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*Arkansas Democrat Project*

Interview with

Allen Berry  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
4 May 2006

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell and I'm sitting here in the office of Allen Berry interviewing him on a project for the Pryor [Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] archives at the University of Arkansas [at Fayetteville]—the Oral History Project. The first thing I need to do, Allen, is [to] ask you if I have your permission to conduct this interview.

Allen Berry: Jerry, you do have my permission. I am a graduate of the University of Arkansas, and I'll gladly help on this project.

JM: Okay, now, spell your first name.

AB: A-L-L-E-N.

JM: Okay, and it's B-E-R-R-Y. Right?

AB: Correct.

JM: Okay, and what is your position here now, Allen?

AB: My current position is treasurer for WEHCO Media Incorporated—the parent company of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

JM: How long have you been with WEHCO Media?

AB: I have been with WEHCO—and, really, with the predecessor company which was not named WEHCO [Walter E. Hussman Company] Media—since February 1972.

JM: All right. I think now we'll just go back and start from the beginning, Allen, and find out how you got here in the first place. And we'll cover everything that has happened since then. Where and when were you born?

AB: I was born in September 30, 1944, in Memphis, Tennessee.

JM: Okay. Where did you grow up?

AB: I grew up in northeast Arkansas in Harrisburg which is just south of Jonesboro.

JM: Did you go to Tennessee just for the hospitals? Is that why you were born there?

AB: No. Of course, we were only fifty miles from Memphis, so that's where people from over there—they either went to Memphis or Jonesboro or a bigger place.

JM: Where did you go to school?

AB: I went to school at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

JM: No, I mean high school.

AB: Oh, high school—at Harrisburg High School.

JM: You graduated from Harrisburg?

AB: Yes.

JM: Okay. What year was that?

AB: 1962.

JM: 1962. Then you went to the University of Arkansas?

AB: Right.

JM: And got a degree in—did you get a degree?

AB: I got a BSBA [Bachelor of Science in Business Administration] with a major in accounting in 1966, [and] then in 1968 I got a MBA [Masters of Business Administration] at the University of Arkansas. I actually finished my studies in July of 1967, but my degree wasn't dated until 1968.

JM: What did you do after you got your MBA?

AB: I joined an accounting firm in Little Rock—Peat, Marwick and Mitchell which at the time was one of the big eight accounting firms. That firm is gone through its—is now [KPMG?]—Pete something [laughs] I don't even know. There have been so many changes in that industry.

JM: How long were you with them?

AB: I was with them almost five years.

JM: Did you leave there to go to work for Walter [Hussman, Jr.]?

AB: I did.

JM: Okay. What happened on that?

AB: I had been in public accounting about as long as I could stand it, and was ready to—did a lot of traveling, so I was ready to make a move. [I] wanted to get out of public accounting. At the time Walter had just joined the company—oh, I think maybe a year and a half. He was looking for someone who had—he didn't have anybody that worked for the company who had any—a degree in accounting or any real accounting expertise. He was looking for someone who had a degree in accounting and had some experience. [He] had two people at an accounting firm—Bill Cravens who is still here in Little Rock [and] was a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] [at] Russell Brown [and Company] at the time, and [George

Rector?] who also did some accounting work for them. They were looking for somebody. I interviewed first with them, and then went down to Camden [Arkansas] and met Walter [Hussman] Jr. and his father. The first time I talked to Walter he offered me a job, and I actually turned it down.

JM: Oh, is that right?

AB: My wife was expecting her first child, and, boy, I just didn't—I really [didn't] want to make a move right then. I was looking, but at that time I would have preferred to stay in Little Rock and not make any moves. Really, after that, I was still looking, but a lot of people didn't know I was looking. I wasn't making a lot of contacts, but [George Rector?] called me back and said, "Well, they are still looking for somebody. Do you think you might still be interested?" And I said, "Well, I think so. I'd like to talk to them again." I met Walter in Hot Springs.

JM: Now, this is Walter [Hussman] Jr.?

AB: Walter [Hussman] Jr.

JM: Okay.

AB: I met Walter [Hussman] Jr. in Hot Springs at the Arlington Hotel. I talked to him, and we had a real good visit. He offered me the job again, and this time I took it.

JM: Yes, okay. You went to work in Camden? Is that correct?

AB: I went to work in Camden. That is correct.

JM: What was Walter's position at that time—Walter [Hussman] Jr.'s position?

AB: Walter, at the time, was—he was general manager of the *Camden News* and reported directly to his father, but, informally, I think that he dealt with all the other newspaper managers, although they might not have formally—I don't

remember whether they formally reported to him or not, but he worked with all the newspaper managers and also the cable TV people.

JM: Who was that job with? Was that with the forerunner of WEHCO?

AB: Right.

JM: Yes, okay.

AB: Right.

JM: And you were an accountant, right?

AB: Right. I had a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] certificate and a degree in accounting.

JM: Okay, and that was in 1972?

AB: Right.

JM: How did you get back up here? I mean, take me the steps on the way that . . .

AB: Okay. One thing that kind of convinced me when I took the job, Walter told me that he was sort of interested in moving his business—the prospect of living in Camden didn't really appeal that much to me or my wife, so Walter told me that he probably [would] move his accounting operation to either Hot Springs or Texarkana [Arkansas]—and most likely Hot Springs. About a year after I was with the company, we actually—we had a small accounting operation, so we moved to Hot Springs just after the *Sentinel Record* moved into their new building at—where they currently are. They were previously down on Central Avenue.

JM: Okay, hold on.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, then how long were you in Hot Springs?

AB: Probably just about a year because it was spring of 1973 when we went to Hot Springs. He bought the *Arkansas Democrat* in March of 1974, so about three or four months after that we moved to Little Rock.

JM: And you were his accountant then?

AB: Right.

JM: Do you remember how much he paid for the *Democrat*? I think I've heard various figures—\$3.6 million, or \$3.4, or I'm not . . .?

AB: Jerry, that's roughly what it was. I can't remember it—the exact number—but that's probably what it was.

JM: Okay, all right. Did you come here pretty soon after they bought the *Democrat*?

AB: Actually, when we bought the *Democrat*, I spent most of my time over here even though I was living and my office was in Hot Springs in connection with the— with really, taking over the operation and doing the accounting for it. It was an asset purchase, so we had to record the assets on the book of a new corporation. That was a new experience to me. It was the first type of merger I'd been—or acquisition I'd been involved in. I was about twenty-nine years old at the time. I probably spent four of the five or six days a week over here.

JM: Were you going over the *Democrat* books and all that?

AB: Yes. Just really trying to—like I say, trying to get through with the—to record the acquisition, and then get set up to do the accounting. We changed quite a few things about the accounting operation—but we had to take over the accounting as soon as the transaction closed.

