant and said that Joe was on vacation and "I'm it. Is there any news?" "I don't know about that," and he went back and called Joe Wirges at home and described me. Joe said, "He really is a reporter," and so he came out there and showed me the docket and everything, and we got the news. Another time I filled in for the city hall reporter, Jason Rouby, and covered Pratt Remmel, the Republican mayor who later on ran against Faubus–unsuccessfully, of course–but Pratt Remmel was disbelieving, too. He could see himself being embarrassed by talking to this imposter, and he kept saying, as we were talking, "Are you *sure* you're a reporter from the *Gazette*?" He didn't call to verify the way the police sergeant did, but that's professionalism by the police. They were more careful about these things. Of course, interviewing that summer of 1954, Senator McClellan–Douglas gave me a lot of questions to ask Senator McClellan, and McClellan ended the interview and called Ashmore to protest sending a kid to interview him.

GJ: To ask those impertinent questions?

GF: Well, yes, I was asking a bunch of brash questions. He said, "This is it," and McClellan called to complain.

GJ: I know a lot of times young reporters learn a lot from cop reporters. Did you learn anything from Wirges?

GF: Yes, but by today's standards you would say that Joe was too close to the people he was covering, and I think that was no doubt true. Again, it's hard to judge people and what they did in that era by the standards of today's era. But we knew that Joe would never miss a story. If something happened, his sources would make sure that he, and thereby the *Gazette*, would get the story. His contacts were tremendous, and he went back into the 1920s. There was this time that I was this rookie editor working next to Shelton, and Shelton said, "I've asked Joe to write 'I remember,' " a Sunday column that we ran for several weeks. Wirges would remember big crime stories in Arkansas over about a thirty-year period, and I was editing it. I know today that I edited too hard and that Joe's style was Joe, and I should have edited it more lightly. I was trying to make Joe into a facile writer, and that was not Joe. I've told editors over the past thirty years that you respect a writer's style. Not everybody writes the same way. In Joe's case, I know now that the thing to have done would be to give him a lot of leeway, but it was torturous trying to edit that stuff.

GJ: [Laughs] Joe was no Buddy Portis, huh?

GF: No, he was not Buddy Portis. But the stories were there, and it's possible I could

have edited it in a way to preserve his style and still be acceptable on paper.

GJ: Were there any newsroom taboos? I ask that because I worked at the *Kansas City Star*, and I got into the newsroom at the beginning of the 1970s, and I heard a lot of what used to be forbidden in the paper. There was one editor who could not stand snakes. Therefore, snakes could never be mentioned.

GF: I don't think the *Gazette* ran snakes either. I don't believe they did. This is not a taboo, but maybe we'll come back to a taboo if we think of one. I think this is where I was introduced to the term "sacred cow." I'm not sure what the sacred cows were because the *Gazette* was an honorable newspaper, and I don't think that extended into the covering of anything important. But from my vantage point, I might not have known that. That reminds me, though, of something else I want to digress on–have you heard of JNH's? John Netherland Heiskell, of course. Mr. Heiskell periodically emerged from his office up front and would come by the city desk and say, "Mr. Shelton, here's what I'd like you to do." He'd usually have written a memorandum, known by those who got them as JNH's. The ideas were usually pretty dull, and when Shelton was away and I was the city editor and Mr. Heiskell would say, "Mr. Foreman, I'd like for you to get this story," I would diligently assign it because the boss had ordered it. And one of the old-timers came over to me and said that you're not supposed to assign JNH's. "What do you mean? As a reporter I got a lot of JNH's. How could it be a rule that you don't hand them out? He's the boss, and he may not like it if you don't do what he told you to do." He said, "If he persists, you assign it."

[Laughs] He said, "He's got to come out at least three times and say, 'Mr. Foreman, what happened to that story?' If he does it three times, then you know you have to assign it, but if he just comes out and says, 'Mr. Foreman, I'd like for you to assign this story,' you don't do it. You wait and see what happens. If he forgets it, then you're OK." So that's something that I learned.

