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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Lynn Hamilton
Little Rock, Arkansas
4 May 2006

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. I'm sitting here on May 4, 2006 getting ready to interview Lynn Hamilton in his office here in Little Rock for the project on the *Arkansas Democrat* that is being done for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History in the Special Collections [department] at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]. And the first thing I need to do, Lynn, is ask you do I have your permission to make this interview, and tape it, and turn it over to the university?

Lynn Hamilton: Yes, you do.

JM: Okay, let's start first, Lynn—spell your name for me.

LH: First name is Lynn. L-Y-N-N. Last name [is] Hamilton. H-A-M-I-L-T-O-N.

JM: And what is your position here with the *Democrat-Gazette*?

LH: My job title is "Vice President of Operations."

JM: What does that mean?

LH: [It] means that I am in charge of two areas—I'm a department head. I'm in charge of the administrative department for areas where we do things like human resources, accounting, payroll, building maintenance, purchasing, credit and collections, [and] all of those administrative areas. I'm also in charge of the

production process. I manage the printing presses, the distribution equipment, [and] the computer systems that help the reporters and editors—put the news into the paper and, also, the system where we build ads for the paper.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, Lynn. You have—I believe you said [that] you have been with the *Democrat*, [now] the *Democrat-Gazette*, since 1974. Is that right?

LH: Right. October 28, 1974 was when I was hired.

JM: Okay. Let's start just from the beginning and work up to the *Democrat*. Where and when were you born?

LH: September 11, 1948, in Madera, California.

JM: 1948. Madera?

LH: M-A-D-E-R-A.

JM: Okay. Did you grow up in California?

LH: I did. I went through high school in California and graduated from high school in Fresno, California and moved to Arkansas right after graduation. I had an older brother here who offered me a job. He had a small data processing business back in the days when data processing was big mainframes and no one had small computers in their own businesses. I worked for him at night, initially, and then went to school at what was still ASTC, Arkansas State Teacher's College in Conway, during the daytime. [I] did that for two years until he sold out to what became Systematics [Information Services, Inc.], then I worked for Systematics for a couple of years and graduated from college in Conway.

JM: Graduated from the [Arkansas] State Teacher's . . . ?

LH: Yes, I did.

JM: Yes, okay. What was your brother's name?

LH: His name is Clay Hamilton.

JM: Clay Hamilton, okay. Is he still alive?

LH: Yes, he is still alive. He is seventy-three years old. He is disabled, but he still has a little—he is a real entrepreneur and he has a little computer repair business out in southwest Little Rock that he runs from a wheelchair.

JM: What was the name of his business that you started working for?

LH: Computers Systems and Data Services, Inc. Nobody today has ever heard of them because he was—like I say, he was successful, actually, in that little business and sold out to Systematics. [He] went to work for them briefly in management, but he couldn't work in a large company. He was an entrepreneur and had a series of small businesses after that, some successful and some not so successful.

JM: What were your parents' names?

LH: My dad's name was Arch Hamilton and my mother was Juran. J-U-R-A-N.

JM: You worked for Systematics a while, too. Is that right? While you were finishing school?

LH: Right. I was there when they were founded, actually. I worked there two years, until 1970 when I graduated.

JM: Okay. What did you do after that?

LH: I was—the Vietnam War was on and I decided to become a school teacher because teachers had a draft deferment, initially. I signed a contract with

Memphis City Schools to teach, and after I signed the contract they changed the law so that teachers were no longer deferred. I had a low draft lottery number, but I went to Memphis [Tennessee] and I taught high school math in an all-black high school, South Side High. I did that for three months before I was about to be drafted into the army, so I joined the navy and was accepted into officer candidate school. I spent three years in the navy as an officer aboard an aircraft carrier. After that, I came back to Little Rock. I had a new baby. I went to work as the data processing manager for a small trucking company called Atlas Transit, here in Little Rock. I worked there for six months, and Atlas was sold to Roadway Express. They offered me an opportunity to move to Akron, Ohio, which I graciously declined. I had no job, a new baby, and a new house payment. Walter [Hussman, Jr.] [at] the *Democrat* was looking for a data processing guy. It was the only job in town that was open, so I took it. I had to have something fast. I thought “I’ll stay a couple of years, then I’ll leave,” because at that time the *Democrat* was not a good place to work.

JM: Yes, okay. What aircraft carrier were you on?

LH: *U.S.S. Franklin D. Roosevelt.*

JM: Was that ever in combat? Did you go to Vietnam?

LH: No, it did not go to Vietnam. I was very lucky. I was stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, and I went to the Mediterranean. I was at sea a lot during the Vietnam War, but the U.S. government has a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] agreement where we have agreed to keep a military presence in the Mediterranean. At that time—and I think it’s still true today—we agreed to keep

two aircraft carriers there all the time, so even during the Vietnam War we kept a presence in the Mediterranean. I was fortunate that I got to see a lot of the Mediterranean, instead of seeing the South Pacific.

JM: Explain to me why the *Democrat* was not a good place to work [laughs] in 1974.

LH: The *Democrat* did not have a good reputation in town. The [Arkansas] *Gazette* was the old established morning paper that was well-respected and led by a prominent family. The *Democrat* was on the verge of going out of business, and Walter bought it at a fire sale price, which I'm sure you're hearing—have heard a lot about. He was the young upstart and had a small conservative afternoon alternative to the big powerful morning [and] well-respected *Gazette*. Everyone knew that the *Democrat* wouldn't last. No one—anyone who was well-educated and a thought leader at all would certainly read the *Gazette*. They might also read the *Democrat*, but no one read the *Democrat* only.

JM: Okay. What was your first job here at the *Democrat*? Had he bought the computer yet?

LH: Yes. Walter hired me as the “Corporate Data Processing Manager.” That sounds like a big title, but it was a small job back then. I was in charge of business data processing on a small IBM [International Business Machines] System III computer system. I had maybe four or five people working for me. We did all of the business data processing for his cable TV companies [and] his other newspapers, as well as the *Arkansas Democrat*. For a while, I had one other programmer who helped me, then he left, so it was me doing all the computer

programming, and I had a few operators—punched cards back then—had key punch operators and a few of those folks.

JM: Who was the other programmer that left?

LH: You know, I can't remember his name. He was a young guy that worked a couple of years for me—maybe not even that long. He lived somewhere near Crossett [Arkansas] and he went back home. They had a—before Walter moved to Little Rock, they had a guy named Nick Bowman who was their data processing manager. Nick moved to Little Rock and decided he didn't like it, for whatever reason. He stayed about six months after Walter came up here to Little Rock. When Nick left, that created an opening and that's why they hired me.

JM: Is this the same computer that they were processing news material on?

LH: No. I had nothing to do with the news operation right then. I was employed, actually, by WEHCO Media. I was based here at the *Democrat*. The facility was here. My office was down in what is still our—well, today it's strictly production's computer systems, but the name "data processing" is still on the door. My office was down there sitting next to the printer where we printed all of the payroll checks and that sort of thing. My duties did not include production of the newspaper at all at that time.

JM: Okay. Had he bought the mainframe, though, at that time that he was going to produce the newspaper on?

