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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Ramon Greenwood
Telephone Interview
29 January 2007

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. I'm sitting here in my home in Greenwood, Arkansas, on January 29, 2007—getting ready to do a telephone interview with Ramon Greenwood, who is in Arlington Heights, Illinois, at his home. Ramon, the first thing I need to ask you is do I have your permission to tape this interview and turn the tape over to the Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas, [Fayetteville]?

Ramon Greenwood: Yes, you do.

JM: Okay. Let's start first, Ramon, with your full name—if you want to give it to me—and how you spell it.

RG: Ramon. R-A-M-O-N. [pronounced RAY-mon]

JM: Okay. Ramon Greenwood. And the last part is just like it sounds, right?

RG: Right.

JM: Just like the town I live in.

RG: That's correct.

JM: Okay. Ramon, when and where were you born?

RG: Born in Warren, Arkansas, 1927. January 14, 1927.

JM: January fourteenth? Okay. Let's see, you—we will get to it as you work up toward it—your career actually started at the *Arkansas Democrat*. Is that correct?

RG: Well, actually, I had a newspapering job in the army and then when I got out I worked part-time at the *Eagle Democrat*, a weekly newspaper in Warren.

JM: In Warren. Yes. Okay.

RG: I worked part-time there for several months—learned to hand-set type and did some reporting for them.

JM: Okay. Good. Well, let's get into that. First, tell me what your parents' names were.

RG: My mother was Ophie. O-P-H-I-E. Mae. M-A-E. Her maiden name was Reap. Ophie Mae Reep Greenwood. [Please clarify spelling of Reep/Reap.]

JM: Ophie Mae Reep Greenwood. And your father's name?

RG: Carl—C-A-R-L—Greenwood.

JM: Well, I knew a Reep from Warren who was a mayor down there just in the last few years. Is he any relation?

RG: No. No.

JM: Okay. Where did you go to school?

RG: Well, I [laughs] skipped around a little bit. I went to Louisiana Tech [University] at Ruston, Louisiana, for a year, then I went to Arkansas A&M at Monticello for a year and then I finished at the university my last two years at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville].

JM: Okay. Now, then, did you go to Warren schools?

RG: Yes, Warren High School.

JM: Warren? And elementary and junior high and everything?

RG: Right.

JM: Okay. What did your father do?

RG: My father worked in the sawmill all of his life.

JM: Okay.

RG: He was a sawyer for the last few years of his life—a job they call sawyer and log-scaler.

JM: Yes.

RG: He was the guy who operated the machines to first get the log—cut it into board widths and so forth. He worked there all of his life from the time he was about fourteen years old.

JM: Now, did you go into the service before you finished school or after?

RG: After high school. I went into the army in June of 1945.

JM: Okay. And how long were you in?

RG: About eighteen months—eighteen, nineteen months.

JM: Okay. Where did you serve?

RG: I served in Greenland.

JM: Greenland. Okay. That was probably pretty interesting, wasn't it?

RG: [Laughs] Yes, it was. I was editor of the base newspaper.

JM: Were you? Okay.

RG: Yes. I ended up with the rank of sergeant—buck sergeant.

JM: How did you get that job? Had you done any journalism when you were in high

school?

RG: Well, yes, I started the high school newspaper. I was editor of it and founded the first printed newspaper along with a fellow named Ross Adams, who was my assistant editor.

JM: Okay.

RG: Then I got into that into the army. I don't know—I really don't know. They were looking for somebody to write sports for an army newspaper. I did that for a few months and then when I went to Greenland, it just was natural that I took over the editorship. We took stuff off of the wire and off radio and edited it, and I wrote sports and features and so forth. It was just a little mimeographed thing, but I did it every day and got a lot of experience from it.

JM: Okay. And you got out of the army when?

RG: 1946—in December of 1946.

JM: Okay.

RG: It was eighteen months. I went in June of 1945 and got out at the end of 1946.

JM: Okay. Then you came back to Warren?

RG: Came back to Warren—worked a while for the *Eagle Democrat*, as I said—learned to set type by hand and did some reporting—that end of the thing. Then I went off to college.

JM: Yes. You went first to where?

RG: Louisiana Tech.

JM: Went there one year.

RG: One year.

JM: Warren's not too far from Ruston, is it?

RG: Well, yes, it was a good little jaunt—probably ninety miles or so. I went down there on a football scholarship.

JM: Oh, did you? You had played football in high school, I take it?

RG: I played football, basketball—yes.

JM: Yes. Okay. All right. And you stayed one year there?

RG: Right.

JM: Then went where?

RG: Arkansas A&M at Monticello.

JM: Okay. Had you decided on a career at that time? Were you into journalism?

RG: Yes. I really decided that when I was in high school. [Laughs] I was going to skip my senior year in high school, and [I] went up to the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville] on a football scholarship. Back in those days you could go to college—skip your twelfth grade—go to college. When you finished your freshman year, you got credit. Well, I went up there and got a football scholarship, and I decided what the hell was I doing skipping my senior year when I had a shot at doing a lot of stuff in sports and so forth.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I went back down to Warren and finished my high school in 1945. Turned out I was ruled ineligible because I'd had a college scholarship, so I didn't get to play any sports my senior year.