GJ: So that was a formula that Shelton and some of the others had figured out?

GF: I'm not sure who it was that told me. It could have been Douglas, but I'm not sure. Whoever it was, I regarded it as very wise counsel. [Laughs] I was there to learn whatever I could.

GJ: Who used to write that first column ["In the News"]?

GF: I think that Douglas invented that. He had a great proprietary interest in that. And it was a very effective column. Talking to people in the community who you'd meet in ordinary life, I'd tell them I work at the *Gazette*. They said, "You know what I really like about the paper?" and I said, "That little column on the left hand side?" and they said, "Exactly."

[End of Tape Two, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side Two]

GF: He certainly championed it and brought it to an art form. As I recall, there were three important features. First was the names in the boldface, and you start the item with the name. Second was it was all one sentence. And third was that "yesterday" was understood. My favorite–and I think that Douglas would always put it as the first item–was "President Eisenhower played golf at Burning Tree

Club in Maryland." That was the lead item just about every day of the week. [Laughs]

GJ: So in a way it became a little bit of a running commentary. [Laughs]

GF: Yes, Douglas used it as a commentary. If the president played golf at Burning Tree Club in Maryland, that's what appeared at the top of the "In the News" column.

GJ: The *Democrat-Gazette*, the fused paper, has tried to resurrect that.

GF: They knew that it was a popular column. I haven't seen it lately. Is it still in there?

GJ: Yes, it is. They suspend it for rare occasions.

GF: I don't remember it ever being suspended at the *Gazette*, but it might have been. I'd have to go back and look. But it was a great vehicle and, of course, the forerunner of the kind of digest columns we run now. I don't remember ever encountering a column, digest or briefs column, that has been nearly as effective as that column. He did it with no photographs, no drawings, no typographical gimmicks other than the boldface. Anecdotal evidence is strong that it was one of the best features in the paper. Of course, we did no research in those days.

GJ: I was going to ask if during that time you were aware of readership surveys?

GF: I'm not aware of any readership surveys. In the summer of 1957, the *Gazette*, which had been, I think, verging on 100,000 circulation for a long time–the powers-that-be decided to pull out all the stops. They had a gimmick called "Tangle Towns." Somebody, I think an outside entrepreneur, had developed

something that would involve just about every Arkansas town of 2,000 population or more lined up in Tangle Towns. It was a rather brazen circulation-building tool. Thanks to Tangle Towns, in the summer of 1957 we went over 100,000 circulation. Of course, then we lost about 20,000 of them in September. Harry Ashmore, who really stood tall during this time, was a visible target. Mr. Heiskell, who risked his family fortune, was more in the background, and fewer people knew who J.N. Heiskell was and his importance. But Harry was the villain for the people on the other side. Harry would respond to some of the letters, very rarely, but one letter said, "It's all right for Mr. Ashmore to desegregate Central High School. He does not have to rub shoulders with blacks on his golf course." And Harry says, "Madam, I have been accused of many things but never before of golf." [Laughter] One letter that we published but he did not respond to was: "When I read Mr. Ashmore's editorials, I was so angry that I called the *Gazette* and said, 'Stop my subscription immediately.' But you didn't stop it immediately, and you kept sending it and in the last two weeks I've continued to read your paper and in that time I've lost ten pounds. Send the paper two more weeks." [Laughter] I remember some of the milder ones saying something like, "The slimy communist editor of your filthy red rag . . . ." Harry was the guy they loved to hate.

GJ: You talked about his coming into the newsroom and pepping you up a little bit, keeping you focused. Was there ever a time when you felt you were in danger? Alienated? Isolated?