LH: Yes. When I walked in the door, to be honest with you, I'm not sure exactly what he had in production systems, but I believe the Linotype machines were still in operation in late 1974 for setting the news. He did have a small DEC, Digital

Equipment Corporation System, called a PDP-8 that was used in putting out the—
I think the old *Democrat* had that machine, and it was used in putting out the
classifieds. Walter had bought the DEC PDP-10 for—it was here when I got here.
I remember seeing it in the room, and other people were working with it. The
PDP-10 was the machine that was doing the type-setting. It was still brand new
and they were transitioning from hot metal to cold metal when I walked in the
door. Again, I had nothing to do with it.

JM: Who was handling that?

LH: A guy named Geoff George.

JM: Geoff George. Yes, I remember Geoff. Okay.

LH: Geoff died last year.

JM: Okay. And, I guess, Jim Shuemaker was working along with them. Or was he
working for you, also?

LH: No. I was strictly business data processing, and those guys were *Arkansas
Democrat* production guys.

JM: Yes. I remember Geoff. As an aside, I went to school in Easton, Pennsylvania, to
learn how to operate all that stuff.

LH: Oh, did you?

JM: I came back and was supposed to teach everybody. Well, they didn't even have a
DEC system at Easton, so I didn't know exactly how to operate—they were not
all similar.

LH: No. No, they weren't.

JM: I came back and Geoff helped me. I worked on one down in the basement for another week before I ever figured it all out. At any rate, I think that was 1974 or sometime, but I'm not positive of it.

LH: It was about the time that I came to work, or maybe slightly before.

JM: Okay. What were your—were you involved in some of the accounting that was going on with WEHCO Media? Did you know what was happening with their finances and all that stuff?

LH: Well, yes, because I printed all the financial statements and I was not yet at that time—I became a CPA [Certified Public Accountant]. I've always been essentially—as a young adult I was pretty good with numbers and books. I could see all the pay checks and I could see all the financial statements, so I knew exactly what the bottom line was. You have to trust your people in data processing the same way you trust your doctor to be discreet, because somebody has got to print that stuff.

JM: What was the financial picture [at] that period of time?

LH: It was bleak. To this day, I don't reveal numbers, you know . . .

JM: No. I wouldn't even ask you [to].

LH: We all knew—of course, it wasn't a surprise to me. I knew the *Democrat* was in a tough situation when I came to work. Like I say, I came to work here because it was the only job that was available to me at the time. I had to have a job. It was—even more telling than looking at the financial statements and the bottom line was the austerity of the operation. I mean, salaries were meager. Furnishings were hard to come by. When a piece of equipment broke down, we didn't replace

it. We patched it, and patched it, and repatched it. You would put in a request for something that you really needed, and would try to get to Walter or to whoever to try and get approval to get something new purchased. You know, usually it didn't happen unless it was just an absolute crisis in order to spend the money to do it. All of those things—the general atmosphere—told you that the situation was not good.

JM: They were tight. Yes. Obviously, the money was tight, and they weren't spending anything.

LH: Right.

JM: Particularly on salaries. I can testify, too.

LH: No, on salary—turnover was terrible. I mean, people came and went.

JM: Even in your area?

LH: Oh, yes. Every area.

JM: Yes, okay. Why did you stay?

LH: I almost didn't. [Laughs] I started—almost immediately after I came to work here I decided to go back to school at UALR [University of Arkansas at Little Rock]. I got a—I first started taking undergraduate business courses, then they opened up the MBA [Masters of Business Administration] program. I went to work toward getting an MBA. I was in the very first class that UALR ever held—class rooms—it was an economics class we were in. Future MBAs were there. I was in that class, and I was among the very first graduates in 1979. I stayed four or five years while I was working at night to get that graduate degree. Then, actually, I took a job with Blue Cross/Blue Shield [Insurance Company]. They

were hiring. They had an opening for a systems analyst. I had just gotten my MBA, and I thought that—you know, I had young children at home [and] I was working day and night. Data processing was computers run twenty-four hours a day, and I was the only person who could take care of business computer problems. If one of our operators had a problem at midnight, I'd be down here. The pay was okay for me. It wasn't great. It was okay enough that I could manage it until I got, like I say, the MBA. Blue Cross had this opening for a systems analyst, and I had been looking. But this one really did attract me. It was more money, and it was at a bigger, well-run organization with huge glittering IBM computer systems. I was in computers, but I didn't have aspirations to stay. I wanted to be in management. I thought that it was a better career track for me at Blue Cross because it was a bigger organization and I could probably move up in time. So I had accepted the job at Blue Cross, and I went in and told Walter that I was leaving. He said, "Why?" I told him that I was tired of pushing buttons on computers, and I wanted an opportunity for a management job. And he said, "Well, what if we make you business manager?" I was floored—dumbfounded, because I didn't—it wasn't a bluff. I had no anticipation that he would—because he didn't promote people.

JM: Right.

LH: There weren't—this was 1979, and I hadn't seen—even though he was young and I was young. If you thought that the *Democrat* was going to last, you could say, "Okay, there are going to be opportunities for promotion and growth here," but nobody really expected—I couldn't see beyond the day-to-day drudgery of all the

hard work we were doing. Anyhow, he offered to make me business manager. And I said, “Well, Walter, there is also this little problem. They are going to pay me”—I think I was making \$20,000 a year for Walter. I said, “They are going to pay me \$24,000 a year.” And he said, “Well, we’ll match that.” That was—what’s that? That’s a twenty percent pay increase. I had been getting two or three percent increases when I got them.

JM: Yes.

LH: That just—that dumbfounded me. I went home—I told him, “Well, I have to think about it.” I went home and told my wife what had happened. She was mad at me because I might accept it. She knew the hours I was working and all the complaining I had been doing at home about how tough the whole situation was. But I wanted to be in management, and he told me I could get out of data processing. As business manager, I was going to be in charge of the administrative areas. I saw that as a big improvement over being a computer guy. If I went on to Blue Cross, I’d still—as a systems analyst, I’d still be working mainly in their data processing department. I didn’t know when I would get an opportunity to get away from computers. Data processing and computer systems were a great entry for me because they involved every aspect of the business. I got an opportunity to really learn what was going on inside this newspaper because I crossed over into every department. But I’m not a technical person by nature, and I didn’t want to stay doing that.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Let's—I'm going to come back to that, and you taking over as business manager, but first, you said something about the interview process—what was it? When you first interviewed with Walter?

LH: Yes. When I first—when I was looking for a job after I left the trucking company, I interviewed, I think, with Allen Berry and maybe a couple of other people. I was reporting directly to Walter. I would be reporting directly to Walter at that time.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay. Now, you were saying that you'd interviewed with Allen Berry and then what happened?

LH: Well, no—it was getting close to 5:00 p.m. I'd be reporting to Walter if I came to work here, so Walter wanted to interview me. I went back—he had the corner office on the first floor. I saw a secretary and she said, "Well, he has somebody in there. He may be a while, but can you wait?" I said, "Well, sure." I sat there until about 5:30 and somebody was still in the office. I wasn't impressed by the *Democrat* in the first place, and now I was even less impressed. Finally, when the person that was in there with Walter walked out of the office, it was Senator John [L.] McClellan. I had never met a U.S. senator in my life. I said hello to the senator. I'd never met Walter, and he invited me in. [He] apologized for keeping me waiting. He said, "You know, when you've got a senator, sometimes—in your office sometimes, you have to wait."

JM: Yes.