JM: Were you ever at the university and actually on the team or anything?

RG: Well, I was on it, you know, before the season started. I was on the squad. I wasn't on the team.

JM: What year would that have been—the season of . . . ?

RG: 1944-1945.

JM: 1944. It would've been actually the football season, probably, of 1944.

RG: That's correct.

JM: Okay. The reason I was asking—I was on the squad in the season of 1945.

[Laughter] So we just missed each other that way.

RG: Missed each other. Yes.

JM: Why did you transfer to the University of Arkansas?

RG: Well, I wanted—I had heard so much about the journalism school, and Monticello really didn't have any journalism school or classes.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I wanted to go up there and get a degree at the university. I'd heard about the [Walter J.] Lemke School [of Journalism] and all.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I went up there to finish up there.

JM: Finish your schooling?

RG: Finish my schooling.

JM: Okay. So you would've started—you started at Fayetteville and finished when?

RG: Oh, boy . . .

JM: Well, did you graduate in 1950 or 1951?

RG: I graduated in 1950.

JM: 1950. All right. With a degree in journalism?

RG: Correct.

JM: Okay. And what did you do after that?

RG: Well, I came back—and Martha and I were engaged to be married—and I came

back down to Warren and worked in a retail lumber yard from—oh, let's see, for about six, seven months—lived at home [and] saved my money so we could get married.

JM: Yes.

RG: Married in February and continued to work and . . .

JM: February of what, 1951?

RG: 1951.

JM: Yes. Okay. And this is Martha Holmes, right?

RG: Yes, Martha Holmes.

JM: H-O-L-M-E-S.

RG: H-O-L-M-E-S.

JM: From Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

RG: From Rison.

JM: From Rison. Oh, okay.

RG: R-I-S-O-N.

JM: Oh, I know how to—well, yes, somebody else [laughs] may not know how to spell it right. Yes. Okay. I was thinking she was from Pine Bluff. So you got married and then what?

RG: Well, I continued to work in the retail lumber yard for another two or three months and was always looking and trying to get a—you know, thinking about the newspaper thing. So I went up and interviewed with the [Arkansas] *Democrat* there in Little Rock. The next day I had the job, so we moved to Little Rock. I was asking Martha after we talked the other day—I went to work at the *Democrat* along, I guess, May—something like that—of 1951, and I worked until the early

summer of 1952. So I was only there a little over a year.

JM: Okay. All right. Well, that sorts of jibes with my recollection because, of course, I started there in June of 1951, so you'd been there about a month or so before then and then you stayed—and then—tell me what you remember, though, about the *Democrat*—what kind of operation it was, who the people were—just go back about all your recollections of it.

RG: Well, I was just—I was star-struck, you know, to go there and work. Karr Shannon—my father, who had—really didn't have much of an education at all, but he was an avid reader—he swore by Karr Shannon.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

RG: And George Douthit, Roy Bosson, John Scudder—all those guys we talked about the other day—I was on just sort of general assignment for about a month and then Mr. Tilden said that he was going to give me a try-out at the state capitol. Ken Francis and Marcus George were on assignment out there, and they needed somebody else, so I took it as quite a compliment. He picked me to go out there and work with them, which was really, really interesting, and sort of a plum opportunity.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I spent all the rest of the time out there working with them covering the—you know, I covered kind of the second-level stuff—the health department, the forestry and education and all that sort of thing. It was just a romantic kind of time. Martha and I hadn't been married very long. Interestingly enough—I'll get to it in a minute—but she was making more money as a secretary than I was as a reporter.

JM: Yes, I don't doubt that.

RG: She had had about six weeks of shorthand—was her whole training.

JM: [Laughs]

RG: I had started at \$40 a week, and she was making \$45 a week.

JM: Okay.

RG: So I was—I'll just go ahead a minute and tell you.

JM: Yes.

RG: So after I'd been out there—a fellow named Fred Lang was the state forester, and I saw quite a bit of Mr. Lang. He said, "Well, would you be interested in talking with a friend of mine about working in a trade association?" I said, "Well, yes. I'll talk to anybody." So he got me set up with an interview with a fellow from Washington, DC, who had been previous state forester in Arkansas. When this guy was in Little Rock, he interviewed me and offered me a job. And as I said, at that time I was making \$40 a week, and Mr. Gillette, the guy from Washington, offered me \$100 a week, mileage that would let me buy a new car, and made me district manager for his trade association. Well, when I went in, I came back and I went in to see—I told Mr. Tilden what was happening, and I had this offer, and I had to be—you know, seriously look at it. And he said, "Well, let me go talk to Mr. [Edwin] Liske." So he went in and told Mr. Liske what was happening. So Mr. Liske [laughs] said I ought to go down and talk to Mr. Engel about this.

JM: Yes.

RG: So after—I was on pins and needles, and after, oh, a little bit, Mr. Liske came back and called me into his office. He said—he always called me Ramone. [Pronounced Ray-MONE].

JM: Yes.

RG: Señor.