JM: Were you doing the accounting for the *Democrat*, too?

AB: Yes. Yes. Of course, the *Democrat* had its own accounting department. Chester Garrett was the business manager at that time, and Jean Bradley was there at the time. We put their accounting records—the general ledgers on our system. I basically handled that transition.

JM: When you started looking at their records, what was your impression of the state of the *Democrat* at that time?

AB: I thought the *Democrat*, at that time, was about fifteen years behind the times. Just a couple—everything they did was very manually oriented and computers were not thoroughly integrated into accounting at that time, but still they were—the only computer operation that they had involved at all was that they did their payroll. The First National Bank did their payroll, and they had only done that for a couple of years. Chester Garrett told me that they actually paid in cash. [He] told me stories how he and a couple of other people counted out all the cash and put it in envelopes and went around and handed it out.

JM: Well, when I first came here, you didn't go out—you went down there and Stanley Berry and Fannie Eatman were sitting at a desk. You lined up and went up to that desk and got your money in an envelope. That was in 1951. You said they were about fifteen years behind the time. Were you speaking specifically of their accounting practices and business practices, or the whole newspaper?

AB: Of course, I had more knowledge of the whole newspaper, but I got the feeling from talking to other people—Paul Smith and other people at operations—that they were pretty far behind the times.

JM: Okay. Did you [have] any feel for what their financial situation was—whether they were losing money [and] losing circulation? Did you get any of that information?

AB: Prior to the time that we took over?

JM: Yes. Right.

AB: Yes. I hadn't seen—prior to the time we took over I hadn't seen a lot of their records, so I did go back—did have the opportunity to go back and see some of their financial statements. [I] noticed that they were losing money, but I don't remember it being a tremendous amount of money.

JM: Yes, okay. Well, they probably weren't spending a tremendous amount.

[Laughs]

AB: No. They did things that—well, one thing that made an impression on me is that—rather than renting a postage machine—they went down to the post office and bought rolls and rolls of stamps. [They] put stamps on everything, rather than spend a few dollars per month for a postage machine. There just seemed to be a lot of things like that that they did in the name of saving money.

JM: Could have been penny wise and pound foolish, as the saying goes.

AB: Exactly.

JM: Yes, okay. All right. You don't remember any particular figures that you saw on their circulation or anything at that time?

AB: I do not, Jerry.

JM: Yes, okay. When did [you] move over here permanently?

AB: I moved over here in August or September—probably August of 1974.

JM: You were their chief accountant?

AB: At that time, my title was controller.

JM: Okay. Was that comptroller?

AB: C-O-N-T-R-O-L-L-E-R.

JM: Oh, controller. Okay. Controller. Okay. What were your duties at that time?

AB: To—really, to manage the accounting operation. We did the financial statements. My department did the financial statements for all the companies, including the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*—excuse me, the *Arkansas Democrat*—and the other Palmer newspapers. At that time, I think there were four cable TV companies.

JM: Okay.

AB: We did the accounting on that, and we did the billing and some other things, and payroll, also.

JM: Did they already own that TV station—that Shreveport-Texarkana TV station?

AB: Yes. Yes. They started that TV station in the 1950s.

JM: Did they? Okay. They had four cable TV networks?

AB: Four cable TV companies—well, maybe five at that point. When I came in 1972 there were four, but I think by that time he had probably put on Vicksburg, Mississippi, and maybe Longview, Texas. There were about five cable operations by that time.

JM: Okay. Okay.

AB: A TV station, and there were four radio stations.

JM: Okay, four radio—and how many—five newspapers? Is that . . .?

AB: Five newspapers.

JM: That was Hot Springs, El Dorado, Camden, Texarkana, and Hope. Is that right?

AB: Magnolia.

JM: Magnolia.

AB: Magnolia.

JM: Magnolia, okay.

AB: Now, they owned a—at that time there was an ownership of some stock in the *Hope Star*, but it wasn't anywhere near a controlling interest.

JM: I guess Alec Washburn was running it at the time.

AB: Right.

JM: Okay.

AB: Right.

JM: As your time went on here for the next few years, what did you see happening as far as finances were going on—finances were happening?

AB: When I first came here—or when we first took over the *Democrat*—I assumed—quite foolishly—that we would be able to trim expenses and have a operating margin—maybe not what our other newspapers had, but I made the assumption that we'd be able to do that. I did not realize what a—at that time—what a foothold that the *Arkansas Gazette* had because of their circulation advantage. It just didn't turn out like that for the next few years.

JM: You weren't making much progress [for your money].

AB: No, we were not making much progress.

JM: You were losing money, and, I guess, the circulation was still going down, too? Wasn't it?

AB: The circulation was going down some.

JM: Okay. Did you form an opinion on why that was happening?

AB: Well, yes, I just thought that—after a while, like I say, I realized that the foothold that the *Gazette* had up in—you know the circulation, the loyalty of their readers—they just had a tremendous advantage in the market.

JM: Okay. As I understand it, at some point of time—and Walter, I know, had done a lot of things to try and cut the expenses and do things—you know, like, he decertified at least one or two of the unions and everything else, but they were still struggling. He decided to go to Hugh Patterson and see if he could get a joint operating agreement. Were you aware of him going over and talking to Hugh?

AB: I was not aware of it at the time that that happened.

JM: Yes.

AB: I became aware of it later.

JM: Okay.

AB: But I was not aware of it at the time it happened.

JM: At that time—say 1978 or somewhere—did the situation look pretty dire for the *Democrat*?

AB: It did. It did. It may lead into your next question, but I remember Walter coming to me, and possibly some others. He wanted me to do some forecasts and put together some projections based on him spending a lot more money.

JM: Yes, I see.

AB: Making a bigger commitment and doing some things.

JM: Okay.

AB: I think that would have been either late 1978 or 1979, somewhere in that time.

JM: Okay. Did his projection include going morning at that time?

AB: I recall that it did, Jerry.

JM: Yes, okay. What were your projections? What kind of projections did you make? Do you remember them?

AB: I don't remember, specifically, the numbers. I recall, in general, that we were spending a lot more money and there wasn't any immediate turnaround forecast, but out several years there was a turnaround forecast.

JM: But no immediate relief?

AB: No immediate—no day-one profit.

JM: Okay. He at some point in time—let me ask you another—later on, he did start putting a lot more money into the paper, right? I mean, he started hiring people. And particularly when he went morning and halted adding to the staff—but he did start putting a lot more money into the paper, right?

AB: That is correct.

JM: I assume [he] was losing a lot more money at the start, or was he?

AB: At the beginning of the time, he ramped up his spending.

JM: Yes. Yes.

AB: Yes.

JM: Yes.