LH: I certainly understood that, but that to me made a really neat first impression. I thought, “This is an exciting place.” I didn’t—like I said—I didn’t have any other alternatives, anyhow. It was a unique experience to see the senator and be hired that way. A couple of—Jerry, another thing that started me off to let me know that this was going to be an interesting place to work—it was not always a good place to work, but it was always interesting and sometimes exciting. On my very first day on the job, there was a group of us who flew to Oklahoma City. I came in that morning and thought “Well, I’ll find my desk and find out where the bathroom is and kind of just get oriented.” I had been at work for about ten minutes and someone said, “Well, we’re flying to Oklahoma City today to look at a credit card billing system that they have in place at the Oklahoma City newspaper. We would like you to go with us because once we put this system in—of course, it’s a computer system and you’ll have to be involved.” And I said, “Oh, okay.” I wasn’t expecting that, but we got on the company plane, a little twin engine King Air. There were four or five of us, and the person heading up the trip was Tony Biggs who was—I think his title was assistant to the publisher. Tony and Allen Berry and I went. Gerald Doty, who was the circulation director, and I think the data processing guy who was going to leave—whose job I was taking—he went. The plane was full. There were five of us. We flew to Oklahoma City, and we got there about 11:30 a.m. The people at the Oklahoma City newspaper said, “Well, before we show you anything or show you our operation, why don’t we go to lunch?” They took us to lunch at the top—I guess it was the equivalent of the Little Rock Club here, but it was a private club

on top of the tallest building in Oklahoma City. Now, I was twenty-six years old .

..

JM: Probably the Petroleum Club.

LH: Maybe so, I don't know Oklahoma City.

JM: Yes, okay.

LH: It was an impressive view and an impressive meal. We were there until about 12:30 p.m. or 1:00 p.m. listening to them kind of talk. [We] still hadn't seen anything of the computer system we went to look at. Someone told Tony that he had a phone call from Walter. Walter told Tony that his father—Walter's father—had decided he needed his airplane back and we had to come back to Little Rock. We left the lunch and rushed down to the newspaper, and ran through it. [We] had spent maybe fifteen minutes there, then rushed back to the airport, and flew back to Little Rock. That shot most of the day. I got home that evening a little after 5:00 p.m., and my wife said, "How did your first day on the job go?" And I said, "You'll never believe where they took me to lunch."

JM: [Laughs]

LH: Again, it was an unusual start and kind of an omen for what was going to happen here, I think, looking back.

JM: Yes. Was that *The Daily Oklahoman* that you went to visit?

LH: Oh, yes. It was.

JM: Yes, okay. Later on, when you became the business manager, had they gone morning yet? Had they—this was—I know they didn't [until] sometime in 1979—they started switching to morning.

LH: I became business manager in September of 1979, and we had just gone morning with the state edition. We had not yet switched the city edition to morning. We did it in two phases.

JM: All right. What was the situation you were in—you were the business manager then—what was the situation in business at that time?

LH: A lot of really cramped quarters. We had one little corner of the first floor and we had people sitting elbow to elbow, desks crammed up against each other. A lot of our billing processes were still manual and hadn't been converted over. I got to be the business manager, but I also got to keep being the corporate data processing manager because I had to hire somebody and that took awhile. We had problems with the people because we couldn't pay a lot. We had problems finding somebody. [It] took us a while to get that settled down, so I was still really doing both jobs for some time, learning, really, what I needed to do there. I can't say there were a great deal of problems getting the billing and payroll and all those things done. Systems were a lot simpler back then than they are now.

JM: What was—I guess you were seeing at that time, though, what the—you probably already knew it to a degree—but what the bottom line was at the *Democrat* and the operation of the *Democrat*. You were actually with the *Democrat* at this time, not WEHCO.

LH: I actually became a *Democrat* employee in 1979. It meant moving fifty feet away from where I had been. The bottom line was worsening. You know Walter, I don't think, made a profit for years here. It turned a little worse than he expected by 1979. In five years of a lot of hard work he hadn't gotten anywhere but the

bottom line. I know that that was discouraging for him and discouraging to everyone around us. Of course, he didn't talk about the bottom line. Very few people knew that.

JM: Yes. I think it was along about that time that he was so discouraged that he went to Hugh Patterson and asked him to enter into a joint operating agreement.

LH: Yes. My understanding—and I didn't have any first-hand knowledge of that at all, of course—but my understanding was that that took place in, maybe, 1978.

JM: Yes, I think so. Right.

LH: I think Walter made the commitment to . . .

JM: To go morning.

LH: . . . morning. That's right.

JM: That's my understanding. That he went to him three times, I think, and was turned down three times. Then he decided before he gave up [that] he would fight it all the way and go mornings.

LH: Yes. You know, I think Walter came into the way—I've heard this and maybe I don't even need to repeat it because other people have told the story. I think when Walter was a young man and came in here, his idea was to make a small profit by controlling expenses and provide the community—provide Arkansas with a small conservative alternative to the large, more successful, more profitable *Gazette*. I don't think Walter set out with the intention of making more money or being the only surviving newspaper.

JM: Or taking over number one and running the *Gazette* out of business.

LH: No. I don't think that was ever in his mind when he was twenty-seven years old. You know, the neat thing, for me, was that while Walter was—I got a chance to learn while Walter was learning. He was—when Walter hired me [at] age twenty-six, he was twenty-seven, and he was hiring people his own age. I thought that was normal. I didn't have the perspective that most people don't get the opportunities that I had at that age.

JM: What began to happen to the business situation with the *Democrat* as time moved on and they went with morning full blast, and everything? [What are] your recollections on any of the key changes or when you started to make real progress?

LH: You know, when you ask me about the business situation, Jerry, all I can remember, to be honest, is [it was] a lot of hard work. You set up systems—administrative systems that go from day to day. Once you get the systems in place then you really—if you can keep your people in place, then you don't have problems. I think we were—we had to be flexible because we were continually coming up with new programs for advertisers. We were continually changing ad rates, and we had new programs to sell advertising and different schedules that continually meant change. We learned to be really flexible, and we learned to react quickly to the market. If the *Gazette* did something, we would react to it and that might mean an all-night session for a computer guy to change something in the way a business system was set up. I don't recall any dramatic difficulties or problems. We were young and thought hard work and flexibility were just natural.

JM: You were still working a lot at that time.

LH: Oh, yes. Really, we worked incredibly long hours—really, up until the first few years after we acquired the *Gazette*'s assets. I mean, that lasted fifteen [or] twenty years.

JM: Yes, okay. During this time, they started giving away free classifieds, and started other advertising proposals. You had to be involved in that in some way.

LH: Well, you know, only to the—at that point, in all honesty, only to the point that whatever was required of the business systems to support the programs they set up. The free classified program really didn't involve business because we didn't have to bill anyone for it. If anything, it made it easy.

JM: Yes, I see. Okay. What were you hearing—were you hearing anything back from what was going on at the *Gazette* at that time? Or were you getting any feedback on that?

LH: I'm sure we were. We talked about it all the time. We would hear—if we're talking still late 1970s and early 1980s, at that period the *Gazette* was still pretty much ignoring us. They would occasionally try to respond in some way to one of our ad initiatives where we would come up [with] a program for advertisers or—like you mentioned the free ads—we'd see some reaction that they made. Early on, they did not react a lot to us, but we were continually watching what they were doing. One thing that we did—and I don't know if anyone has told you all this yet—we knew exactly the volume of advertising in the *Gazette* because we measured the *Gazette* every day, and we would compare the amount of advertising they were getting from the same advertiser against what we were

getting. We compared with what they got last year. As time went on and we started getting more advertising and theirs started declining, we knew exactly what the numbers were.

