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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Dave Reddoch
North Little Rock, Arkansas
31 July 2006

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is July 31, 2006. I'm sitting here interviewing Dave Reddoch for this project on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Democrat-Gazette*. Dave was at one time the classified ad[vertising] manager at the *Arkansas Democrat*, and a very pivotal position in the war with the *Arkansas Gazette*. The first thing I need to do, Dave, is to ask you if I have your permission to make this tape and to turn it over to the Pryor [Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] archives at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]?

Dave Reddoch: Jerry, you have my permission, and I'm glad to help any way I can.

JM: Great. Let's just start out from the beginning. First, cover the historical basis.

When and where were you born, Dave?

DR: I was born in Houston, Texas, on June 26, 1939. I'm now sixty-seven years old.

JM: Give me your full name and spell Reddoch for me.

DR: David—D-A-V-I-D—Reddoch—R-E-D-D-O-C-H.

JM: Okay. What were your parents' names?

DR: My dad's name was Elbert Reddoch. My mother's name was Mildred Reddoch.

JM: Mildred?

DR: Yes.

JM: M-I-L-D-R-E-D and E-L-B-E-R-T.

DR: That's right.

JM: Okay. Very good. All right. Now, then, maybe you should tell us a little bit first about how you got into the newspaper business.

DR: Well, I had worked in a machine shop for a number of years in Houston, Texas, and I began to sell *World Book Encyclopedia* door to door. I found out working in the evening that I was a pretty good salesman, so I thought I might get in sales and make a lot more money. My wife saw an ad in the Houston newspaper, the *Houston Post*—one of the two papers there—for outside sales—classified sales. So I applied and got the job, and that's how I got into sales, and how I got in really to newspaper sales. The *Houston Post* was competing in a newspaper war at the time with the *Houston Chronicle*—the *Chronicle* being the dominant paper. But the *Houston Post* was owned by Oveta Culp Hobby. Her husband had been governor of Texas. They had a lot of money, and they built a beautiful, new plant out on the southwest freeway, at the intersection with the that new newspaper they were moving plant, and it was really something. I worked with Art Lashae (pronounced Luh-shay) 610 Loop in Houston. So I got to go to work there just as into and Connie Cloe and Bill Beaukemper. I had a really good . . .

JM: Maybe we'd better go back and spell those names because I know they're going to ask me. Who was the first one—Shay—was that it?

DR: Art LeShae.

JM: Okay. How do you spell Leshae?

DR: I think it is Lashae. L-A-S-H-A-E. Connie Cloe, although it sounds like a woman's name—he's a man. [Laughs] It's C-O-N-N-I-E—Cloe—C-L-O-E.

JM: Okay.

DR: And Beaukemper—I believe Bill spelled his name B-E-A-U-K-E-M-P-E-R. I believe that's the way he spelled it. I'm trying to think back now to about twenty-five or thirty years ago.

JM: Yes. Well, we can perhaps find a way to check that out.

DR: At least thirty years ago.

JM: Let me ask you this. Which was the afternoon newspaper and which was the morning newspaper?

DR: In the Houston market?

JM: Yes.

DR: The *Chronicle* was the evening paper and the *Post* was the morning paper.

JM: Okay.

DR: That was a little bit unusual that the evening paper being dominant . . .

JM: Yes, it was.

DR: . . . because of the demise of the evening newspapers.

JM: Okay.

DR: But there was where I got my newspaper education. Not only did I have excellent sales training courses and classes, they had ongoing training there at the newspaper. But they had begun the *Post* want ads, and they knew the value of private-party ads. They had what they called three lines for three days for three dollars.

They were *really* catching up with the *Chronicle* in circulation and in classified ad count, and so forth, because of these private-party ads they were getting in the newspaper. And the most important newspaper class I ever took—you may remember because you've been in the newspaper business—you may remember the McDonald's Classified Services. It was a clip-art service. But McDonald understood classified probably better than anyone else in the country, and he wrote a training course on how to sell classified advertising. In that training course, he stressed the importance of private-party ads as being the life blood of the classified section. You might have all the big display ads you want, but without those little reader ads—those little private-party ads—you don't have the readership that you need. And that really stuck with me and became really valuable, even more so, when I made my move up to Arkansas and went to work for the newspaper here.

JM: Okay. So how did you get from the *Post* to the *Chronicle*? How long did you work for the *Post*, and then when did you go to the *Chronicle*?