AB: The free classifieds—I don't remember [whether] the free classifieds started before the morning edition did or not, but I know that that was all happening about the same time.

JM: Did you see an impact from the free classifieds?

AB: I saw a—yes. Of course, not just in the classified section, but also the—we began to see after not too long, as I recall, that we were attracting more commercial ads, which was the purpose of the whole thing.

JM: And more circulation, too?

AB: And more circulation.

JM: Yes. Okay. All right. I know that the *Gazette* people have said, “Well, you know, Walter had a lot more money than we did,” et cetera, and like that. But Walter said for a long part of that time that was not true. As I understand it, early on, at any rate, he wasn’t reaching into the funds from the cable TV. I guess he was using funds from the other newspapers and things like that. Is that correct? He did not tap the funds from the cable TV units?

AB: That would be right. In fact, the cable TV companies—back in those days, in the early to almost the late 1970s before they got pay television—they were not making any money.

JM: Oh, okay.

AB: When he first put those things online, it would be a point where you started out with—what Walter did was start out as cable operations with no subscribers. You had cost and you had to get to a certain level of subscriber penetration before you made any money. Cable rates compared to today were \$6.95 [or] \$7.95 or \$7.50 range for just basic cable service. Cable companies were just not making much money, in fact, until they got pay television in the late 1970s. [Then] they started generating some cash flow.

JM: So, for a long time there he had to supplement the *Democrat's* income with income from the other newspapers. Is that correct?

AB: That's correct.

JM: Okay.

AB: That's correct.

JM: Do you remember a figure—the most he ever had to tap the other newspapers for?

AB: Jerry, I don't.

JM: Yes. At any rate, he did have significant—had to use significant resources from the other newspaper to keep the *Democrat* afloat and keep it competitive, and all.

AB: Right. Right, because the *Democrat* was losing money and cash flow, too—negative cash flow.

JM: When did you detect sort of a real turnaround as far as the situation at the *Democrat*?

AB: Probably in the mid—say 1983 or 1984 time frame. We were still losing money, but circulation was increasing and advertising was increasing. It was not necessarily so much an immediate impact on the bottom line, but—just hearing reports from Paul Smith and others—we were making inroads in circulation and getting advertisers. We were doing better with Dillard's [Department Store] and some of the other advertisers.

JM: Did you form any opinions on why that was? What were the moves that were made that helped turn things around, as far as getting more ads and more circulation?

AB: I think the move to a morning newspaper was obviously very big. The free classifieds—I think, also, we were putting out a large newspaper—a very large newspaper for the amount of advertising that we had, so there was plenty of news and plenty of features.

JM: You had a big news hole?

AB: Right. A very big news hole.

JM: Yes. Yes. I remember one time Walter—when I was still here—I left in 1978—he came to me and said, “What’s the biggest sports section in the United States?”—Sunday sports section. I said, “Walter, I don’t know. I don’t see them all.” I came back and he said, “I want to put out the biggest sports section in the United States.” And I said, “Are you talking about total space?” And he said, “No, pages.” And I said, “Walter, there’s a lot of difference between filling up a paper—section that doesn’t have any ads in it, and one that’s half-full of ads”. [Laughs] But he said [that] he still wanted one that had more pages than everyone else. We didn’t do that while I was still here, but later on I know he did have a very big sports section. So the morning—the switch to morning was obviously a big factor.

AB: It was. Also, I think we got a lot of credibility when Orville Henry came over.

JM: Yes. Do you? Okay.

AB: He obviously had a large following at the *Gazette*, and was the—he was the reporter for the [University of Arkansas] Razorbacks.

JM: Yes. Yes. Yes.

AB: So I think it gave us a lot of credibility.

JM: Yes. Yes. Yes. I know that was a big shock to a lot of people because Orville had been so dedicated to the *Gazette* over the years. But later on, I guess this—he—well, he had problems before then, but I guess after Gannett took over, in particular, that he really had problems with the Gannett people.

AB: I was thinking Orville came over here before Gannett bought it.

JM: I don't think so.

AB: You do not think so?

JM: I think maybe . . .

AB: Was it not that time frame?

JM: I think maybe it was shortly after.

AB: Shortly.

JM: I remember somebody telling me a story that when Gannett came over, they delegated his column to inside the paper—not on the front of the sports section.

AB: Okay.

JM: Then one day—at one time there in the same column—two days in a row, they had a foul-up or something. I'm told he was really incensed with that, and I think at that time he may have started shopping.

AB: I think it was late 1988 or 1989 when it occurred—when he came over here—because I can remember an event that kind of [?].

JM: Yes. Yes. Because I'm thinking that Gannett bought the paper in late 1986 and then somewhere along then . . .

AB: Yes. I think it was maybe 1988 when he came over here.

JM: Yes. Yes. I think that sounds more like what I thought. What was your impression, or reaction, when the *Gazette* filed suit against the *Democrat*?

AB: It was something that—it was not unexpected because we had known that Mr. [Hugh] Patterson had been complaining about the *Democrat*'s competition before. In fact, he made a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

JM: Yes. Okay.

AB: Walter, Paul Smith, and I had to—we actually went to Washington [DC].

JM: Oh, is that right?

AB: [We] had to go to the—actually, the meeting took place at our attorney's up there. We used a FCC [Federal Communications Commission] attorney in Washington. They handled this for us, but we had some Federal Trade Commission lawyers, and an economist, and an accountant [that] came over there and they grilled Walter, Paul, and me for the better part of a day.

JM: Is that right? Okay. I guess Hugh's complaint had to be something that there were unfair practices [or] unfair violations of the Sherman Anti-trust Act. That's what the suit was about?

AB: That's what the suit was about, but I think it was just about the competition in general. I guess a lot of it would have to be based around what he perceived the pricing—probably the free want ads and maybe some of the pricing on the retail of our commercial advertisers, because I don't know if someone could sue you just for any other competitive reason. I think it had to do with pricing.

JM: Of course, the lawsuit [laughs] was decided unanimously in favor of the *Democrat*. I think it struck a lot of people—including me—as sort of funny that the bigger operation sued the smaller one for anti-trust violations.

AB: Well, Jerry, they tried to portray us as—Walter—as a big company who was using—who was moving all this money from big places like Camden, El Dorado, cable companies, and Hope to Little Rock to run Mr. Patterson and the *Gazette* out of business. They really tried to portray us in that light.

JM: What was the situation as far as the revenues from the others? I mean, was that a huge operation, or what?

AB: It was not a huge operation. The biggest newspaper—the *Texarkana Gazette*—had a circulation—well, a Sunday circulation of about 34,000. The others were—Hot Springs, the next biggest, was around 19,000. It certainly was not a big media conglomerate.

JM: Not a monolith.