JM: You knew how much they were declining, and how much you were gaining.

LH: Right, exactly. We watched that closely. We had one person in the business office whose whole job was to measure the *Gazette* and the *Democrat*—physically measure it with a ruler [and] mark which advertiser had which ads.

JM: Do you remember at what point in time they began to decline a little and the *Democrat* began to go up?

LH: I don't have the numbers on the top of my head, but in the late 1970s, before we went to the morning edition and the free want ad program, their numbers were dramatically ahead of us, verging on eighty percent of the ads in business, so immediately after we went to free want ads, we started acquiring—the free want ads attracted readers, which attracted more paid advertisers—so, immediately we started seeing a slight decline in their numbers. It wasn't enough, really, to worry them, I think, for several years.

JM: Yes, okay. When did you start seeing an up tick in the *Democrat* income?

LH: The income started going up immediately after we went to morning, but the problem was that the expenses were going up faster then. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, All right. Okay. Did you—at some point in time, did you get back into data processing and computer—involved with the computers?

LH: Well, what happened was I was—my title was business manager for—I'm going to say two and half years, from September of 1979 until I was promoted to my

present position in April of 1982. What happened was we were having terrible problems getting the newspaper produced. We had old equipment and, in a lot of cases, we had people who were not motivated and weren't properly trained trying to produce the newspaper. We were putting a tremendous workload on them with new programs that were coming. In any case, we would have a weekly staff meeting in Walter's office. It was the ad director, the circulation director, myself, [John Robert] Starr, who was the editor at the time—I think there were five of us in the office. I think that was it. And the production guy—Jim Shuemake was our production manager. Jim is a good, good fellow who is retired now, but was a technical guy by nature and was asked to continually do the technical things he had to do, plus manage the production department. He was overwhelmed. You talk about working long hard hours and being mentally and physically exhausted—that was Jim's situation. Anyhow, we were having terrible problems getting the newspaper produced. In these meetings in Walter's office, we would talk about what we could do to get the newspaper printed so that it looked good and was printed on time. That continued to be a problem, so at one point Walter decided that some of us in that office—in management—would need to be here every Saturday night. I think Paul Smith took the first Saturday night, and I took the second one. Someone else took the third. We rotated—we did that for several months. This was in late 1981. I really didn't know newspaper production at that time at all. No one else did [laughs]; that was the problem. I would come down here on Saturday night and I would have my dictating machine. Whenever I saw a problem, I would dictate a note, then I would write a report on Monday morning

about the problems I saw on Saturday night that had to be corrected, and [say] “Here’s what we have to do to get out—printed on time.” This continued for several months. Then in April of 1982, Walter promoted Paul Smith to general manager, and at the same time—vice president and general manager of the paper. And at the same time, they made the announcement that I would be the vice president of operations, which meant I got to keep the business office job, plus take on the production job.

JM: [Laughs]

LH: I got a small pay increase, but it wasn’t nearly as much as when I was about to go to Blue Cross.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

LH: Anyhow, I got to learn production. At that time when I took that over, then the computers—the production computer system came under my responsibility. Of course, I was familiar with computers and how they operated in general, but I really was not familiar with newspaper production and I had to learn—I was thrown into the fire to learn it. Since 1982, I have had those computer systems. Today, I don’t have the business data processing. It is still a corporate function. It’s set up in the building next door, and that’s not part of my responsibility anymore.

JM: What was the main problem—problems, I should say—in getting the paper out?

LH: Bad equipment, unmotivated people, high turnover, and continual change of the process.

JM: As I recall—I can relate to this because I was involved with that until 1978—from 1974 to 1978. When I left here—as I recall—one of the problems was [we] only had one computer. [We] didn't have a backup, so if it crashed, you were hung until you got it back up again. You had a limited number of terminals to produce it with, and—you say—you had lots of turnover, so you consistently had new people trying to learn how to operate a computer terminal.

LH: Right. You know, it's crazy today, when you think about it, the way we operated. We would have—and you know this better than I do—but we would have editors whose responsibility would be to restart the computer when it failed.

JM: That was my job.

LH: Well, I think everyone up there eventually got involved because you weren't there one hundred percent of the time. Celia Storey tells me today that's one of her memories of you having to run downstairs and kick the computer to get . . .

JM: Yes, I understand. No, they gave me a beeper, so if I wasn't there they could call me back. [Laughs]

LH: You multiply that—and you know, you saw it in the newsroom—we had the same problem with our equipment throughout the whole process.

JM: Yes.

LH: You know, the pressroom was a total disaster. It was worse than the newsroom situation, as far as equipment.

JM: Yes.

LH: We had the union—we had the strike and the union left the pressroom. I want to say before I became production manager, so that must have been about 1979—I think—when the union left.

JM: Could have been. Somewhere along in there, I think.

LH: I became production manager in 1982, so we had a couple of years of existing without the union, and there was no leadership. The guy in charge of the pressroom was a good guy. He was about thirty-five years old and he was the youngest one of the former union members. He was beaten down, and his attitude was just bad. That's the only way to say it. The thing that was—two things about what happened in the pressroom. One thing that was most revealing was that the way a press works is you have the large rolls of paper down underneath the press that look like big toilet paper rolls. You run 40,000 or 50,000 copies an hour, so it is moving extremely fast as the paper is coming off the rolls. When you get down to the end of the roll there is an automated process where the next roll of paper is taped onto it, and you don't slow the presses down. You keep running at 40,000 or 50,000 an hour. Well, if you have to stop, you're wasting paper and wasting time. That was part of our problem on Saturday night. Our pressmen did not know how to make automated pasters. Every time we ran out—we'd have four or five of these big rolls under the press. Every time one of them ran to the end, the press was stopped and the next roll was hand pasted on, and the press was restarted. That's just incredibly—inefficient is not even a good word. No one does it. It's just unheard of in the newspaper industry to do that, but that's what we were doing at the *Democrat*. Today our newsprint waste runs—about 2.9% of

all the newspaper we buy is wasted. In those days, no one was measuring it. One of the first things I started doing was measuring the amount of waste. We were wasting about twelve to fourteen percent of our newsprint in the process, because we were continually stopping the press. The pressroom was literally covered in ink on all the walls, the floors, the equipment. Right after I took over as vice president of operations, we brought in a technical pressroom expert from what was then a ANPA [American Newspaper Publishers Association]. They provided his service. He traveled to pressrooms all over the country, looking at pressrooms and making recommendations for improvement. So he came through our pressroom—this was a crusty old guy who was a lot younger than I am today. He was probably forty-five or fifty. I thought he was a crusty old guy. I was at that time thirty-one, I guess. He went through our pressroom, [and] spent the night watching our pressroom not running very well. The next morning I saw him and I said, “Well, what do you think about our pressroom?” And he said, “Do you want the truth?” I said, “Sure, I want the truth.” And he said, “It’s a shit hole.” I thought, “Yes, that’s kind of what I think, too.” But I didn’t know what to do about it. Shortly after that, one of the first things we did was hire some people—well, before we got them hired, Walter decided to convert from the letterpress printing method to offset. We took our old 1968 press and put a—cost a million dollars, but it was a relatively inexpensive process for converting to offset so we could print more color, and supposedly print a higher quality product. We converted that old press to offset, and we had a crew that couldn’t run the easier

press to run. We were able to hire a guy out of Des Moines, Iowa, named Bob Rooney, who came in to run the pressroom.