JM: [Laughs]

RG: And he said, “Well, we don’t want you to leave.” He said, “Here’s what Mr. Engel says we can do for you.” He said, “You’ve been here about a year now, or going on a year.” He said, “You’re making \$40 a week. You’re due to be raised to \$45 a week in the normal course of events. And now that this has come up, because we want to keep you, we can raise you to \$55 a week.”

JM: Yes.

RG: So I said, “Well, Mr. Liske, don’t you understand? I just told you that these other people are going to pay me \$100 a week. Yes, they had offered me \$100 a week and a car—mileage and so forth.

JM: Yes.

RG: So he said, “Well, that’s the best we can do.” He said, “What are you going to be doing? What does this job entail?” And I said, “Well, it’s public relations for the forest product industry.” He said, “*Public relations!*” He said, “Ramon, do you not know that this public relations business—it’s not here to *stay*?” [Laughter] So I said, “Well, Mr. Liske, I guess I don’t have much choice.” So I had to leave, or *thought* I had to leave.

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: That was how that came about.

JM: Yes. Now, the name of this firm that you were going to—what was the . . . ?

RG: American Forest Products Industries.

JM: Okay.

RG: They sponsored the “Keep America Green”—America tree farm system. And, of course, there was a “Keep Arkansas Green” and Arkansas tree farm. Did a lot of work in association with Al Pollard, who had the “Keep Arkansas Green” advertising account.

JM: In Little Rock?

RG: Yes, in Little Rock.

JM: Yes. Okay. Now, we’re talking—now, this is Allen Tilden. A-L-L-E-N. He was the city editor at the time, right?

RG: That’s correct.

JM: And Edwin Liske was the managing editor.

RG: Managing editor.

JM: And, of course, K. August Engel was the owner and publisher.

RG: Right.

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: He was Marcus George’s uncle.

JM: Yes. Right. Okay, before we get to the further parts of your career, though—now let’s go back and tell me more about your recollections of the *Democrat* and the people there and everything. Now, you say you started there at \$40 a week. What kind of fringe benefits did you have?

RG: Gosh, I don’t know that we had [laughs]—I don’t remember *any*. [Laughter]

JM: I don’t either. That’s why I asked.

RG: Of course, I wasn’t too interested in it then, but I don’t believe we *had* any.

JM: No, I don’t think—we didn’t have health care or retirement or . . .

RG: No, I don’t think we did, Jerry. The only thing I remember—we’d go in every

Friday at noon and get paid. It would be a little envelope with cash money in it.

JM: Yes. Right.

RG: You know, I never thought about that. Hell, no, we *didn't*.

JM: No, we didn't. And it was not air-conditioned, right?

RG: Not air-conditioned. [Laughs] No!

JM: What do you remember about the building itself?

RG: Oh, it was kind of creaky and pretty grim looking, when you look back on it.

JM: Yes.

RG: You know, it was kind of—seemed to me kind of dark, and it wasn't terribly well lighted—just everybody sitting at an individual desk. Each of us had a typewriter. You weren't assigned a desk, you just—whatever was open, you went to it.

JM: Yes.

RG: You know, you'd turn in your copy, and they'd edit it and put it in that little wire basket and shoot it up to the press room to be set in type.

JM: Yes. I have to ask you one question, which is insignificant in a way, but I have different recollections than other people—do you remember what kind of floor they had on the second floor in the newsroom?

RG: No, I . . .

JM: Well, the reason I ask—I remember it as being a wood floor. Some people think that they had a metal floor. Some people think they had a concrete floor.

[Laughs] But I remember—I think it was *wood*. Do you remember?

RG: I can't say I do.

JM: Okay.

RG: Jerry, let me . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, we were just discussing—I had asked you about the floor, and you didn't remember. But tell me what else you *do* remember about the *Democrat* and its operation as a newspaper.

RG: I thought it was an excellent newspaper. I remember more than anything that I sort of felt like, in looking back on it, we were sort of the last go-around of the traditional newspaper people, you know. Oh, like the classic newspaper I guess you grew up reading about and hearing about—Ernie Pyle and those kind of people. The place was filled with interesting characters.

JM: Yes.

RG: John Scudder, who was a raging alcoholic—nice, nice man . . . I remember him telling me one time [laughs] that he never owned but one pair of socks at a time. He'd wear them until they just got beyond wearing and [then he would] go buy a new pair. And you'd see him—he'd come in—he had great resources—great contacts. You'd see him come in from an interview with somebody, and he'd be really, *really* in his cups, you know. You could tell he was snookered [intoxicated]. He could sit down and write copy just beautifully—rarely a strike-over—write through it—zip it out—get it out. And he'd get up and leave.

JM: Yes.

RG: I remember George Douthit had great contacts—a short, stubby little guy—self-important sort of fellow. Never left—I don't recall he ever left—I don't recall he hardly ever left the newsroom, but he worked the phones. Roy Bosson was kind of everybody's ideal of sort of a straight shooter—kind of a guy—a big fellow, handsome, attractive guy—likeable.

JM: Yes.

RG: I always thought it was strange [laughs] that he left to be the lobbyist for the
Brewers Association.

JM: Yes.

RG: Sort of a contradiction there. Oh, I remember Bud Lemke, Mr. [Walter J.]
Lemke's son.