AB: [They] tried to portray us—and the cable companies at that time were—they were doing fairly well. We didn't have to spend much on capital expenditures. The cash flow in the cable companies was pretty good, but we were anything but a big conglomerate.

JM: What would have happened if the *Gazette* had won the suit? Wouldn't that have put the *Democrat* out of business? More than likely?

AB: Absolutely, it would have. I don't remember the damages that they were—the exact damages that they were asking for, but my recollection is that in that kind of anti-trust action, there are treble damages paid.

JM: You were entitled to treble damages for whatever the actual damages were?

AB: Right. They were asking [for] several hundred million [dollars] which I think would have probably put Walter's whole company in jeopardy.

JM: WEHCO Media, too?

AB: Right.

JM: Oh, okay. All right. [Laughs] Walter had something riding on that lawsuit, didn't he?

AB: He did.

JM: Yes.

AB: From the time—I can tell you—from the time that that suit was filed in December of 1984 until the time that it went to trial, people over here spent—a lot of people—spent very little time on anything but that lawsuit. The attorneys—our attorneys Wright, Lindsey, and Jennings and Phil Anderson headed up our team. They had a law firm in Washington that was advising him on that. We spent all of our time rounding up records to respond to the *Gazette's* attorneys' interrogatories, legal questions, and also trying to prepare exhibits and gather information to go to trial with.

JM: The attorneys were also—I know—filing—doing depositions and filing their interrogatories—getting testimony from people—*Gazette* witnesses, and everything.

AB: That's right. The same thing was going on on both sides.

JM: Do you have any—even a ballpark figure on what it cost you to defend that suit, including attorneys' fees and all the time it took over here and everything? Is there any way you can estimate that?

AB: Jerry, I'm going to guess that we spent a quarter of a million dollars in legal fees at least, and the time—I don't know how you'd value that, but probably at least that much in time. Not only do I think that you look at the time that you spent, but someone like Paul Smith's time in trying to go out and sell advertising—the opportunities that he lost when he could have been trying to sell advertising; he was working on that lawsuit.

JM: So it was a big relief here when [laughs] the jury found in the *Democrat's* behalf.

AB: It was a huge relief. I remember sitting in the courtroom hearing the verdict. The judge had warned everybody not to whoop and holler—I guess that's not his words—but not to show any emotion and to give the jury time to leave. He wanted the jury, I think, to get a head start out of the courtroom, so we all sat there in silence, kind of smug. After that, we all went out in the hall and did a hip-hip-hooray.

JM: Yes, I can imagine. So, at that particular time there was a lot of relief, and probably some optimism, on the part on the situation here?

AB: Jerry, there was. There was. It was just like a huge—like you say, "Relief"—just a huge burden off your back. For me, it was probably different than Paul Smith. I mean, I—immediately after that, there was so many things that I had put off and neglected because of the time spent on that. I spent the next six months trying to recover from all of that.

JM: Yes. What all were you doing during that time when you were preparing for the lawsuit? What type of work did you have to do?

AB: We had to just find files and respond to the *Gazette*'s interrogatories. [We] helped the attorneys draft answers to the interrogatories and produce the documents. There were paralegals that came in that—we just practically turned our files over to—just to look through our files—into our files to get documents to [respond to] the *Gazette* on.

JM: From a sort of euphoria after winning the suit—then what was the reaction when the *Gazette* sold out to Gannett?

AB: I think it was probably about—I seem to remember it was March—the law suit was decided in March of 1986. And I think it was December of 1986 . . .

JM: I think it—yes. I think it's the same year.

AB: The same year. The same year that the *Gazette*—that Gannett took over—of course, I didn't know a whole lot about Gannett's operation at the time. I had gone to some industry conference and knew that they were the biggest and had more newspapers. [I] had run across some of their people [who] had sort of a high profile in some of the industry things that I went to. Mr. Neuharth was quite vocal. [He] started up *USA Today* about the same time—maybe a little before that. [Editor's note: Allen H. "Al" Neuharth was chairman of Gannett during this time. He founded *USA Today* in 1982.] It was quite frightening when we heard that Gannett was buying it. Obviously, they had [a] more significant amount [of] resources than we did. We assumed that they just—you know—could move people in from whatever—wherever they wanted to.

JM: Yes.

AB: I guess, too, as reported at the—Mr. Neuharth made a speech here in Little Rock [to] the *Gazette* employees that—he promised all the resources that they needed to win the competition here.

JM: I think he said, “We have deep pockets.”

AB: Yes.

JM: [Laughs] That was one of the quotes. I know that the competition really surged, then, from both sides—from the money that both sides were spending and everything. Do you remember—and I—you know, Walter did an interview of about four hours in this project with Roy Reed, and maybe he gave a figure in there. Do you remember how much the *Democrat* was losing at the height of that war with Gannett? How much a year that—I’ve heard that they were losing several million, and Gannett [lost] a lot more than that.

AB: Jerry, I would—just roughly, and I wished I’d gone back and looked at some of those—I don’t know where I would have found those numbers.

JM: Okay.

AB: [Laughs] Those ones you want to hear now, but I [have] to think that our typical year was in the loss of \$7 or \$8 [or] \$9 million.

JM: Yes, okay. Was it your impression that Gannett was losing even more than that?

AB: Yes. We saw a few of their financial statements back when we took over, and saw that they were losing more.

JM: They were losing a lot of money.

AB: Right.

JM: Yes. I guess that's why the stockholders said, "Hey, wait a minute." Did you all have any forewarning that Patterson was shopping to sell the *Gazette*?

AB: I don't recall any. I just don't recall.

JM: Yes, I don't know. I was in Oklahoma at that time, so I don't think that I ever heard it.

AB: I don't think that it was—I don't know that it was widely known. I don't know whether he had—I don't even know if he had a broker involved or not. I don't know that a broker was involved in that transaction.

JM: Okay. After the battle started with Gannett, what were the big expenses here? Where were you spending the most money? Do you remember that? What were you spending the money on that you really had to wrap up?

AB: Well, just the news and circulation department and newsprint.

JM: Yes.

AB: I don't know exactly what our—we had more advertising than we did in the early years, but we still had a pretty large news hole.

JM: I remember . . .

AB: Our print bills were big. We added employees in—some employees in probably—I'm sure in editorial and circulation primarily. Our expenses were pretty high.

JM: I heard stories—like I said I was in Oklahoma at that time—but it got to the point where the two newspaper were advertising against each other and one of them said, "Well, we had six people cover this event." And the other said, "We had seven." [Laughs] They were just trying to outdo each other in the number of

people that they put on certain stories and stuff like that. And [there's] no telling how many people that they sent to the Arkansas football games. I think it was quite high, wasn't it?