JM: Bob who?

LH: Rooney. R-O-O-N-E-Y.

JM: Okay.

LH: Bob hired another guy named Don Mokler to come as his assistant.

JM: How you spell his name? Do you know?

LH: M-O-K-L-E-R.

JM: Okay.

LH: Bob lasted about four years and decided that he had had enough, but his assistant, Don Mokler, turned out to be a real godsend for us. Don is still here today, and he has been our press manager since 1983. That's been going on now twenty-three years. Don has just been a tremendous guy for our operation, and really, through a lot of hard work, made the improvements that we [have] today. He made them possible.

JM: This offset—you used to put it in where the old press was? Here in this building?

LH: What we did was—yes. We had one printing press that was too small. It was inadequate for what we were trying to do, and we modified it to put the offset technology on it.

JM: Okay.

LH: It was a company called Press Machine Re-corporation who was doing that. That was a trend at the time, as newspapers from all over the country were switching

away from letterpress to offset. The people who were profitable bought new printing presses.

JM: [Do] you want to explain just a minute the difference between letterpress and offset?

LH: [Laughs] I don't know if I can. Offset works under the principle that water and ink—water and oil doesn't mix. We all know that.

JM: Yes. Yes.

LH: So—backing up—with a letterpress operation, you actually take ink and put it on a plate and smash the plate into the paper as the paper is going through the press. It is letter-pressed onto the paper.

JM: Okay. Okay.

LH: Offset—what happened is the printing image is applied through a combination of water and ink to a blanket. It is offset onto a blanket that—and not—it goes from the plate—that doesn't have raised images—the plate is an aluminum plate that is a [slue?] service plate, but it's chemically treated so that the ink will apply only to the printed areas of the plate. Then that ink is offset onto a rubber blanket and then the rubber blanket—if the press is spinning—touches the printed web of paper so the image is offset from the plate to the blanket to the paper. It's a process that allows for a finer, smoother, nicer image on the paper.

JM: Okay, all right. That will be something that some people will be interested in, and will have heard those terms. At this same time, particularly before you went to offset, were you also having a lot of web breaks?

LH: Tremendous web breaks.

JM: Yes.

LH: Of course, a web break will cost you anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour in your press run time, every time you have one.

JM: Yes, that's my recollection of it. That they were having web breaks—too many going on and everything. What year was this that you went to offset? You may have said, but I forgot.

LH: It was—I took over the job in April of 1982, and I want to say by fall of 1982 we were doing it.

JM: Yes, okay. Any other areas in production you recall particular problems with?

LH: Yes—well, there were things that—the pressroom was a total nightmare, but every area of production had problems. Staying with the pressroom just a minute, we had a—there was not a week that went by that I didn't get phone calls in the middle of the night. Our goal—we started printing at 10:30 p.m. or 11:00 p.m. and our goal was to finish by 4:00 a.m. and there would be fifteen or twenty nights a month where we didn't finish by 4:00 a.m. Whenever we were going to be late, my instruction to the press crew was to give me a call. There were nights where we had electrical components go out on the press, and we were trying to wake up electrical part store owners around time so we could get our press running. There was one night—one thing that we tried to do early on was create an ink recycling system where we could—[it's] just normal in all newspapers to recycle the ink so that there is not so much wasted. We had to collect the waste ink and then recycle it. We set up a system to put it back into our tanks. Well,

somebody dumped a floor sweep accidentally into our recycled ink. They thought
...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: This is side two of tape one. This [is an] interview with Lynn Hamilton. Lynn,
you were saying something about recapturing the ink?

LH: Yes. We were recycling the ink and someone dumped the floor sweep
accidentally into our waste ink and we got it back into our main ink tanks. I got a
call one night after midnight that the presses couldn't run because we couldn't
pump ink and no one understood why. I got down to the plant and—of course, I
didn't know how the pumping systems worked at all. I found out that the
pressmen didn't. We had lost anyone who—when the union left—we lost anyone
who knew anything about the ink system, so I called Chester Garrett who, at that
time, was probably—well, let's see, he was in his seventies. Chester, thankfully,
understood how the pumps worked. We had a backup pumping system where we
had two sets of filters, and Chester showed the pressmen how to operate them.
We would clean one set of filters and let the ink flow through that, and
immediately switch over and clean the backup set. By the time we got cleaned
out, the other ones had clogged again, and we went all night long with Chester
showing the pressmen how to go back and forth and clean the filters on the press.
I don't know what time we finished printing, but it was really late. I was really
thankful that Chester had been there because I don't know how we could have
gotten the paper out if that old man hadn't known how to run the pumps.

JM: [It's] sort of amazing, because that was not his area.

LH: Chester was such a loyal, good, decent person. Chester would get on a forklift and unload supplies when they were delivered here. He knew just an awful lot about what went on to make this newspaper work.

JM: Yes.

LH: He had been a *Democrat* employee for—I guess he was hired in the 1940s.

JM: Yes, he was.

LH: He stayed until he was almost ninety years old and still working part-time.

JM: Yes. I interviewed him about two or three months before he died.

LH: Good. That night after Chester—Chester was the one who ran all around over town looking for—opening up electrical parts supply stores, too. In that era, I told Chester [that] he had a job with us as long as he wanted it, and he took me up on it [laughs] and stayed a long time.

JM: He stayed a long time, yes.

LH: He was one of the most loyal and decent employees there ever was.

JM: He was.

LH: That we could have had.

JM: Yes. I think he started out in Fort Smith in the business as a deliver boy, actually.

LH: Yes, he did.

JM: Anyhow, so this is the pressroom now. Are there any other departments?

LH: Well, let me tell you about the mailroom. The newspaper mailroom is really what we call a distribution center today. The term goes back to the—I guess the 1700s when all newspapers were mailed, so after paper comes off of the press and you

get it ready to go out to your readers it's handled in the mailroom or the distribution center. That area was just as fouled up as all the other production areas. As we started selling more advertising, particularly preprints, they had to be inserted. We had one little slow machine to do all of our slick inserts. When the ad department really got going they simply overwhelmed the machine. There was—this was, again—must have been in 1982. I'm almost certain it was. It was one Saturday night that at about midnight or maybe 11:00 p.m., I realized that there was no way we were going to ever get all of our Sunday inserts put in the paper. It would be noon the next day before our Sunday paper was out. So, I called Paul Smith, who was my boss, and told him what was happening. He called all the ads salespeople in and—I say all [and] I assume it was all of them. We must have had twenty [or] twenty-five ads salespeople who came in that night. [They] worked all night long from midnight to early in the morning hours doing a lot of hand inserting and trying to run that one little machine. Literally, we were all up all night long and finished probably around 6:00 a.m. or 7:00 a.m. I'm not sure. I had a presentation to make at church the next day, and I did that on no sleep. That was one of the low points of those early years. Again, we did the same thing in the mailroom that we did in the pressroom. We hired a really good guy named Fred Martin. I hired him in 1982 after that incident. Fred had been a time and motion studies person at Timex, and Timex was cutting back on their employees, so we got him to come to work for us and he is still here today. What we were really able to do in production, beginning in the early 1980s and, I guess, throughout this newspaper, was we began to hire some really good people

and paid them better than [what] we had paid people in the 1970s. [We] treated them well, and we are still benefiting from that era. People in that time learned to work really hard and to do more with less. The *Gazette* always had better equipment and higher paid staff than we did, but our people really learned to be more efficient and effective. I think that played a big part in winning the newspaper war, ultimately—in all areas, not just production.