GF: I don’t think we felt danger in the newsroom, although the kind of modern-day security that most companies, including newspapers, have were unheard of then. Margaret Morrison, who was the head of the League of Central High Mothers, a segregationist organization, came to the city desk and slapped Bill Shelton. He didn’t flinch; he just pointed to the door and said, “Out.” A memorable occasion. I don’t think any of us thought we were going to be invaded. That may have been sanguine. There was a story about how, years before, J.N. or his brother Ned had held off a mob with a pistol. That was kind of the murky past, and I don’t know the details. I don’t recall feeling in any danger in the newsroom. One night Gene Prescott, the photographer, and I were sent out to investigate a report on Pinnacle Mountain, west of Little Rock about ten miles, that a paratrooper of the 101st had been killed, strung up out there. Whoever was on the desk felt that it ought to be checked out. Prescott expressed great concern that we were being lured into a trap. We cruised around but did not find anything, and we were only too happy to get back to Little Rock. We didn’t want to get out on foot and start rummaging around. We got back all right. It was the sort of thing you worry about if you’re in a vulnerable position where somebody might try to do you harm. Looking back on it, it was mostly verbal. Threats, intimidation although, as we know, there were bombings and violence was possible. You had to think that Harry–it’s a miracle that nothing happened to him.

GJ: It is. It could have been a whole lot worse. There’s no question about that. What years were you at the *Gazette*?

GF: I worked the summers of 1954, 1955 and 1956. In 1956 I was getting ready to go into the Army, and I had my orders to go in October. Shelton let me cover the Faubus re-election campaign against Jim Johnson. I know I didn't have enough background, and I did not do justice to the story. A lot of things, of course, I know now that I should have followed up on. It is clear, for example, I could have followed up on what was said in off-the-record time with Faubus and Claude Carpenter and Kay Matthews–Carpenter and Matthews were his Ehrlichman and Haldeman. Without betraying the off-the-record thing, I could have reported that they had a stalking horse, that one of the other candidates was in there simply to ask tough questions of Jim Johnson and deflect from Faubus's at-that-time moderate stance on segregation. Faubus positioned himself as the moderate and said to the segregationists and those inclined that way the right things about how "this is not what we want to do." He didn't talk in the rhetoric that he later adopted. Roy's book showed how he became one of the most virulent segregationists [after 1957]. But he wasn't by background and upbringing a segregationist. He was still a consensus builder. The difference between him and Johnson was obvious. It was also significant that Faubus won, and it reinforced the idea that in 1957, he should have done the right thing rather than what he did. Roy's book explains how he calculated [in 1957] he would not get a third term by simply being a good, statesmanlike governor. The third-term taboo added to the fact that a lot of the white voters would have been enough to prevent him from getting a third term (whites outnumbered black voters by a significant margin).

He would not have won a third term if he had simply done the right thing.

GJ: When did you finish your active duty in the military?

GF: In April of 1957.

GJ: So you were on the *Gazette* staff from 1957 to 1962?

GF: Yes, that's when I went to *The New York Times*. After the first year *The Times*' Southern reporter, a job later held by Roy and Gene Roberts, was Claude Sitton. I met Claude in 1958. He and Moseley and I covered some things together, and Claude commissioned me *The Times* stringer when he left. I would write some stories for *The Times*, including some takeouts, on what's going on. I decided in 1962 that I would really like to move on, and Claude got me a tryout on *The Times* copy desk, and that's how I wound up going to *The New York Times*. Which, of course, ended five months later because they all went on strike and, unlike Pat Crow, I did not hang in there and wait it out. So Roy was instrumental in getting me a job, and he knew that Ed Freeman was looking for a managing editor.

GJ: This is at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*?

GF: Yes, so that's how I wound up there.

GJ: When you went to New York, this is the early 1960s. Everybody was still, I'm sure, freshly judging Arkansas and Little Rock and all that. I'm sure every bit of that preceded you into every meeting. Did you have any apprehension about going to *The New York Times* and being able to compete there?

GF: Yes, oh, yes. I felt that I could be in over my head. I was twenty-seven years old.