AB: There were. We went to great lengths and expenses to make sure that—even flying people and newspapers back and forth to northwest Arkansas because, at that time, we only had presses in Little Rock and it was difficult to—fortunately, I guess, almost—they didn't have lights in Fayetteville [Arkansas] for football games, so we had a little bit of advantage on the deadline. Still, it was pretty tight getting stuff to Little Rock and getting papers back up there. Basketball was popular, too—Razorback basketball.

JM: You needed to get the papers up there, so you were flying them up by airplane. Is that right?

AB: As I recall, sometimes they flew the newspapers up there on an airplane.

JM: I remember someone who came in here early on—I don't remember what point in time when the Razorbacks were playing—said, “Well, we just got to go to press on Saturday night at 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m.” [Or] whatever it was. And I said, “Even on Razorback nights?” And they said, “Oh, yes.” And I said, “You're going to kill yourself.” I said, “If the people—I don't care where they are—if the Razorback game story is not in the paper—their paper they get—they're not going to take it.” I finally convinced everyone. So you were having the same thing?

AB: Exactly. I remember, distinctly, being in Memphis. My father was in the hospital. I bought a *Commercial Appeal* at Baptist Hospital in Memphis. There had been an Ole Miss [vs.] Memphis State game the night before, and I wanted to

see who had won that game. I heard everybody around there talking about it. I picked up the paper and there was a halftime score of that game.

JM: That was in the Memphis paper.

AB: That was in the Memphis paper, and I thought, “Man, how did they get away with this?” Then I got home that day, and the *Democrat* had the score—the Little Rock edition—had the score of that game.

JM: Yes.

AB: I thought, “Boy, we are doing a better job of covering sports” and realized how important a lot more than those folks did.

JM: Yes, okay. I don’t know whether you would have noticed that or not, but could you tell that your sports coverage did have a significant impact on the status of the *Democrat*? Could you tell that it was helping you?

AB: I think I could tell that it was helping even before Orville Henry came over there. Of course, we were building a good readership in our sports section.

JM: When Gannett folded and sold their assets to Walter, were you aware ahead of time that this transaction—I guess you probably were.

AB: Yes.

JM: You probably had to be involved in some of the accounting.

AB: Right. I was aware—I think the first meeting with the Gannett people with just Walter and Phil Anderson and maybe another attorney involved—they hammered out kind of a general agreement. Well, shortly thereafter, Walter told me about it. We started—of course, we had to borrow the money to buy the *Gazette* assets. We started putting together—contacted—we had a banking relationship with the

Bank of New York. They had made loans for our cable TV companies to rebuild our cable TV companies. We started putting together a package for the bank, and I did projections based on assumptions that Walter gave me of what we could possibly do. Since we were losing money, it was—we actually had the bankers down here. The Bank of New York put together about five banks and split it up—I guess \$69 million with about five different banks. All the bankers came down here. They looked around Little Rock, and we made a presentation to them—you know, our company, and then—and, also, what we thought we could do with the *Gazette*.

JM: Okay. Do you remember what you paid for the Gannett assets for the *Gazette*?

AB: It was around \$68 or \$69 million.

JM: Okay. I suppose—maybe those bankers were a little bit cautious about you being able to pay that off. Weren't they, or were they?

AB: They were. Like I say, there were five or six banks involved in that initial syndicate. The Bank of New York—they were the lead bank and knew a lot about the company. They knew Walter, and had a lot of confidence in Walter. [They] knew what he had done. Some of the other banks were very skeptical.

JM: Yes.

AB: There was one banker in California who—the tone of his questions was very negative. I thought, “Well, that bank—we might as well forget about that bank,” but they did sign on to be part of the group, which I was shocked that they did.

JM: Are those loans paid off?

AB: Yes.

JM: They are? Do you remember when they were paid off? How long it took?

AB: Actually, let's see—we borrowed that money in 1991. In 1997 we had almost paid [it] off, or we paid it off right before we bought the newspaper in Chattanooga [Tennessee].

JM: Okay, all right. Which was that? The [*Chattanooga*] *Free Press*? Which was it?

AB: The *Free Press*.

JM: The *Free Press*, okay. How is that operation going as a matter of—just a curiosity, not necessarily related to this?

AB: That operation is going very good. Chattanooga is a good market. Of course, we have the entire market. We bought the [*Chattanooga*] *Times* later, so Chattanooga is a good market. It has some degree of operation of isolation there.

JM: Yes.

AB: It's a good market.

JM: The other paper was—one of the papers was owned by *The New York Times*.

AB: Right, the *Times*. They were in a joint operation—it was a joint operating . . .

JM: They had a JOA [Joint Operating Agreement]. Okay. What has been the situation at the *Democrat* since you've bought out those assets and since you've become the only newspaper in town? How is the situation going now?

AB: Well, for a few months thereafter we were still spending a lot of money and recovering from the *Gazette* acquisition. We had a lot of—there was a lot of discounted circulation [that] we picked up, which we didn't show any immediate profit.

JM: Who had discounted the circulation?

AB: Well, it was the—the *Gazette* had discounted the circulation, but we picked it up.

JM: Explain what—I think I know what you mean by discounted circulation.

AB: Well, they sold it to the subscriber at a discount for prepayment.

JM: Oh, okay.

AB: And we picked up some of those discounts.

JM: So that would—that would have actually been losing money, probably, by the price that they had sold it to them?

AB: Certainly at a reduced rate, right.

JM: Yes, okay. So you had to pay off some of that?

AB: Right. We—right.

JM: You did avoid getting stuck with a lot of their expenses, though, didn't you?

AB: Right.

JM: Because you bought their assets and not the paper itself.

AB: Right

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: This is Jerry McConnell, again, here with Allen Berry. This is side two of this tape. Allen, you were talking about buying the *Gazette*'s assets and not their entire paper and everything. For a few months you were still paying off things and probably—I guess you maybe were still losing money? Is that . . .?

AB: We lost money for a few months. From day one—for a certain period of time—they delivered both newspapers. It took us a while to merge the circulation databases, and we got that done fairly quickly. There were some—and I guess

that probably primarily was the biggest area of cost that we weren't able to eliminate immediately.

JM: Yes, I understand. Of course, you didn't know what their circulation was and who was getting both, and so for a period of time you just delivered to everybody on either list. Everybody got the newspaper.

AB: That's exactly right. In fact, just the day before—a couple of days before the transaction actually closed, our—it was the first contact our computer people made with their computer people to talk about a merging—merging the two databases.

JM: I guess that had been kept quiet, so this probably came as a great shock to the *Gazette* computer people.

AB: Well, it—I'm sure that it did, although by that time, as the date of closing got near, there were people—it had gotten out in the community that the transaction was going to happen. We had reporters from the TV station actually hanging out here.