JM: But you're talking about all areas.

LH: Sure, but it's certainly true in production. I hired a lot of really good people in the 1980s who have stayed with me for a long, long time.

JM: How was the composing room? Was that going effectively?

LH: It was changing continually with—the composing room is the area where we would—where the news would be captured from the computer systems they had, put into a printed form, and then pasted on the pages so that we could make printing plates. At one time we had—I want to say sixty, maybe, union printers who worked in composing. They worked on Linotype machines, and did other jobs. When we went away from Linotype machines and converted to cold type, a lot of those people left. I'm not sure how the attrition took place. I know the union decertified at one point, but by the 1980s we probably still had about fifteen of the union printers who were doing those jobs. These were older men—there were no females—guys who had come up through hot metal days that were crusty old veterans that were sometimes not the most pleasant people for the young reporters to have to deal with. They had—what happened was as people left we

managed to keep the really good ones. Those older fellows learned our system and adapted. The ones that stayed did.

JM: Were you still, at this time, having problems with the computer system that was involved in getting the type out?

LH: We were having fewer problems. We—I can't—there was one night where we just simply failed to get the news in the paper, and I guess that was in the 1970s. Were you still here when that happened?

JM: No. It happened after I left.

LH: Yes. We had one evening where we could not get the computer systems to work and we went to Texarkana [Arkansas] to use the computer systems there.

JM: I heard about it, but I was gone.

LH: That was before I was production manager, and that was probably part of what led up to me being named production manager, actually. Those types of happenings. That was 1981. That was the worst it got, obviously.

JM: You just didn't produce—didn't print one night? Is that . . .?

LH: We actually—we printed, but I think what we did was go to Texarkana to do the type setting and then we flew negatives back to Little Rock. We ended up using a lot of yesterday's news in the paper.

JM: Okay.

LH: We managed to get all of the current ads in with yesterday's news, in most cases.

JM: Okay. I heard about this from afar, but I understood that maybe you changed the front page? Or did you go with still the same front page?

LH: You know, I can't remember exactly. Again, I wasn't in charge of production that evening, thankfully. I was here and I was aware of what was happening, but my memory [is] a little vague.

JM: Is that only one day that you were down like that?

LH: That was—no, that was the only time that we ever used yesterday's news.
[Laughs]

JM: Yes.

LH: And that was the worst it got. After that Jim Shuemake, who had been our production manager, was in charge of actually doing the technical repair on the computer systems himself, and so—and he was a good guy. After he was relieved of management responsibility and was able to focus on technical responsibilities, things got better.

JM: Yes.

LH: We hired a few more people to work with him. As long as we had those old DEC computer systems, though, they just weren't reliable and they were hard to manage and maintain, so we always had problems.

JM: Yes.

LH: That lasted, really, until 1991 when we acquired the *Gazette* and went over to the *Gazette's* computer system.

JM: And you just brought their computers over here? Is that correct?

LH: We did, yes.

JM: Yes, okay. And what kind of system did they have?

LH: Oh, I knew you were going to ask me that, Jerry. Boy, there have been so many that have come and gone [that] my mind is blanking. I'll think of it in a minute.

JM: Oh, that's all right. That's okay. So you still continued to have problems with the computer producing the paper—the stories and everything, until the *Gazette* folded and . . .?

LH: You know, I would put it this way. In the 1970s and early 1980s we had major problems with type-setting computer systems. By the late 1980s—in 1990 we had minor problems because we had done a lot of work to make the system we had work.

JM: As an . . .

LH: But it was a slow [and] long process to get there, and a lot of changes had been made in the components of the system.

JM: As an aside, I'll just—you know, when I was here I was working with Jim Shuemake a lot, and everything. He was really good at fixing equipment, but he did have an awful lot to do. He was the only one sometimes, you know. There just wasn't anybody else. He could fix it, but, you know, he had to sleep sometimes. That's why I got anointed to learn how to bring the computer up.

LH: Right.

JM: If it died, I had to go down and bring it up and everything.

LH: When Jim retired, we did a big—and there were probably 150 people at his retirement party. Everyone loved Jim.

JM: Yes.

LH: He cleaned that—Jim was not an organized guy. He was not a manager.

JM: Yes.

LH: He cleaned out his desk to leave, and he found a sealed envelope that was from Walter. I told this story at his retirement. A week or two before—he found this envelope a week or two before he retired, and this was just three years ago. He opened the envelope and it was from the 1970s, and it was a note from Walter about some payroll problem where he was over-budgeting those payrolls. The note said, “Jim, see me about this tomorrow.” Of course, twenty years had passed.

JM: [Laughs]

LH: But that was Jim. I mean, he found that stuff in the back of a drawer.

JM: [Laughs] He never did see him about that one.

LH: He said he had a desk drawer that was filled with things that he didn’t have time to get to right now, and that’s where he threw those management issues.

JM: When did—before it happened, was there any point in time when you began to feel pretty good about the situation here? That the *Democrat* was going to survive?

LH: Oh, I think the thing that—when the *Gazette* lost all the Dillard’s [Department Store] advertising, I think the *Gazette* people—I’ve heard some of them cite that as the—they realized that things were going the wrong way for them. Of course, that was a great signal for us.

JM: Yes.

LH: We were continually encouraged. I know, Jerry, I’m an optimistic guy, anyhow, and maybe that’s part of why I stayed. Nobody in town early on expected the

Democrat to survive. I don't know that I thought long term, but I just had this innate sense that good things were going to happen to me. [Laughs] They don't always happen.

JM: [Laughs] Yes.

LH: But I look at the glass and, even when there's just a few drops in it, I think it's half-full. So I always, I guess, thought that good things were going to happen. I was always encouraged by the little things that we would see where we'd get a new advertiser, or circulation would go up a little bit.

JM: You were beginning to see some little things, though, as you went along, by that time. There was a time I don't think anybody could see anything encouraging.

LH: Well, you know, I'd say when we went morning, really, is when good things started. Before we went morning, you never saw anything encouraging the first five years. The era when I was thinking about going to work for Blue Cross, nothing good was happening. Once we went morning and the paper seemed to get energized, they brought on Bob [John Robert] Starr. He was really controversial, but he attracted attention to the paper and people were starting to talk about the *Democrat*. A lot of folks still didn't like the *Democrat*, but they were starting to realize that we were afloat. So that was when I'd say the encouragement started. Then there were gradual steps.

JM: When did Dillard's withdraw his advertising? Was that after Gannett took over?

LH: Yes, I'm trying to think. Yes, I'm fairly sure it was after Gannett, and the ad guys, I'm sure, can tell you better than I can.

JM: My impression was that it was. Some people think that the *Gazette* filing suit against the *Democrat* and then losing was a big turning point, too.

LH: Oh, that was a tremendous turning point because—again, I was optimistic that we would do okay, but once we won that lawsuit, you know, we thought we had been vindicated and we were going to get to continue to fight. If we had lost that lawsuit, we don't know really what would have happened. It would have been according to the terms, I guess, of what Walter would have had to pay to the *Gazette*. Chances are that people who worked here in this newspaper would have been out of a job, like, ultimately, a lot of the people at the *Gazette* were.