DR: I worked for the *Post* for three years and had just a great job there. I helped them kick off their new Apartment and townhome section, which was a separate section around Saturdays. "Apartment Living," it was called. I helped them kick that off. I had just an amazing start there. The first week I was on the job I sold a full-page ad in black and white. My boss was impressed. The next week he said, "How are you going to top this?" The next week I went out and sold a double truck [two facing pages] in black and white. He was really impressed. "How are you going to top this?" I know it sounds like I'm bragging, but this actually happened, Jerry.

JM: No, I'm glad. I want to hear it.

DR: The third week I went out and sold a full page in *full color*, which was unheard of in the classified section.

JM: [Laughs] Yes.

DR: "How are you going to top this?" And, sure enough, then I think it was the next week—maybe it was two or three weeks later—I sold a double truck in full color.

JM: Yes.

DR: So, anyway, that year I was elected the classified salesman of the year, and was doing great. And then I came up with this idea to begin a real estate magazine of photo-pictured homes for sale by owner. So another man and I formed the United Home Buyers Guide, and we had the nation's first real estate magazine that was full of photo pictures of homes—FSBOs (pronounced "fizbos")—for-sale-by-owner homes. We had it on the newsstand in about five or six major cities. Didn't have the financial backing that we needed, and eventually it folded.

JM: That was not part of your newspaper.

DR: It was not part of the newspaper. So I left the *Post* to begin this real estate magazine, and it didn't make it. It lasted about a year. It didn't make it.

JM: Yes.

DR: And then I went over and went to work for the *Houston Chronicle*, the competing newspaper.

JM: Okay. What was the status of the two newspapers at that time? Do you remember? Was the *Chronicle* still the dominant paper?

DR: The *Chronicle* was still the dominant paper. Yes.

JM: Okay.

DR: Then I worked at the *Chronicle* for a couple of years—handled their largest ad-

vertiser. The name of the company was U.S. Homes. They were the major home builder in the Houston area, and they would run as many as eight or ten full-page ads in the Sunday real estate section, so that was the dominant account. The *Chronicle* knew what I had done against them when I was at the *Post*, so they gave me the best account they had. Anyway, I left there because I felt a call to go into ministry and wanted to prepare for that. So I left the *Chronicle* and left Houston to move to Arkansas to enroll at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, which began in Little Rock, Arkansas. It has since moved to Memphis, Tennessee.

JM: Okay.

DR: And, of course, it's still there now. But that's what brought me to Arkansas.

JM: Okay.

DR: I was married and had kids. I had to work while I was going to seminary, so I knew I had to have a job here. So I applied at the *Arkansas Democrat* and at the *Arkansas Gazette*. Now, Jerry, you stop me if you want to ask me questions.

JM: No, you can go right ahead.

DR: Otherwise I'm just kind of . . .

JM: No, you're telling me just what I want to know. [Laughs]

DR: Okay. The *Arkansas Democrat* offered me a job first. Actually, after I started at the *Democrat*, then the *Gazette* called later and wanted me to come in and talk to them. But by then I told them I already had a job and was happy at the *Democrat*.

JM: And that was what year?

DR: That was in 1975.

JM: 1975. Okay.

DR: Yes. I went to work on the retail staff. They had a classified manager at the time. His name was Tim LeMay—I'm talking about at the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes. Okay.

DR: But, boy, it was not going well. Tim lost his job, and because of my classified experience, Paul Smith asked me if I would be interested in taking the classified ad manager's job for the *Democrat*. And, of course, I was very, very interested, and did just that.

JM: So what year would that have been when you took over as classified [ad manager]?

DR: Oh, that would've been 1976, I guess.

JM: Okay.

DR: Yes. It was in the first year that this happened.

JM: Yes.

DR: When I started, we had four people in inside sales—telephone sales—and we had three in outside sales. So I was supervising a staff of seven people. We averaged about three or four pages of classified daily, and maybe six pages—maybe sometimes seven pages—on Sunday.

JM: Okay. Keep going.

DR: I could see right away that the main problem we had in the classified section was the anemic condition of the ad count we had. And, of course, the boss wanted me to—"Just get those big ads. Get those big real estate ads. Let's get those big auto ads. We've got to get those in the paper." And every day they would measure the paper—measuring to see the space—but that's not the count you need in classified. The main count you need in classified is ad count. Ad count is more impor-

tant than measuring space.