In order to get into *The New York Times* I had to become a copy editor, too. I feel strongly about the importance of copy editing, but that was not my basic skill. So I told Claude I'd like to take a shot at *The Times*, and he said it was almost impossible for someone my age to be a reporter. The only editing I'd done was, like Shelton, assigning-desk editing. I said, "OK." And I got all of Ted Bernstein's books and crammed, and I practiced writing headlines. I did okay when I got up there, but there was great trepidation. Not only in the rarified atmosphere at the top, as Crow would later describe it, but also doing something that was not my basic strength. I had to learn a new aspect of editing. I had observed what people were doing over at the *Gazette* copy desk, but I had never written a headline.

GJ: Did you find that ultimately you were fundamentally sound because of your experience at the *Gazette*?

GF: There's no question that what I learned at the *Gazette* watching Shelton, watching Douglas, talking to all of the pros there really did teach me a lot of things. And after Crow came up for his tryout, the secretary said, "What is this about the *Gazette*? Crow dazzled us," so they thought they had struck a mother lode. They asked if there were any more people "like you and Crow down there." A great training ground. For a paper of that size, the standards were really high. People cared. They saw what they did as very important, and everybody worked hard at it.

GJ: I know Mr. Heiskell came out occasionally and left you JNH's a third time before

the apparatus swung into place. Did you get a sense that hard work and professionalism prevailed in the newsroom? Who set that tone?

GF: I'm not sure who was responsible. A.R. Nelson, Arla Reed Nelson, was the managing editor, and had a reputation as a very good desk man, news editor type. He portrayed himself as the tough, hard-boiled type of guy. I think he was a lot more mellower than that in reality, but he projected himself as the tough editor. He was not a great leader. Particularly after Ashmore left in 1959, a lot of us felt–that kind of led to my decision to go to the Big Time, the feeling that the *Gazette* was not moving ahead. Nelson said at a party one time–a friend of mine, Patrick J. "Pat" Owens, had had a few drinks, and Nelson said, "You just don't understand. Nobody really *runs* the *Gazette*." And Owens, as drunk as he was, said, "If I had your title, I would." I think Douglas felt the same way about it. [Laughter]

GJ: Well, of course, he became the managing editor, and he's legendary as THE *Gazette* managing editor now. When you think of *Gazette* managing editors, you think of him.

GF: I was, of course, not there when Douglas was the managing editor. I imagine when Douglas got his title, he did [run the *Gazette*]. Nelson did some good things for me, and I shouldn't feel badly about Nelson. Ashmore, even though he did not have day-to-day contact with you, in what I see now is clearly a purposeful visit, would stop in two or three times a week to make sure the group did not get discouraged. When Ashmore left, something was missing. I did not see it

moving ahead at that point. One of the things you talk about is camaraderie, which is good, and a feeling of smugness, which is not good. A feeling that the *Gazette* did not need to change with the times because we were so much better than the *Democrat* that we could just keep on doing what we were doing. The decade or so that Nelson ran the paper, the *Gazette* tended to fall behind the rest of the country as to what the paper business was doing. Certainly, the Gannett way was not the answer either. It trivialized the *Gazette*. When the *Gazette* finally died, it was as if somebody had been on life support, brain dead, for ten years, and then they died. That's how I felt when the *Gazette* was folded into the *Democrat*. There was a part of me that was saddened that my alma mater, the place I learned the basic ropes of the business, where people like Douglas and Shelton had taught me so much, was not there any more. The kind of newspaper they put out was not the kind the *Gazette* had become. The finality that the *Gazette* was now dead was very painful, but it was also mixed feelings because it wasn't really the *Gazette* that died. That happened to an alien paper with all that color and trivial stuff on the front page. A lot of us in the business know that in spite of all the gimmicks that have been trotted out over the past thirty years or so, efforts to stanch circulation losses, the *Gazette* always did what the *Gazette* thought was important. Some of the stories may have been too long and kind of wandered, but the paper's overall coverage was solid. It fulfilled the reason why people picked up the paper, to read about something that happened in Little Rock, North Little Rock and the rest of Arkansas. They knew the *Gazette* was going to

have something on it. The *Gazette* was not going to miss it.

GJ: Yes, that's an incredible story. I think that's a good point.