JM: Oh, really.

AB: Going around trying to get comments. I remember one day a guy—I think it was—I know it was a guy from Channel 11—a Channel 11 reporter—I think it was Joe Quinn, actually, wanting to come into the building and interview Walter about the transaction. Walter was under this confidentiality agreement with Gannett and didn't—and couldn't divulge the transaction to the public. This guy—I remember this guy was standing by—this TV reporter was standing outside by Walter's car. We sort of did a—we saw him out there, so another

fellow went out and got in Walter's car. I called Walter out to another location and we sort of slipped him.

JM: [Laughs] Yes, okay. I understand that at one time—this was before that—in some point in time they allowed some TV reporter in the building and they thought that he took a sort of cheap shot at the *Democrat*. Walter said, “No more. We're not going to let any TV stations come in the building anymore to tape stories.”

AB: Well, I guess that—but, also, we were under a confidentiality agreement.

JM: Yes.

AB: We couldn't talk about the transaction officially, except among the people—the few people here that knew about it. I had fellow employees asking me about it. I just had to tell them, “I'm not sure. I'm hearing the same things [that] you're hearing.”

JM: How soon after the transaction did the paper start making money?

AB: I think that we probably had a profit the first year.

JM: Okay.

AB: The first full year of operation would have been 1992.

JM: Yes, okay.

AB: I think we would've had a—we had a profit for 1992.

JM: Did it start increasing some after that?

AB: Yes, for several years.

JM: For several years, okay. I don't know if I have ever heard this addressed, did—I know, obviously, he kept a big news hole and everything, but was there some

cutback on expenses? I mean, were you able to cut back some maybe on people and maybe news hole a little bit, as far as expenses were going and everything, or was it generally maintained?

AB: I think it was generally maintained. We acquired their—of course, their physical assets. We acquired all their intangible assets, which would [be] their circulation and goodwill. We also acquired some of their contracts, and we had some obligations for features and things like that that we had to—in some cases which were duplications of things that we already had—maybe not the same thing, but the same type of thing—some of the comics and some of the other things. We had to kind of work out of all of those things.

JM: So you had to pay for those?

AB: Right. We were paying for those.

JM: And paying double.

AB: We were paying for those and paying double the obligation on the contracts we had acquired.

JM: Of course, you picked up a couple of guys—Charlie Allbright and Richard Allen.

AB: Right, and some other *Gazette* people. There were some *Gazette* people—I think—came over—we offered people pretty much from every department over at the *Gazette* jobs over here.

JM: Well, you did—I guess you did bring some over with the computer people, didn't you? Or some of those people—pressroom, maybe? I don't know.

AB: Right. Well, we had—in my area, we had one—a programmer. We acquired their computer equipment and their circulation software, which we didn't convert

immediately, but they had a better system than we did. We converted down the line, so we did hire one of their computer programmers who was knowledgeable about circulation. We hired one of their accountants. We began immediately operating their—the *Gazette* pressroom down at Fourth and Byrd, so we hired all their pressmen.

JM: Oh, did you? Okay.

AB: And all the people in the mailroom.

JM: Okay.

AB: I say all—surely ninety-nine percent of them.

JM: A big hunk of them and everything. Okay. Because that was a lot better press . . .

AB: Right. Right.

JM: . . . [ ? ] more expensive to [build on?].

AB: Some people in the circulation department came over, and some of their advertising salespeople. They took some of the better salespeople.

JM: Okay.

AB: Composing, pretty much all the way through. There were some people . . .

JM: I don't think at first there was a big influx of editorial people. I mean, they took [Allbright and Allen], because they had contracts with him. Later on, they did hire a few, but my impression was that right at first they didn't hire a whole bunch of reporters or editors from over there.

AB: That's probably correct.

JM: Yes. Of course, later on, Leroy Donald came over and Jerry Jones and maybe some other people, too—Irene Wassell, maybe. I'm not sure. At any rate, you got a much better computer system—as I understand it—from them. Because . . .

AB: Right. Actually, our computer system that we had that we used for our circulation for the *Democrat* was not big enough to handle the database circulation billing. It just was not—so, we actually rented some computer space from Systematic for a while.

JM: Oh, did you really? Yes, okay.

AB: Until we were able to install the computer system that the *Gazette* had.

JM: Was that just for the *Democrat* circulation, or was it for the additional circulation?

AB: [It was] for the combined circulation.

JM: Okay. You didn't have enough . . .?

AB: We just didn't have enough computer capacity.

JM: . . . computers to . . .?

AB: And the machine we had couldn't be expanded to handle it—to just take on that many additional subscribers and do the work for merging them.

JM: I guess they still had the old DEC system for producing the paper that . . .?

AB: They did. They had a DEC—they also had a DEC system for circulation—for their accounting.

JM: Yes. Did they? Okay.

AB: We moved all of that over here.

JM: Yes. I remember that old DEC system. [Laughs]

AB: Their DEC system for production was separate from their DEC system for circulation.

JM: Yes. I understand that. I remember that there was only one mainframe computer [laughs] and no backup.

AB: Right.

JM: I assume that things started smoothing out a lot, though, after this all happened and you acquired all the *Gazette*'s assets and integrated them into the company and everything?

AB: It did. That process took—to get through all that stuff—I'm sure it took—it took at least a year.

JM: Yes.

AB: Maybe longer to get past those—just acquisition issues. We still had—I mean, we had a lot of their assets—they were still over at the *Gazette* building. We moved some things over here that we could use, but there were still a lot of things over there that really—that were obsolete. I remember, specifically, a couple of big color scanners that they used that they paid over \$100,000 each for. They were—even at that time, they were obsolete. You could buy a much cheaper color scanner in 1991 than what they had paid for them. Even today you can do what those things did with a desktop scanner. So, to me, they're—it's a . . .

JM: At the height of the war and when you were really having to tap the resources of the other newspapers and other—did they have to cut back some? Did they have to cut back on their expenses? In other words, was it sort of draining them, to a

degree, to keep the *Democrat* afloat? That they maybe had to tighten their belt as far as their operations?

AB: Are you talking about the *Gazette* tightening their belt?

JM: Oh, no. I'm talking about the *Democrat*. Did the other Hussman papers—did WEHCO—the other WEHCO Media papers—Hot Springs and El Dorado, et cetera . . . ?

AB: Okay. Okay. I think, definitely, they did.

JM: Yes.

AB: We—probably not on the—too much on the operation side, but we really didn't spend much on capital expenditures. We really did more keeping up with what was going on.

JM: Yes.

AB: But one thing that I do want to mention in this, and I'm quite proud of it—proud of Walter for this—is that all during the years that we were losing money there from the acquisition of the *Democrat* until the *Democrat-Gazette* became profitable, Walter made a contribution to the company's profit sharing plan every year, even when there was an overall loss for the company. I think he just showed [that] he recognized that employees were an important part of it. He just wasn't going . . .