JM: You're talking just the number of ads—that's what you're talking about?

DR: The number of ads, because of the correlation between readership and ad count. If you had the ad count volume, then that means you had a great assortment of items for sale. That brings readers into the paper. The more readers you bring into the paper, the more people have to buy the paper. Your circulation goes up, so everything ties in from the classified perspective. It all ties in and comes down to ad count. And so we began to get concerned about ad count. I had to actually sell management on this theory—talking to Paul Smith and then him relaying the messages to Walter [Hussman, Jr.], and my great concern that we would *never* catch them—we'd never do very good. Because, you see, Bale Chevrolet could run a big ad—well, the readership's not there. The circulation's not there. Consequently, they don't get near as good results as that same ad that ran in the *Gazette*. “So what are we gonna do? You're spinning your wheels. We've got to get those little private-party ads in the paper. Paul, Walter, we've got to get them in there even if we have to *give* them away. They're that valuable. We have to have them.” They began to really think on this, and thought, “You know, maybe that ol' boy from Texas—what if he's right? Maybe he *is* right.” Well, it was Walter Hussman [Jr.] who heard of a newspaper in Winnipeg, Canada, that had free want ads, and, man, they were getting a bunch of them. So he called up there and made the arrangements. I also talked to the classified manager there over the phone, and we set up a meeting. We got in Walter's little jet [airplane] and flew up to Winnipeg, Canada. We were only there for a couple of days. And, of course, he met with the publisher and so forth, and Paul and I met with the classi-

fied manager and the advertising director. They were so kind and took us on a tour all through the paper. I prepared a list of questions that I knew I would need answered. I sat down with the classified manager, and we went over this. As best he could, he answered all the questions for me. The idea was that we would come back, then, with some information and possibly go ahead and start free want ads in the *Democrat*.

JM: Who all was on that trip?

DR: On that trip was Walter Hussman [Jr.], Paul Smith, Dick [Lankford], our advertising agency man, and myself, along with the pilot.

JM: Okay.

DR: So we flew to Winnipeg. I got the answers that we needed, and came back with Walter's approval of starting free want ads. As we were . . .

JM: Excuse me just one minute.

DR: Yes.

JM: Do you remember the day of that trip to Winnipeg?

DR: I do not remember.

JM: Okay.

DR: I don't have it recorded anywhere, and I don't remember. Paul or Walter might remember.

JM: Oh, that's all right.

DR: But I really don't know.

JM: Okay.

DR: So we went to work on this project. We asked everyone who would know about it as we began to work on putting this together to "keep it quiet—keep it hush-

hush. Don't tell anyone. We've got to keep it quiet." I set up the front page of the classified section with a bright yellow color on it, which we didn't use hardly any color in classified back in those days. But this bright yellow really popped out—great big at the top of page one of the classified—every day it said, "Free want ads—372-FREE." I called the phone company and got that phone number reserved so we could use that. We came up with a new index for the front page of the newspaper—a classification index. Picked a new typeface. So everything on that first day would be brand new. Dick Lankford, the ad agency man, drew up a half-page ad—big, bold—if I remember right, it was either color or at least all black reverse. And all it said was, "D-Day is here! Call 372-FREE." And we ran it in the *Arkansas Gazette*.

JM: Hmm.

DR: He called the *Gazette*, as an agency can, and reserved a half-page space—didn't give the client's name, and purposely brought the slick in—the ad in—right at the deadline. When everyone was gone he took it to the press room. [Laughter] They pasted it down at the last minute. So the *Gazette* promoted in their *big* Sunday paper our free want ads.

JM: [Laughs]

DR: So that was kind of the shot that was heard [laughs] around the world, so to speak, in the newspaper war, because that really, *really* got them good. Along about that time, we had started a real estate section. It was full of house photos—houses for sale for realtors and so forth. I was responsible for getting that out in news racks to be picked up all over Little Rock and North Little Rock in the convenience stores and so forth. So we had that going, also. But—go ahead, Jerry.

JM: Now, explain to me how the free want ads work, then. Who could do free want ads and how long did they run, et cetera?