[Tape Stopped]

GF: A news editor named Tom Swint was a rather flamboyant office character and sometimes a clown. Underneath this exterior was evidently a very strong feeling of resentment and frustration. He became a good desk man, but what he really wanted to be was a star reporter; at least that's what I concluded. Ray Moseley was the star reporter, and Ray, as I said, could do any kind of story and do it well. A dazzling talent. It is an understatement that Swint resented Moseley. One day after I'd gone to work for Shelton on the desk, I was moving all kinds of Sunday copy–bookmobile schedules and the like. I think I had to come in early that day, and Moseley observed that I'd been working about ten or twelve hours and he could see the stack of stuff left to go. About nine or ten o'clock he said, "Why don't you go home? I'll finish this up for you." I was only too glad to turn things over to Moseley. So Moseley edited something and sent it over to the news desk, where Swint was in charge. This was all related to me. Swint came over then to the city desk to demand that Moseley change the story, that there was something wrong with it technically that Swint was pointing to. Moseley was dismissive, and he said, "No it's all right" and he argued back. He thought the case was closed, and he turned away to do something else. But Swint now was enraged. He leaped over the desk, grabbed Moseley by the neck, threw him to the floor and was banging his head on the asphalt tiles by the city desk. Ron Farrar, who

teaches now at the University of South Carolina, was a reporter in the back of the city room, and he saw this happening. There were not too many people in the newsroom, and he did not see anyone doing anything, so he threw the phone down while interviewing somebody and raced up there and made a flying tackle and pulled Swint off of Moseley. Moseley was battered and bruised. He had to be taken to the hospital in an ambulance for emergency room care. He had already given notice that he was going to the *New York Post*, of all places, but for a two-week period Moseley insisted in coming to work even though he had black eyes and was all battered. Nelson was confronted with having to do something. He usually did not want to do anything, but there was no escaping this. He had to make a decision here as to what to do. After two or three days he called a group of us, including Douglas and me to his house. He said it was clear that these two men could not continue to work together. We all looked at him and said, "That's right." Nelson went on, "I have concluded that some editors would fire Swint for what he did. I look at him and he's got kids in school, and Moseley does not have any kids. He's leaving in two weeks, so I think Moseley should go and Swint should stay." [Laughs] On Moseley's last day, when he went around shaking hands, when he came to Douglas, Douglas said, "Mose, go into the supply room and steal some pencils. Get even." [Laughter]

GJ: That would certainly square the score right there. That sounds like it was character central there.

GF: Yes, there were a lot of characters there. Swint was a very confident guy. He did

leave the paper a few months later, three or four months later. I think he immediately started trying to get another job. Interestingly enough, I think he went to the *Seattle Times*. I remember when I was in APME, I talked to the editors there, and Swint had become a very popular columnist at the *Seattle Times*. I didn't tell them what had happened at Little Rock.

GJ: So he did improve.

GF: But that moment he could have killed Moseley.

GJ: He jumped over the table, started choking him and pounding his head.

GF: Yes. I think it had not been for Farrar . . . Farrar ought to be on your list, not just because of this, but Ron spent a couple of years there before he became a journalism educator. He went off to Indiana University to get his master's and, I think, to Iowa to get his doctorate. He was head of the department of SMU, Ole Miss and Kentucky before going to South Carolina. I didn't think he wanted to be the dean, but now he is the acting dean because they lost their dean about a year ago. He's sixty-six years old, looking to retire. He was in charge of the graduate program at USC. Ron and I stayed in touch with over the years. He was a fine reporter. In 1959 we had the election, no thanks to me for spiking that story, that had a tremendous turnout. I think about ninety-eight percent of eligible voters voted, and the vote was about 13,000 for STOP to about 12,000 for CROSS. As close as it was, that was crucial. I can see why, in retrospect, Harry thought we had to pull out all the stops to see that they win. It was changed, and the newly constituted school board was still–I think this is a good story. When

the three segregationists were thrown off the board, the moderates decided they would be magnanimous and let the segregationists to fill one spot. Arch Campbell, the county judge, who is noted for moving the county jail and for purple road construction trucks–also it fell to him, under the arcane constitution, to fill vacancies on the Little Rock School Board.