JM: In other words, the *Democrat* might have folded—had to fold if they had lost the lawsuit and had to pay a lot of damages, or something.

LH: You know, I didn't know all the details, but I never thought we were going to lose that lawsuit. I mean, I never expected to lose it because I truly didn't feel like the—I thought we were an underdog and I didn't see how anyone could claim that we were doing anything that was terribly anti-competitive. Obviously, Walter had more resources than the Pattersons, but that is just life. We went kind of from the frying—it was a rollercoaster ride. We were worried when the lawsuit was going on [and] we were sued, then when we won the lawsuit we were up at a peak. Then, Gannett bought the papers and they came into town talking about deep pockets.

JM: Did that scare everybody?

LH: Yes. Well, ultimately it was the thing that allowed us to win the newspaper war, I think.

JM: Yes.

LH: I don't know how long it would have dragged on if somebody hadn't come in and talked that way, because that really motivated Walter to lose serious bucks. I mean, he had been losing millions of dollars, but after Gannett upped the ante, he lost multimillions of dollars. Of course, Gannett was losing more and ultimately that was why we won, but when Gannett came in talking that way, Walter realized it was time to really get serious about gaining circulation.

JM: Kind of got his back up?

LH: He did. And he knew that he had to spend more money than he had been spending in order to be successful.

JM: At one time, I think—or maybe earlier on in the operation, I don't [know] whether you saw this—but he could not tap his cable funds, as I understood it, at first—coming from the cable systems—because they had some kind of agreement with the people that had loaned them the money for the cable.

LH: No, I'm really not aware of that. I know we didn't need to, really. Not at the level of spending that he was doing. Maybe that's why he didn't tap the money much.

JM: Yes, okay. Did it come as a big surprise to you when Gannett folded and Walter bought their assets?

LH: Well, you know, not a big surprise, but it was like, "I can't believe this is really over."

JM: Yes.

LH: We didn't really have time to just kind of sit back and reflect because of the way that it happened. It was announced, and then we immediately, instead of being—you know, we didn't talk to the people at the *Gazette*. They truly were the—enemies is too strong of a word, but the competitive nature made it impossible for us to be on friendly terms. One of our guys—one of our production guys—went inside their plant one night, and we ended [up] getting a nasty letter from the vendor who took him in there—or the *Gazette* sent the letter to the vendor and the vendor passed it on to us. The *Gazette* didn't want our people in their plant spying or looking around. It was mutual. I mean, we just didn't invite them over in a neighborly sort of way.

JM: Was this pre-Gannett, too?

LH: Oh, yes, pre-Gannett and during Gannett. We did not—I guess in the newsroom the reporters would see the *Gazette* reporters out and maybe they were on friendly terms at the time, but production and business people weren't. So when the event happened and we had to work closely with those guys in order to make the transition happen, it got to be difficult. That was a morbid surprise in itself.

JM: After you bought out the *Gazette*'s assets, then, at that point in time, did you take over their press and their . . .? .?

LH: Immediately what we did was print on all the presses. They had two presses and we had two, and we were running four printing presses. The first few months we printed a new *Democrat-Gazette* on all four presses. Anyone who had been a *Democrat* subscriber and a *Gazette* subscriber got two papers because we didn't know who we had in common. It took a couple of months to get the list merged.

I want to say that a few of those first Sundays, we printed about 400,000 papers . . .

JM: Is that right? Okay.

LH: . . . and delivered. We had their comics that we had to marry into the paper along with their features. You know, their columnists that we were including and keeping—we had to figure how to change the format of the paper and make all that happen. We were working directly with them and they were really nice cooperative folks at that point, but it was strange having them over here and doing that.

JM: And they had a fairly new press, isn't that correct?

LH: Well, yes. They had the best that could be bought from the Goss Printing Company and ours were old and—we had one press that had new printing units, but we put an old folder and old reels on them and put it together a lot less expensively than the *Gazette* did. So we had two presses that weren't nearly as good as the two that the *Gazette* had. We ran on all four of those presses for some time—for two or three months—and then we got down to running on three presses. Finally, we shut down the presses we had been running completely. Ultimately, we dismantled them. One of them we sold for scrap and one of them is in northwest Arkansas.

JM: The one you sent up to Lowell [Arkansas] or somewhere to print *Northwest Arkansas News*?

LH: That is the press that we had bought in 1986. The *Gazette* had bought two—one in 1986 or 1987 and one in 1988.

JM: You bought a new press in 1986?

LH: Yes, but, again, it was just the printing units. It wasn't a complete press.

JM: Oh, I see.

LH: We brought a lot of old equipment to put with it, and we bought our press, I want to say, for \$4.6 million and the *Gazette* paid \$9 million for each press. They paid, ultimately, I think, \$18 million for the two presses.

JM: And they built a new building for them, I think.

LH: No. Well, they built onto the building that they had. They modified it. That building has been—actually that's a fairly new building. It was built in 1972.

JM: They had built it. Yes, okay, they'd already built it. I'd forgot. I think they built it about the time that I left there and came back over here. But I know they were—I came over here in 1971 and left the *Gazette* in—but I know when I left over there they were talking about—in fact, they were even talking about building a new office building for them to move the news operations, but they never did.

LH: Walter, every now and then, talks about that, too, and has never made any real effort to do it.

JM: About building a new . . . ?

LH: An office building.

JM: New office building.

LH: Yes. I don't—see, this one functions real well. There's no real need to do that.

JM: Yes, okay. So, you inherited their presses, and their computer system, and everything else.

LH: Yes. Our production people thought they had died and gone to heaven. My job became—you know, I used to be up all night several nights a week. My job became—after we got the two papers merged together—my job became manageable—livable—and it's a good thing, because I'm getting old now. I'm fifty-seven.

JM: How old?

LH: Fifty-seven.

JM: Oh, you're young.

LH: Well, yes, I'm young. I'm young, but I'm not as young as I was when I was staying up all night all the time. I'm too old to be doing that. But we—Jerry, we felt like we had the best people. Our people had learned to be flexible and work hard. They knew our system and way of operating. Then, when we acquired the *Gazette's* assets, we had the good equipment to go with it. We have a really strong operation today, not just in production, but throughout this newspaper, I think, for those reasons.

JM: Yes, okay. Everything began to get better and easier at that time when you got all that equipment?

LH: Yes. Immediately things got better. When we got profitable, too, it—you know, our pay scales became better here. We weren't profitable—we had one profitable month sometime in the 1980s and we handed out—have you heard this? We handed out . . .

JM: I think maybe Walter said something about it, or maybe—he gave checks to everybody?

LH: Yes, I still [have] a copy of my stub. What he did was split the profits. I think we made, like, \$40,000 that month and we had 700 employees, so he divided 700 into \$40,000 and everybody got the same amount.

JM: Everybody got . . . ?

LH: I can't remember the exact amount. I think my check was for \$43.

JM: I think that sounds about right. I have heard that from somewhere, and maybe Walter talked about it in his interview.

LH: When we became profitable, things immediately got better.

JM: Yes. Salaries have improved . . .

LH: Salaries have improved . . .

JM: . . . and working conditions.

LH: . . . and the equipment. Not only did we get their printing presses and production equipment, but we got all of the desks. We threw out all the—we had so many chairs that didn't have backs on them or that were ragged and torn. We threw all of those out and brought over the *Gazette's* furniture, and even that was a tremendous improvement. Now if we wear out a chair, we replace it. Back in the old days, we didn't.