JM: Yes.

RG: Mayberry.

JM: Mayfield.

RG: Mayfield.

JM: Mayfield, yes. R. B. Mayfield.

RG: Yes. There were two or three women there—I can't remember their names.

JM: Well, let's see, there was Dorothy Menard.

RG: Dorothy Menard was a sorority sister [Zeta Tau Alpha] of your wife and Martha, I
believe.

JM: That's correct.

RG: At the university.

JM: Yes.

RG: I think the Mayfield guy—didn't he commit suicide?

JM: Yes, he did.

RG: I think he did.

JM: Yes.

RG: So it was just—it was kind of a romantic time. We felt we were doing something,
you know? It was what you hoped a newspaper would be like.

JM: Yes.

RG: And Gene Herrington—I remember him. He was very, very helpful to me—sort of took me under his wing a lot.

JM: He was, I guess, probably the assistant city editor at that time.

RG: That's correct.

JM: Assistant to Tilden. Yes. Oh, the other one—the other woman was probably—might have been Margaret Frick. Do you remember?

RG: Yes, I do. I remember that name.

JM: She didn't—she wasn't around the office a lot. She covered the federal building. She stayed out at the federal building most of the time.

RG: Yes, I remember the name. Yes.

JM: What do you remember about the editors?

RG: Oh, they were always very nice to me. They were helpful. They were kind of characters. Mr. Tilden was known to keep a bottle in his desk drawer. The other guy—oh, the short fellow—the one—Allen.

JM: Yes. Deane Allen.

RG: Deane Allen.

JM: Yes.

RG: I remember he'd take a nip or two on the job.

JM: Yes. And for the transcriber, that's D-E-A-N-E. Deane Allen.

RG: Yes. He later went on to be some—went to Washington [DC] as somebody's legislative assistant.

JM: I think it was Dale Alford when—Dale Alford, who was a optometrist or ophthalmologist, I don't know which—ran against Brooks Hays—beat Brooks Hays

[in the 1958 congressional election].

RG: That's correct.

JM: And he went to Washington with Dale Alford. He was, I think, the state editor at the time we were there.

RG: Yes. Bob McCord—I don't actually remember—Bob and I, in later years, got to know each other and became good friends.

JM: Yes.

RG: But I don't remember Bob being around there very much when I was there. I think he was—go ahead.

JM: I think he was in the army. He graduated the same year I did, in 1951. But before—if he came back to the *Democrat*, it would've been a very short amount—because he went into the army for a couple of years about the time he got out of the university and then came back. So he would not have been around there much. Did you work on the *Traveler* any when you were at the university?

RG: No, I didn't.

JM: Oh, okay.

RG: No, I missed that entirely, and I don't know why. I guess I didn't know how to kind of get in the circle. It seems to me—I had the impression it was sort of a closed circle. I don't know. I don't know *why* I didn't.

JM: Yes. But that's—you would've known McCord. McCord, of course, was the editor the last year and the managing editor of the previous year.

RG: Yes. I had some classes with Bob. And I've thought back about—I remember one time Mr. Lemke, in one of the classes he taught—I don't know, maybe twenty-five or thirty people in the class—and he said, "I want to tell you that not but

one person in here, and I'm not going to identify him or her—there's not but one person in here in this classroom who's going to make a really fine professional newspaper man.” We always wondered who he was talking about. [Laughter]

JM: You don't remember who else was in the class, do you, besides yourself and Bob? [Laughs] I suspect that—I think it was my opinion that Mr. Lemke over his last few years developed sort of a jaundiced idea toward newspapers, anyway.

RG: Yes. Yes, I think he did. Yes, I think he did. He was a good teacher.

JM: Yes.

RG: He had that little bow tie on. Yes, he was a good teacher. I liked Mr. Lemke.

JM: Yes.

RG: Mr. Thalheimer was there.

JM: Yes, Joe Thalheimer.

RG: Yes, Thalheimer. Well, we're getting ahead of the story.

JM: No, that's all right. That's fine. A lot of newspaper people came out of that group that was there at that time, and I know Charlie Rixse would've been in school at that time. I don't know whether you knew Charlie or . . .

RG: No. But I remember Karr Shannon. When he'd go on vacation, they'd ask for volunteers to write his column.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I volunteered and wrote Karr Shannon's column.

JM: Yes.

RG: And my father, who thought Karr Shannon hung the moon, was never prouder of me for anything I ever did *ever* than the time I wrote the column for Karr Shannon. [Laughter] He really thought that was really something else.

JM: Well, I think that's great, because I went back—and when I started on this project, I went back and started going through the microfilms of the *Democrat*—mostly times, you know, that I had worked there—and I did work there for several years. But I remember seeing some of the columns that you wrote. And I just have to throw this in. I've seen some of the columns that you wrote for Karr Shannon and also some of your new stories, and just to tell you—I think you were pretty darn good.

RG: [Laughs] Well, thank you.

JM: I guess I thought that at the time, too, but as I went back later here recently and read them, I thought, “Hmm, that guy was pretty good.”