[End of Tape Two, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side One]

GF: [The segregationist appointee] turned out to be a burglar. [Laughs] By the afternoon Shelton's reporters were able to confront him–that he had a record of felonies that made him ineligible to vote or be in the school board. So the burglar-turned-school-board-appointee came down to see Ashmore: "I will withdraw if you will not run the story saying I'm a burglar." Ashmore said, "Get out of here! I'm not the one who appointed a burglar to the school board." So we ran the story that Arch was going to have to go back to his recommenders for another nomination because his first one was ineligible to serve because of his nocturnal activities. Of course, we had not yet invented the ethics-in-journalism course that I teach, but it occurred to me at that moment that nothing at journalism school had prepared me were I in Ashmore's shoes to deal with that. I think about it and, clearly, Ashmore couldn't manipulate the story by saying there is no appointment. You have to tell people things they don't want to hear. "We're going to be running the story in tomorrow's paper, and it is too bad. We're not the ones who created the situation." That has evolved over the years. So many of

the schools do teach a news media ethics course, as I do now, and if you are the reporter or editor, you have to make decisions like this. I recognized at the time that my journalism formal education had in no way prepared me for that kind of situation.

GJ: It would have been easy to just say, "Okay, we won't run the story."

GF: Yes, "we will report that Judge Campbell has not appointed the sixth member of the board." [Laughter]

GJ: A burglar? He's got a record, and he thinks no one is going to find this out?

GF: Things were starting to change now. As the summer went on, about the middle of August, school was scheduled to start after Labor Day. In the middle of August the Supreme Court–I don't know why the court was meeting in the middle of August–but they finally ruled on the school-closing law that Faubus had used to shut down the high schools in Little Rock and said it was a sham, a subterfuge to obstruct the order of the court and therefore was null and void. The school board was then afraid to give Faubus and the legislature a chance to put up another sham law or cause trouble in the streets. So the board announced that school would open two days from then. Shelton was on vacation but still in town. I called Shelton at home and told him that the Supreme Court ruled that the school closing was unconstitutional, and the school board immediately met and said school was going to open in two days. There was a pause and he said, "That's interesting." I said, "I was wondering if you were going to come back and cover the opening of the schools." He said, "Do you see any reason why I should?" I

said, "No, Bill, I can take care of this." So he said, "Okay, you do it." I drew up the list of the fourteen reporters, and I got Roy doing the overall main, Portis doing this and Whitworth doing this, and I had everybody assigned. During that period Farrar was covering the police. I decided to leave him on the police station in case there was a fire some place else, so that if it burned up ten city blocks, we'd have someone covering it. Farrar felt that he was being left out. He did not say anything to me, but he took the broad constitutional interpretation that the police beat would involve following the police to Central High School, and he did a great story of the police lines and how they were bracing themselves for an assault. They did have this incipient assault–Gene Smith, the police chief then, had been the assistant police chief when his undermanned and overwhelmed police in 1957 had to take the kids out the back door. They thought they were going to be killed and probably were close to it. The humiliation of taking them out, of having to let the segregationist mobsters nominate representatives for his officers to take inside the school to show them there were no blacks in there. Two years later he was the police chief and had built a much better police force, and that day he won the day. The incipient mob action was routed and, interestingly enough, with Birmingham a few years later, he brought in the fire department to wash them off the street with high-pressure hoses. The fire chief was a segregationist, and he had a lot of misgivings about it. Then later, in retaliation, E.A. Lauderdale, a big roofing contractor in West Little Rock who was a KKK guy, hired some thugs to dynamite the fire chief's car and the school board's