JM: Where did he get the money to make his contribution?

AB: Well, there was just—there was enough cash flow there in the corporation, but technically—because the company didn't have a profit—he would not have had to make a contribution to the profit-sharing plan.

JM: I see. Okay.

AB: But he did.

JM: I've heard people tell me that they got in on the profit sharing plan—and I guess this was a company-wide plan?

AB: It was a company-wide plan.

JM: [People] said that really turned out to be a big bundle of money when they retired and collected their profit sharing and everything. I remember Jim Shuemake told me, "Hey, that was more money than I'd ever seen." [Laughs]

AB: I remember Jim Shuemake well, and he did quite well in profit sharing. Jim got out before the stock market kind of hit—took a real hit in 2001.

JM: Yes.

AB: Jim retired at the . . .

JM: At the right time?

AB: . . . optimal time.

JM: Yes, okay. Let me ask you about that. I haven't even thought about that. What did the big stock market drop do to the situation—to the operating situation?

AB: 9/11 [reference to the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001] and these—I think that all occurred about the same time.

JM: Yes.

AB: I don't know that financially—well, obviously, it had a big effect. The economy took a hit.

JM: Yes.

AB: That was not a good time for us. People were immediately—I know we had—the 9/11—[it] seems like there were people that canceled some ads and things. I think it just had an effect on people's outlook in general, and, also, the economy.

JM: They were suffering, so they had to—some of the other firms were suffering.

AB: Right. Right.

JM: All right. The status of the *Democrat-Gazette* now, though, is, I assume, pretty healthy.

AB: The *Democrat-Gazette* is doing really well.

JM: Yes, okay. And has maintained—I know they have a good penetration in the local market and everything.

AB: We have a very high penetration in our retail trade zone here.

JM: What was the—what has happened with the development in northwest Arkansas—putting in the northwest Arkansas edition and your own plant up there? What has been the impact of that? Has it been a financial boost, a financial drag to an extent, or what's the situation on that?

AB: It's been a financial drag, because of the competition. It's very competitive up there.

JM: Yes. I understand.

AB: You know, there were three main players in there at one time.

JM: Yes.

AB: Now there are two. It's been a drag. We spent quite a bit of money putting that plant up there, but it's allowed us to have a product there [that] has a local—we are going to have local news on a timely basis and be competitive in that market.

JM: You took one of the presses from here—the old *Democrat* presses—and took it up there. Is that correct? And put it up there?

AB: That's correct.

JM: Okay. You have some of your own buildings and equipment and everything up there now?

AB: We built—the *Democrat-Gazette* built a printing plant in Lowell [Arkansas] in 1986.

JM: Okay.

AB: And moved the press that was at the terminal warehouse building at 500 East Markham—now President [Bill] Clinton is in that building—that was moved from—as you said earlier—from there up to the printing plant in Lowell.

JM: That was one of the old *Democrat* presses, or was it?

AB: No. That was not the press that was behind the *Democrat* building years ago.

JM: Okay. Okay.

AB: We had bought—we moved that press over to—there were two presses [moved] over to the terminal warehouse building, but we had bought a used press. I can not remember who we bought those things from, but it was . . .

JM: I'm thinking maybe it was somewhere in North Carolina—Charlotte or Raleigh or somewhere, but I'm not . . .

AB: I can't remember where we bought that press, but it was a fairly good press—up-to-date press. We first put it—installed [it] over there at 500 East Markham and then moved it to northwest Arkansas.

JM: Had you started printing the paper over there before you acquired the *Gazette* presses?

AB: Yes.

JM: Okay. Okay.

AB: That printing plant over there is about the same time as the law suit. It seems like we—I don't remember when we started printing over there, but it was probably about 1986.

JM: Yes, okay.

AB: Maybe 1987, but we were working on that at the same time.

JM: Okay. When Walter got ready to move into northwest Arkansas, did you do some projections for him on what he could expect on that?

AB: I don't remember anything specifically. Of course, every year part of our budgeting process is to do some forecasting for several years out, and take into consideration our debt and capital expenditures. We do that every year. We certainly built the northwest Arkansas operation into that, but I don't remember doing anything specifically at any time related to just an expansion up there.

JM: I assume you gained quite a bit of circulation in northwest Arkansas?

AB: Yes. Yes, we have.

JM: Okay. Because I know you have, but you also have a pretty good size staff up there, I think.

AB: Yes. There is a new staff at—they were in Springdale [Arkansas], but now they are in Lowell.

JM: Lowell, okay.

AB: Also, since we bought the *Northwest Arkansas Times* and *Benton County Daily Record* from [Smithy Publishers?], we have news people at both of those newspapers.

JM: Are those—I'm not sure how—because I'm never out there to pick to pick it up—are those papers delivered with the *Democrat-Gazette*, or is the *Northwest Arkansas Times* delivered with the *Gazette*?

AB: Yes. In Fayetteville the *Democrat*—the *Northwest Arkansas Times* and *Democrat* are delivered together in Fayetteville. And in Bentonville the *Benton County Daily Record* and the *Democrat-Gazette* are delivered together.

JM: The big competitor now is the Stephens Group [Stephens, Inc.] which includes *The Morning News*, I guess.

AB: Correct.

JM: Was there anything else? Was there any other newspaper involved in that conglomeration?

AB: At one time Springdale and Rogers were separate newspapers, but they acquired both. I don't know the history of that, but they merged those into one paper, so it's just Springdale and Rogers.

JM: It's just now *The Morning News*, I think.

AB: Correct. *The Morning News* of northwest Arkansas.

JM: Of course, they also owned the Fort Smith paper—which I see—and the Pine Bluff Paper—I thought.

AB: Right. Stephens acquired Donrey Media in the early 1990s.

JM: Sold some of it off, and kept some of it—as I remember it.

AB: Right.

JM: I take it that that's still a pretty competitive situation up there?

AB: It is a very competitive situation.

JM: Okay. One thing that I just thought of—and I need to go back because—[laughs] two reasons that I thought about this. I don't think I asked you—what were your parents' names?

AB: My dad was named Lon or Alonzo. [Lon Berry].

JM: Alonzo?

AB: Yes. A-L-O-N-Z-O. My mother was Mary Lois.

JM: Mary Lois?

AB: Yes.

JM: Okay. I thought of that because I didn't want people to make false assumption that you might be the son of Allan Berry [laughs] that ran [Little Rock] War Memorial Stadium.

AB: No. No, I have been confused . . .

JM: No relation right?

AB: No relation, but I've been confused with him—because he has a son my age.