RG: Well, I appreciate that. I have to tell you a story about—I don't remember exactly what year it was—but it was the year of probably the worst tornado that ever hit Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

RG: It started down at Texarkana and skipped up around Hot Springs and went up on up through Beebe and on up through that way. And we were having—I don't know—you might've been there—I don't remember—but we were having a staff picnic out at a city park . . .

JM: Boyle Park.

RG: . . . when that thing hit, and somebody had their car radio on. Gene Herrington was there, and he kept sending people to go here and there. And it pretty well got down to just—weren't many of us left—Gene and I and two or three others. So Gene said, “Well, come on, let's you and I go, and we'll go up toward Beebe and up that way—Judsonia—and see what we can do up there.” So we went in his car

and left there—I don't know, 7:00 or 8:00—it was pretty well dark. And the devastation was just *incredible*. We went and visited the hospitals and so forth, and he and I turned around—it was on a—I believe it must have been on a Friday—it must've been Friday night, I guess. Yes, I guess it was. So we turned around and came back down—got back down about daylight down to Little Rock—went to the newsroom and wrote our stories. And I wrote about being in the hospital and seeing these parents sitting on the floor in the hallway waiting to take—holding a baby in their arms, and there was blood and the baby was injured. They were sitting waiting there for the doctor. So I wrote that in my part of the story. Well, that got picked up by the AP [Associated Press], and I got calls and letters from all over the country about that segment of the story.

JM: Yes.

RG: So, anyway, we had worked around the clock and then had to get the Sunday paper out, and I told Martha—I said, “Well, it's a really an experience. Of course, we'll be paid for all those extra hours.” [Laughter] When he came in Monday to go to work, Mr. Liske called us all together. He said, “Now, you all put in a lot of overtime, but we thought it would be better—instead of paying you for the overtime, we'll just give you time off.” [Laughs] So, anyway, we had time off, which didn't sit very well with us.

JM: I'll bet. Comp [compensatory] time. Yes.

RG: But, anyway, that was pretty typical of Mr. Engel.

JM: Yes. Yes, it was. Well, I can tell you when that tornado was. It was 1952—probably April. [Editor's note: Tornadoes killed 111 when they struck Dierks,

Searcy, Judsonia, Bald Knob, and other areas on March 21, 1952.]

RG: Yes, that's about right.

JM: And the reason I remember was that—and I've told this elsewhere, and I'll tell it again—it was because I was the one that called the office and told them about it. I was working the police beat at that time, and sometime mid-afternoon I called the state police, and they said—from the city hall to the state police and the Little Rock Police Department—they said there had been a tornado down at Dierks, and “We think there's been two people killed.” I called the office, and they said, “Okay, we'll get somebody on it.” I waited around a little while. So I went on into the office to check and see how things were going, and after I got to the office I called the state police again. They said, “Well, there were more people killed than that. We think maybe five or more.” The office had already sent Roy Bosson and Bill Secrest to Dierks. So they decided, “Boy, this is going to be a bad tornado. We maybe need some more people.” So they said, “Okay, Jerry, you and George Douthit go down and you follow up on it. They'll take care of the story for tomorrow morning, but you all go on down and find out what you can now and then start checking. And in the morning get some information for a Sunday piece.” So they sent Douthit and me down. [Laughs] Well, of course, [] later, and they wound up killing seven at Dierks, but killing, as you know, a lots more than that in other places. Judsonia and England and Augusta and all those sort of places. But that's why I particularly remember that episode. And there was a—I remember there had been a staff party scheduled out at Boyle Park at the time.

RG: Yes.

JM: So they gave you all that hard work and everything, and they couldn't pay any

overtime for it. They just gave you some extra time off.

RG: Yes.

JM: Yes, I understand that. I don't know whether I ever got paid overtime or not. But one thing I've neglected to ask you—do you remember how many days a week you were working?

RG: I guess I worked Monday—let's see, I worked Monday to Friday and then I came in and worked Saturday night on the Sunday paper. I worked at the desk on the Sunday paper.

JM: Yes.

RG: But I don't remember. I think I worked five days a week plus Saturday night, I think.

JM: Yes. Well, I think you worked six days a week.

RG: Yes. I think that's—that would've been the five days and then I worked Saturday night.

JM: Yes, you worked the five days through the week and then you worked Saturday night, right?

RG: I believe that's correct.

JM: Yes, that's what I worked. I worked six days a week. So how did you think or feel like at that time that the *Democrat* compared with the *Gazette*?

RG: I really probably thought—I was inclined to envy the *Gazette* sometimes.

JM: Yes.

RG: It seemed to be, oh, more—I don't know. I guess I kind of envied them. I thought we were more kind of blue-collar, in the trenches, real news guys, and they were kind of more bylines and more flash and whatever.

JM: Yes.

RG: I suppose—but I thought we were a better blue-collar, hardworking, nose to the grindstone kind of group.

JM: Yes. And you thought—I take it you thought that we had a pretty decent staff.

RG: Yes, we did. Yes, we did.

JM: Yes.

RG: You think about those people we've been talking so much about. Marcus George was a good news guy. He was a real pro. So, yes, I thought we were pretty good. I think they had a little more glamour to them, maybe, but I guess that's probably what I thought.

JM: Yes. Ken Francis that . . .