JM: What—and this may not be something that you were even involved in and everything—what happened to their old picture files? Do you know what happened?

LH: We've got them. Yes. We've still have those. Those are part of the assets. We still keep them in that building over there.

JM: They're still in the *Gazette* building. Have they been opened up to anybody, or do you know of it?

LH: You'll have to talk to the photo people. I don't know what you mean by—you mean opened up for research?

JM: Yes, yes.

LH: I don't know what the policy is on that. I'm not sure.

JM: Yes, okay. I don't either. I filed some of those pictures myself in sports when I was there.

LH: Hell, yes.

JM: But I had wondered about that. So, in the end it turned out that you had made a good decision to stay.

LH: Yes, I think it is going to work.

JM: Yes, yes. It looks like it. How is the paper doing now?

LH: It's doing okay. We're really well-run here. We—of course, I have a lot of pride in my departments, but we're really well-run in areas that account for revenue and count toward the bottom line. We measure our performance against other newspapers across the nation, and we have the highest—what's the term I'm looking for? Penetration in the market of any Sunday newspaper in the country. I think we have something like seventy percent of the households in Little Rock that read our paper. You don't find that in most markets.

JM: That's awfully high.

LH: We have—our ad rates are lower than a lot of markets our size. We have a lot more circulation than papers like Memphis, which is surprising to most people,

because we are a statewide newspaper. We feel we still do a good job of managing our costs. We do a good job on the sales side. And the news product—you know, you can judge that better than I can. We're really proud of our news product. People who travel a lot go to other markets and they come back and say, "You know, the *Democrat-Gazette* is a bigger newspaper than you find in towns like Rochester."

JM: Yes. It has a pretty sizable news hole I think still, compared to some.

LH: We're proud of the fact that we have a lot of news in our newspaper. So when you ask how the paper is, I think we're doing really well. The Internet is a threat, and that's the thing that everybody is talking about. But people have been talking about different types of media threats for a long, long time. We don't see it as a serious long-term threat.

JM: You don't?

LH: I don't. I think—personally, and different people have different opinions, but I think the way that a printed newspaper can be easily managed and handled and deliver local news—I think that is going to be really hard to match with an electronic format. Maybe someday, but I think it will be long after I'm gone.

JM: Yes, okay. They've been talking about new ways of doing things like that for a long time, but a lot of them never have materialized, you know.

LH: That is exactly right.

JM: I remember twenty or thirty years ago I was going to the seminars and they were talking about—well, they'd eventually put the paper on microfiche and deliver it—[laughs] deliver a microfiche to each reader, but that hasn't happened.

LH: Things are certainly changing. I mean, classified ads can be delivered really efficiently over the Internet. Young people tend to like the Internet more than they like the printed product, apparently. I'm not sure—who really knows? But we haven't seen a serious problem to this point.

JM: Okay. Well, Lynn, this has been very informative and I just wonder if there is anything else that you can think of that you haven't touched on that you might want to go back and touch on?

LH: Yes, the one thing that I can think about that doesn't get a lot of attention—you probably will hear this if you talk to circulation people and what they did. The quality of our circulation department, I think, made a tremendous difference in the competition with Gannett. For one—I think, probably, you've heard we committed to on-porch delivery. That's kind of a given in Little Rock that it happens, but in most cities across the United States, putting paper on the porch is still uncommon. We started that—the *Gazette* later tried it. I'm not sure they ever got it completely done. We started that in the competition, and we continue that today. I think that made a big difference, but the one thing, I think, that made more difference in selling circulation and increasing our number of readers than any other thing we did was the effort that was put into door-to-door sales crews. I'm not sure that people talk about this very much.

JM: No, they don't.

LH: We had—I can't give you the exact numbers, but we had up to thirty, forty, maybe as many as fifty people at a time knocking on doors offering people the opportunity to buy the *Democrat-Gazette* and we had extremely lucrative

commission plans for those folks—to buy the *Democrat*, not the *Democrat-Gazette*. This was in late 1980s. We had some salespeople making \$50,000 a year selling subscriptions door-to-door.

JM: Is that right?

LH: They had an extremely attractive commission plan, and they were selling lots of subscriptions.

JM: They were working, so they . . .

LH: They were motivated to work, and I don't think the *Gazette* either—I know the Pattersons didn't do it. I don't think the Gannett people copied that at all. Of course, today we still have door-to-door crews. We don't have the sales pressure that we did then.

JM: Who was your circulation manager?

LH: His name is Larry Graham, and he has been in that position since the early 1980s.

JM: He has been here a long time hasn't he?

LH: He is another guy that has done a great job. It's really common to find people who've worked here twenty-five years.

JM: Yes.

LH: But that, to me, played a very big role in why we were able to overtake Gannett. It's something that you don't hear about often.

JM: You don't hear much about it. I have heard at some point in one interview of someone saying that he was present, I think, when they mentioned it to the *Gazette* circulation manager about being sure, you know, that the paper was up on the porch, or putting it up by the door. He just pooh-poohed it at that time. He

just thought, “No, that’s not necessary,” but, apparently, it made a big difference with the . . .

LH: We went—and this was—we keep backtracking, but there was one event that was really interesting and still stands out in my mind. This was in the—as we went morning and we still had youth carriers—we don’t have kids anymore, but we still had lots of kids when we were an afternoon paper and we were converting to morning. We held an event out at the UA [United Artists] Cinema 150—the big round theater out on Asher [Avenue] and University [Avenue]. On a Saturday morning we called in all of our carriers and we showed them a movie. This place was full of kids. I remember Walter standing up in front of those kids talking about the newspaper war, and he said, “We’re going to fight them in the streets and we’re going to fight them on the porches. We want those papers on the porches.” And they introduced a program called “Baseball.” Baseball was where you got a—you automatically had a bonus on your—a monthly bonus. These kids were going to get—I want to say \$100, or maybe \$150 extra. You’ve got it. It’s yours. If you get one complaint on your route, you’ve still got it. Two complaints, you’ve still got it. Three strikes and you’re out in baseball. You lose your \$100 bonus. That sort of thing—paying incentives to people in circulation was just a really key thing. Those kids—when Walter said, “We’re going to fight them on the porches,” those kids cheered.

JM: Whose idea was that? Do you have any idea?

LH: Probably Walter and Paul Smith together.

JM: Yes.

LH: Paul gets so much credit for our marketing strategy. You know, he has recently been made president of the newspaper division, and president of the *Democrat-Gazette*. Paul, for years, has been the marketing guru. *Genius* is a word that gets tossed around, but Paul is an incredible marketer. I think that this operation—like an award-winning movie you have a producer and director. Well, Walter is the producer and Paul is the director. Paul is the artistic guy. In a movie, the director is the artistic person who is creating a work of art. Well, if the *Democrat-Gazette* is a work of art, Paul is the director.

JM: Okay.

LH: Walter is the guy that made it possible with the money and, I guess, the vision.

JM: And the toughness and determination.

LH: Yes, and all of that which your producer has got to have.

JM: Yes, okay. Okay. All right, well is there anything else you can think of?

LH: No. Probably lots more I ought to be telling you, but we've already got more than I want to edit.

JM: No, that's all right. I'm going to edit. That's great. I got stuff even beyond what I thought I would get. I think it's been a great interview and I appreciate it.

LH: Yes, sure.

JM: Okay.

[End of Interview]

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