offices and places like that. That was the last hurrah of the segs in Little Rock from 1957 to 1959. It was not exactly a "lived happily ever after story," but they quickly found the crooks, including Lauderdale, and sent them to prison. That marked kind of a demarcation to the end of the story as a day-to-day "white heat" story. We knew things had changed when a local leader who was involved with the Shriners denounced the bombings. This was sort of a public statement that namby-pamby leaders had refrained from when we really needed them. "We are about to have an eight-state Shriners convention here in Little Rock, and I am getting calls all day asking if it is safe to come to Little Rock." Later, Douglas came over and said, "Terrible timing." The only thing that bothered this Shriner leader was not the bombing itself, only that it disrupted his convention. But the fact that he would make such a statement meant that there had been a change in the wind. It was now safe to make a statement that maybe the segregationist idea was not the best thing. I still look on that day in August in 1959, when I was the acting city editor and deployed the entire staff, as my greatest day in journalism. It stands out. I really felt an accomplishment, and I tip my hat to Bill Shelton for having the confidence in me to let me do it. I was twenty-four years old.

GJ: You must have had some butterflies going.

GF: Yes, it worried me all day long. But we got this picture of a police line. My sister-in-law said there were a lot of butts in this picture. It was taken from behind the police, and they were girding, and you could see the Confederate flags, and I thought it was a dramatic picture. We played that picture on the front and

had all these sidebars. Portis went out and did the color sidebar on Hall High School. We staked out Hall because there were black students going to Hall that year, too.

GJ: All the stuff I remember about reading the *Gazette* and, of course, the stuff I've heard over the years suggest that the staff was huge.

GF: Fourteen reporters. I used all of them except one, Ron Farrar, and he wound up deploying himself. I was really glad he did what he did, because we wound up using his story on the front page. We pulled all the people in from the Court House, City Hall–we left everything untended although I thought I had the police covered, but I didn't.

GJ: How long had Farrar been there? When did Wirges retire?

GF: A year or two. He came over from the *Democrat*, and he went to the University of Arkansas. He's from Fordyce.

GJ: Home of Bear Bryant.

GF: Yes. He's a Redbug. I do think you ought to try to get at least a phone interview with Ron. You can get him off the Net, and he'd be really good. McCord stays in touch with Ron as well as me. I know his daughter real well. His daughter [Janet Farrar Worthington] wrote Dr. Walsh's book on prostate cancer, and I've become acquainted with her. I talk to her every time I have somebody who needs information. I tell her that she's the best reporter, for a lay person, in the country on prostate cancer.

. . . We weren't too much on modern information graphics in those days. As a

matter of fact, Shelton would sketch out little maps of his own if he thought we needed one. Bill had a lot of qualities as a journalist, but art was not one of them. I can remember when the decision was announced by the Defense Department that they would build Titan II missile silos in central Arkansas. Bill looked up what the range of these missiles were, and he drew a flat map that concluded that these missiles could not reach Russia. This is really confusing that we're building all these missiles and they cannot reach Russia. Later that day they told him that he used the wrong direction for the missiles. He's a stand-up guy, so the next day he ran the map again and said, "Wrong, all wrong." That was the heading. You can look it up. It explained that if you went over the North Pole, you could hit Russia. In that regard, I later became the state editor–and talk about how today we do things better–during the missile site construction, there was a terrible accident around Searcy. Several dozen workers were suffocated in that accident. Today we'd be all over that story. We should have sent a platoon of reporters into that town, with them losing all those people and the impact on this town and how tragic it was. I don't think that the reporting I directed on that–in the first place I did not have the staff to speak of. Three of us worked from the desk, and I tried to figure out a way every now and then to send one of us out to do a story. But it had to be a set-piece story, and you go in and out in one day. What I should have done is to go to Nelson and Shelton and say, "We got to send the City Hall and Court House reporters from Little Rock and just blanket Searcy." But I did not do it. I saw the Central High School thing in 1959 as a great success, but the

greatest failing was my coverage of this accident in Searcy. We covered it, but we didn't cover it with nearly the depth and the human angle we should have. That was three years later, when they were building the silos.

GJ: Is there any kind of a memorial there?

GF: I don't know. The number sixty stands in my mind, which is a really big story no matter where it happens. I just don't think that we did that story the way it should have been done.

[End of Interview]