RG: Yes, Ken Francis was a very—had a *lot* of good contacts. The stories would come to Ken. He was a good, quick writer. He was a good guy.

JM: Yes. Okay. And I guess that you covered—at the state capitol you probably covered at that time—it wasn't until late 1952 or early 1953 that they had a change—but I guess you covered [Governor] Sid [Sidney Sanders] McMath some, didn't you?

RG: Yes, Sid McMath. Orval Faubus was highway commissioner.

JM: Yes.

RG: And I remember quite a few times taking a coffee break in the afternoon, and McMath would be down in the cafeteria down in the basement of the capitol. He would be there sitting with that kitchen match in his mouth, drinking coffee and sitting there talking with him.

JM: Yes.

RG: [Laughs] I had another interesting experience, and my memory fails me. Anyway, Ken Francis and Marcus had left early and told me to stay on. We stayed there, I believe, until about 3:30 in the afternoon—and asked me would I cover—they had something else they had to do. So they said, “Be sure before you wrap up, just stop by the governor’s office and the secretary of state’s office just to double check just before you go home.”

JM: Yes.

RG: So I was making my rounds, and I walked into the secretary of state’s office, and there sat Sam Harris, Matilda Touhey [*Gazette* reporters], and I believe it was Jack Holt. [] I can remember the other two, but anyway, I said, “Well, what’s going on? Why are you all here?” And then it dawned on me. It was about time to file for governor. And I thought, “Whoops! What’s going on here?”

JM: Yes.

RG: So I said, “Are you going to file for governor?” And Holt started hemming and hawing back and forth, back and forth. And I said, “Unless you tell me otherwise, I’m going to go file a story saying that you are going to file for governor.” And they didn’t say anything.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I went running—tearing off down to the newsroom and got on the phone and called the desk and told them what had happened. And they questioned me pretty sharply. “Are you sure? Are you sure?” And I said, “Well, yes, I’ll tell you what happened.” So they ran—the final edition had about one paragraph stuck on the front page—I think it was Jack Holt. I’m a little confused about that.

JM: Well, that's probably right. He ran in the Democratic primary in 1952.

RG: Anyway, he did, in fact—I sweated bullets [until the next morning?].

JM: Yes.

RG: And the *Gazette* came out with a full story. And, of course, he was favoring Sam and Matilda with his story. But I always got a great kick out of it—just the sheer luck of walking in there.

JM: Yes.

RG: Yes. I covered a story one time in the health department, and they told me right on deadline—they told me they were recalling a whole bunch of canned tomatoes because they were contaminated.

JM: Yes.

RG: So I went racing around and wrote a story about it, then got worried I was going to be sued for libel, but it turned out the story was okay. So it was, you know—just interesting times.

JM: Yes. I don't guess they were Warren tomatoes, were they?

RG: No. [Laughter] No, they wouldn't have been contaminated.

JM: Yes. I understand. [Laughs] Okay. What kind of a guy was Faubus?

RG: I liked him.

JM: Yes.

RG: I liked him a lot. He was a really down-to-earth guy—very, very interesting to talk—conversation with him. I never had the slightest hint of racism in anything he ever said.

JM: Yes.

RG: He was just a down-to-earth guy.

JM: Yes. I remember—I think there was some point in time along in there that we came up with some stories—Roy Bosson in particular, though—about what was viewed as some chicanery in the highway department and how they'd been—do you remember that?

RG: Yes. A fellow from Searcy was the highway commissioner and was supposed to be selling short loads of gravel or—I don't remember.

JM: Yes. Well, they had a whole highway audit commission hearing later on—had some hearings. They investigated the highway commission and how it operated. Okay, what else do you remember? Any other significant stories you remember at that time?

RG: There's one—I don't know whether it's—I don't know whether I ought to tell this or not because it involves—oh, I don't know, maybe I'll just tell you when we finish and then if you want to put it in, we can.

JM: Okay. That will be fine. All right. Do you remember what time we went to work? What time did you go to work?

RG: It seems to me like I—probably 8:00 [a.m.]

JM: Yes.

RG: We'd always gather in the newsroom, and Ken and Marcus and I would go from there to the Walgreens drugstore on the corner of Main Street . . .

JM: Yes, Fifth and Main.

RG: Fifth and Main—we'd get a cup of coffee and then we'd take the bus out to the state capitol.

JM: Yes.

RG: And I worked out there—every Friday we'd come into the office to get our pay

envelope, and we'd go to the Lafayette Hotel and eat lunch.

JM: Yes, I remember that.

RG: I remember they had—they served some gumbo over there that was to die for.

JM: Yes.

RG: But I don't know—I don't remember many pranks being pulled on people.

JM: Yes.

RG: I don't remember—I remember one time Martha and I were—there was a group of people in Pine Bluff—Ward Bond, the old movie actor, was there with some people. Julie somebody from North Little Rock was an actress, and they were there to introduce some movie. Me and Martha—she and I went to it, and she got to meet Ward Bond.

JM: Yes.

RG: They talked about his role [as a Yankee captain] in *Gone With the Wind*. It was just seeing—you met so many interesting people.