JM: Yes, okay. What is it? Does his son have the same name?

AB: His son has the same name. It's spelled a little different than mine. He spells his name—A-L-L-A-N. Also, we are both CPAs.

JM: Are you really?

AB: Yes.

JM: Does he still live around here?

AB: I think—the last I heard of him, he worked for UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock].

JM: Did he? Okay.

AB: I'm not sure. He graduated from Hendrix [College, Conway, Arkansas] the same year that I graduated from the UA [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville], so I ran across several people who knew both of us.

JM: Okay. Okay, Allen, thanks very much. Let me ask you, though, can you think of anything else that we might not have addressed that maybe you want to make a point on—something that we haven't discussed that you—anything else that you can think about—your time here and the operation of the *Democrat*?

AB: Oh, I can just say that—I think that we've touched on this, but maybe not directly. It was when we were competing—particularly in the early years—the whole time it was a very stressful situation for all of us here. My job—somebody had to round up the money when the *Democrat* needed money over there. That was my job—well, one of my jobs. It was quite difficult at times because this vast conglomerate that we were described as having was not—you know, it was just difficult sometimes to round up—to get money from those other operations.

JM: So you had to round up the money from the other parts of the operation to supplement the money over here?

AB: Right.

JM: And you were—I take it that you were finding that some places didn't have a whole lot of money to spare?

AB: Of course, when they would have a good month and the *Democrat* didn't need money, we would invest it in something interest-bearing—a transaction like U.S. [United States of America] Treasury Bills, probably. Then, when they needed money—when the *Democrat-Gazette* would have a big newsprint bill, or something, and it was very difficult to project their cash needs over there—they would hit me by surprise a lot of times. It would be very tough and quite stressful to round up the money.

JM: Maybe hit you—saying, “Allen, we need X amount of money,” or something.

AB: Yes.

JM: Yes.

AB: Terrell Strickland was over there. At the *Democrat-Gazette* he was the chief accountant and controller at the *Democrat-Gazette*—at the *Democrat*.

JM: Okay.

AB: [ ? ] him. I would always tell Terrell—we always had these conversations, “Hey, I know you're going to need money. Just try to give at least three days' notice—just as much as you possibly can.” Terrell tried to do that, but he always couldn't do that. He would come—quite frequently he'd come over here and say, “We got some bills due tomorrow.” [Laughs]

JM: Who was this now?

AB: Terrell Strickland.

JM: T-E-R-R-E-L-L?

AB: Right. Terrell Strickland.

JM: What was his job?

AB: He was the chief accountant at the *Democrat*.

JM: At the *Democrat*, itself.

AB: Yes.

JM: So he would come to you as the accountant or treasurer—or whatever—for WEHCO Media.

AB: Right.

JM: And say, “Whoop. We’ve got to have this money.”

AB: Right. Right.

JM: So—yes, okay.

AB: We kind of butted heads over it. We were actually very good friends, and still are today. We laugh about a lot of those times when we were trying to have some of those meetings. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. I assume that that was a situation maybe throughout the organization? That at the height of the war and everything, there probably was a lot of angst and a lot of pressure and . . .

AB: There was a lot of pressure. There was a lot of pressure on, certainly, Paul Smith and on Walter—you know, Walter—gosh, he—you know, he—the rest of it was just—it was just a—oh, it was more than a job to Paul Smith and the millions of other folks. We didn’t—we certainly didn’t have a—we probably could have gone out and found another job, if the *Democrat* had folded. Walter had—certainly his reputation as a newspaper person and his—just a lot of money that he’d invested. It certainly would have all gone down the drain.

JM: So was there a time where you didn't really think that the *Democrat* would make it?

AB: There was a time there—probably in the early 1980s—where I had my doubts that the *Democrat* would make it.

JM: Yes.

AB: When the lawsuit came about, I know we all felt the pressure that—gosh, you know—there were a lot of people over there whose jobs were riding on this.

JM: Yes.

AB: It was very stressful.

JM: Yes. What was your reaction when he decided to go morning? Did that strike you as a really big gamble?

AB: It did, but I didn't see that he had any other choice. I could see that we were not making any real progress.

JM: Yes.

AB: So I think that Walter—I agreed with Walter's decision that, if he wanted to make a go of it here, he was going to have to do some things. Going morning and taking on the *Gazette* seemed to be the only way to do it.

JM: I can't remember now if I asked you this. Were you aware of his meetings with Hugh Patterson—trying to get a joint operating agreement?

AB: I was not aware at the time. I became aware, certainly, a year or so before the *Gazette* lawsuit was filed that those discussions had gone on, but I was not aware of them at the time [that] they actually went on.

JM: Did that strike you as maybe a big mistake on the part of Hugh Patterson?

[Laughs]

AB: Well, in retrospect, it was certainly a big mistake.

JM: Hindsight.

AB: That's right. But [in] accounts that I've read of that since, I thought it was certainly very arrogant of Mr. Patterson not to—to blow Walter off, and not—because a joint operating agreement has worked in several cities, and they worked for the benefit of both parties. I can understand Mr. Patterson would want to have the whole thing, but I thought it was pretty arrogant of him not to—to blow Walter off.

JM: Well, at the time, as I understand, and what the final offer Walter made on the joint operating agreement was that he practically offered the *Gazette* everything that would for sure nail them down as the dominant newspaper, but I guess—and I may have to go back and ask him, although he's been interviewed for the *Gazette* Project—that I think he must have thought all along that “the *Democrat* [is] going to go out of business and I'll have the whole thing—the whole city and state—and I won't have to give up any revenue.”

AB: I guess that would [have been] his thinking. I don't know what else he could have been thinking.

JM: Yes. It was sort of clear to you then that Walter was taking a gamble when he decided to go mornings and decided, “Hey, we're going to fight it just as long as we can.”

AB: He, himself, termed it as a gamble.

JM: Yes. Yes. Okay, Allen, is there anything else that you can think of that we haven't covered in this interview that you might want to mention?

AB: Jerry, I really can't think of anything.

JM: Yes, okay. I'll tell you what—you'll get the last shot at the transcription of this and edit it and everything, and if you think of something that you want to add—and a lot of people do this—say, “Oops. I wish I would have said something about that,” then just go ahead and type it up and stick it on the end.

AB: All right. I'll do that.

JM: I did that. I did. You know I was—of course I worked at both newspapers, and I was interviewed for the *Gazette* Project. I got my interview back and I said, “Oh, I wish I'd said something about this,” so I just typed it up and sent it back and everything.

AB: Yes. I'll do that.

JM: But at any rate, so that will be good. Allen, I appreciate it very much.

AB: Well, thank you for the opportunity, Jerry.

JM: Thank you, a lot.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Geoffery L. Stark]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]