RG: Yes. Jack Keady, who was the sports editor. Cranky. Cranky guy.

JM: Was he?

RG: He couldn't get along with anybody.

JM: Yes. And, let's see, I guess—I don't know whether you knew him—I guess Fred Petrucelli was in sports then.

RG: Fred—Fred was there. Fred Petrucelli.

JM: Yes.

RG: Nice man. Nice man.

JM: Yes. But you're saying it's kind of the old type that I take it you meant, in the sense of rushing out and getting the stories and then hard working, hard living,

hard drinking. [Laughs]

RG: That's right. Hard drinking, hard living—just really down in the trenches—what you thought a newspaper guy ought to be. Not a lot of tomfoolery, but it was light-hearted; it was a fun place to be. I learned an awful lot. I just—I don't know. It was what I thought a newspaper was going to be like when I was in journalism school—what I wanted it to be.

JM: Yes. Did you remember—you were talking about going in in the morning—did you go in and do your rewrites? Some of us—you know, they used to clip the *Gazette*, and you'd go in and they'd have the *Gazette* clippings for your area. You'd go in and rewrite some that looked pretty straightforward and then there were some you might have to check. But do you remember that?

RG: No, I don't remember doing that. I remember we'd come in and talk a little bit about anything we thought was going on. I didn't do a lot of preparation—get out to the state capitol and split up and make our rounds and come back.

JM: Yes. And how . . . ?

RG: And often we'd go over catty-corner across the street—there was a great place for a barbecue sandwich. We'd go across . . .

JM: The Shack.

RG: The Shack. But I don't remember much preparation. I don't remember us talking a lot about stories. There'd be people hanging around the newsroom.

JM: How did you get your stories in from the newsroom to the office?

RG: Had a Teletype.

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: We'd type them.

JM: Yes, you had a—okay.

RG: I wrote a story that an old man named Rankin, who was the land commissioner . . .
. [Editor's note: Claude Rankin was land commissioner from 1943 to 1954.]

JM: Yes.

RG: I was new, of course, on the beat, and I had—he was one of my first stops. Well, I don't think I was more than two trips by to see him, and he wanted to tell me about his story. He said that he had died and come back to life.

JM: [Laughs] Okay.

RG: And he was riding a streetcar in Little Rock and passed out, and they took him—declared him dead and took him to the mortuary and were about to embalm him, and he started moving. [Laughter] “Don't do that, I'm *alive!*”

JM: Yes.

RG: I wrote the story for the *Democrat*. People said—the story gets rewritten and rewritten about every three or four years.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

RG: I rewrote it and sold it to the old *Grit* newspaper—remember that?

JM: Oh, yes.

RG: I sold it. I think I got \$3 for that story that I wrote. I just rewrote the *Democrat* story.

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: And I always wanted to get something in the *Democrat* magazine, but I never did—I didn't try. I just daydreamed about a story.

JM: Yes. Okay. Chester Allard didn't come out and recruit you?

RG: No. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: Chester was too busy being cute with the ladies, as I recall.

JM: Yes. Okay. Anything else you remember specifically about your times at the *Democrat* you want to mention, Ramon?

RG: No, I think that's about it.

JM: Oh, no. I remember one thing I wanted to ask you. What about your byline? Tell me about that.

RG: [Laugh] Well, I spell the name Ramon. R-A-M-O-N.

JM: Yes.

RG: And I [would] turn in my story to the desk, and they'd edit it and send it upstairs, and the paper would come out R-A-Y-M-O-N-D.

JM: Yes.

RG: And that happened over and over and over again. I finally went to Mr. Tilden. I said, "Is there nothing you can do about this? This is just awful." He said, "Well, come on with me." So we went up that . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JM: This is Jerry McConnell again on the other side of the tape here, Ramon. You were talking about your byline, and [how] they kept misspelling it, and Mr. Tilden was taking you upstairs—up the spiral staircase. Now, go ahead with your story.

RG: So we got up there and he went to the head guy, and he said—had the newspaper in his hand where it was misspelled. He said, "I keep sending this copy up here. This man's name is Ramon. R-A-M-O-N. I sent it up here like that and you guys keep changing it. Why can't you get that right?" And this old guy said, "Hell,

nobody spells Ramon R-A-M-O-N.” And that was the end—never got it straight.
Never got it straightened out.

JM: They never did get it straight?

RG: No.

JM: Oh, goodness. Okay, Ramon. So then you left the *Democrat*, and you went with this Forest Products Association. Walk me through your career after that.

RG: Well, I worked for the American Forest Products Administration. Martha and I in transition went back and lived in Warren for a few months, then we moved over to Memphis, and I set up a headquarters there—a one-man headquarters. And this was—let me see, it was summer of 1952, I guess—and I worked on that job until 1956. The people down at the old Crossett Company offered me a job as director of public relations, which really meant editor of their employee magazine. So I went down there and did the magazine thing and then sort of gradually worked in and became responsible for all the company’s advertising activity.

JM: Now, this was a pretty big company at that time.

RG: Oh, yes, it was a huge company. They owned over a half million acres of land.

JM: Yes.

RG: It was a big, big company—really fine, fine company.

JM: Yes.

RG: A lot of Harvard [University] and Yale [University] people—whatever. So, anyway, I worked there until about 1962, I guess, and I was offered a job as director of public relations of Morton Salt Company in Chicago [Illinois].

JM: Yes.

RG: By the way, I started the first public relations society chapter in Arkansas. I was

the first president of it. But anyway, I went there and worked for Morton Salt Company—big move—two little kids—whatever. But we went to Chicago. I worked for them for about four or five years and then I went over to a company called Consolidated Foods, where I was vice president of public relations. The company is now known as Sara Lee Corporation—it was Consolidated Foods then.

JM: Yes.

RG: I went there and worked there until I went down to Washington, DC—took a leave of absence and went to Washington and served the last eighteen months as head of public affairs for the U.S. Department of Transportation. Then I thought I was coming back to Chicago, but American Express came along and offered me a job there where I was senior vice president of public affairs and communications. I stayed there until 1983.

JM: Now, this was—where were you headquartered with American Express?

RG: In New York. New York City.

JM: Okay.

RG: And traveled a lot—had wonderful experiences traveling all over the world, Martha and I. And I got fed up with the corporate thing—went back to—dropped out when I was fifty-five—said, “To hell with this.” [It was an] enormously pressured job. But we went back to Pine Bluff and started a consultant business—I’m on the board, as I told you, of Simmons Bank and a supermarket chain—kind of the management group of the Cranford agency—consultant with them.

JM: Cranford agency? You mean Cranford Johnson?

RG: Yes, Cranford Johnson Robinson and Woods.

JM: Yes.

RG: And I started a company with my son, and we sold it to Rubbermaid. [I] helped him start another company. Finally said—my kids and grandkids were living in Chicago, so it was time for us to move. I had reached retirement age on the board at Simmons. They wanted to keep me in Arkansas, so we moved here in 1981. So we moved here and we live near our son and our daughter and our granddaughters.

JM: Yes. You have two children?

RG: I have two children, a son and a daughter. And five granddaughters.

JM: Okay.

RG: And here I sit looking out—it's snowing and it's ten degrees.

JM: Oh, is that right? It is snowing? Well, we had a little snow yesterday, but it was forty degrees, so—[laughter] a little different. Okay.

RG: Yes. That's pretty much it.

JM: Yes. Okay. Well, now, I heard along the way—didn't you write a history of your hometown, Warren, Arkansas?

RG: Yes, as a matter of fact, I've written four books.

JM: Yes.

RG: One of them—the one you talk about—is titled *Another Time, Another Place*.

JM: Okay.

RG: As a matter of fact, I'll send you a copy, Jerry. I'm down to just a handful, but I'd like to send you a copy.

JM: Well, I'd love to see it.

RG: Give me your mailing address.

JM: [address deleted from transcription]

RG: So I wrote that book and had a really great, great response to it. I gave a bunch of copies to the Warren Library, which was one of my favorite things I've supported through the years. I sold copies and raised enough money to buy their books for a year after the state cut their funding. But, anyway, before that, I had written a book, *The Name of the Game is Life*. A writing partner and I interviewed a number of famous athletes—Roger Staubach [former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys professional football team].

JM: Oh. Okay.

RG: And we interviewed President [Gerald] Ford and [Ronald] Reagan—and what did athletics teach you about life. And then I wrote . . .

JM: Was that a hardback publication?

RG: Yes.

JM: Yes. Okay.

RG: Then I wrote a book, *How to Make the World of Work Work for You*, and another one, *How to Land Your First Job*.

JM: Okay.

RG: But I'll send you a copy of *Another Time, Another Place*.

JM: Yes, I'd appreciate that and I'd love to see that. I have to ask you one question and then we'll go on—but when you worked for the *Eagle Democrat*, was his name Bob Newton?

RG: Yes.

JM: The man who ran it for years—was he there when you [were there] or did he come . . .?

RG: No, he wasn't there.

JM: He was too young at that time, I guess.

RG: Yes, he was too young.

JM: Yes.

RG: A fellow named Bill Love was the editor and publisher.

JM: Bill who?

RG: Love. L-O-V-E.

JM: Oh, okay. All right.

RG: I went there—primarily, I wanted to learn—back then, you know, a lot of the type was set by hand.

JM: Oh, yes.

RG: I learned that. I learned how to run the press and learned a little bit about the Linotype.

JM: Yes.

RG: And wrote a few news stories and did that.

JM: Yes.

RG: I went back—I graduated from high school with a terrible [].

JM: For some reason, the phone is cutting out here a little bit. Okay. Let's try . . .

RG: Anyway, I went back—although I had graduated, I went back and renewed my English course in high school, worked at the newspaper, then went to college.

JM: Yes. Okay. Well, that's great. Okay. Anything else, Ramon? I really appreciated this interview and—anything else you recall about your times at the *Democrat* that you want to mention?

RG: Not that I can think of. If I do, I'll just give you some notes later.

JM: Yes, you can add it on then. Well, Ramon, I really appreciate this interview.

Thanks a lot, and hold on just a minute. I'm going to stop the tape here.

RG: Well, it's been fun. I've certainly enjoyed it. Great, great memories.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]