DR: The free want ads ran—you could run five lines, and they ran for a week initially. Any private party—in other words, Jerry, if you wanted to sell your car, you could run the ad. If you wanted to sell your house—if you wanted to sell your boat—if you wanted to sell a piece of furniture—anything you had for sale—a business couldn't use the ads free, but any private party could run an ad—three lines—five lines for a week, absolutely free. But here's the thing—and what concerned me was—although I could see that it worked in Winnipeg, and although I had been in the Houston newspaper war and saw the value of the private-party ads there and what they had done for the *Houston Post* to help them, would it work in central Arkansas? Because, you see, the amazing thing is, although the *Gazette* had eighty-five percent of the classified revenue, we only had about fifteen percent. Their section also was anemic in that they never promoted private-party ads—they had very few of them—but yet they had all the advertisers—but they weren't getting all that good of results. The advertisers were *really* unhappy with them to begin with because the newspaper market—the readers here in central Arkansas—they weren't educated to think, "I need to run an ad in the paper because I need to sell that car. I need to get an ad in the classified because I need to sell my house." They just didn't think like that.

JM: Yes.

DR: There weren't very many private-party ads, so my concern was—this was a great service to the people of central Arkansas, but would *they* see it that way? Would they try it? Would the phones ring? We set up a separate room at the *Democrat*

filled with a phone bank—telephone lines. If I remember right, I think we initially set up twelve phones and operators. We wound up having to pretty much double that. But would these people we hired and trained and all these phones we put in when we began the free want ads—would the public respond to it? Would they call in the ads? We just didn't know because this had not been a private-party market. But I'll tell you what, *did they respond*. People *loved* it. I was so concerned that I sat down in the week right before we started, and I wrote up—I don't know, I probably had a hundred classified ads that I wrote up that were little, bitty reader ads, but they were promoting that classification. "Sell your car in this—" That type thing. But I was so afraid we wouldn't have very many ads in each one of those classifications, so I was trying to beef it up a little bit, you know—put a few ads in there myself.

JM: Yes.

DR: Well, as it turned out, we didn't really need those because the telephone lines *lit up* and they *stayed* lit. In fact, there was a problem—people trying to call in and they couldn't get through and they were put on hold for too long, so we had to put in more phones. We had to hire more people. It was just absolutely amazing. Now, along with this came wonderful promotion. The *Democrat* hired a promotion manager. Of course, you know Jeffrey and what a wonderful . . .

JM: Estel Jeffrey.

DR: Estel Jeffrey, and what a wonderful job he did. So our new classified section was supported with some *dynamite* television ads promoting classified. And, I mean, they ran just *every day* on the news in the evening and all the prime times—just great television ads. We had radio spots on all the key radio stations. They had

big billboards promoting the classified all around town. We had bumper stickers about the free want ads that people got and put on their automobiles. So we went from—just right away, jumped up from [about] three or four pages of classified a day to twelve to fourteen pages of classified, with literally thousands of reader ads in there—those ads that I've been talking about that are *so* important—the lifeline of classified. We were up to twenty pages and over on Sunday of classified.

JM: Oh.

DR: All at once, the *Gazette* had the little, small classified section with hardly *any* private-party ads. Jerry, we had people who would come before daylight to the pressroom—I'm talking about the *Democrat* pressroom, out there where they load the bundled papers up to the . . .

JM: Yes.

DR: . . . trying to get a copy of the classified section because they knew if they didn't get that classified section *early* and go through and circle those ads on the items they wanted, they'd be sold by the time—if they waited, they might be gone.

JM: Yes.

DR: And it was just amazing. The people were so hungry for an avenue to sell items that it became like one giant central Arkansas garage sale, and it was just absolutely amazing. The readership went up, and as readership went up, circulation went up. Of course, ad count went up, and I was so concerned about that. Then our classified display advertising went up. Now [when] Bale Chevrolet ran their ad, there were all these other *hundreds* of car ads in there—and, yes, they were private-party people, but they brought the readers in. So they might look at that and look at a couple of those used cars, and then they'd see that big, old Bale ad,

and they'd say, "You know what? I think I'll just go ahead and get a *new* one."

And they go on right down to—and they'd go into Bale Chevrolet carrying that free want ads section with them with their Bale ad in there.

JM: [Laughs]

DR: So then the commercial advertisers complained right at first. "How come we've got to pay for ads and you're giving all these ads away?" We had to tell them, "Look, it's all about readership. Let's get the people in the paper. They're going to see your big ad and it's going to work for *you*." And it did, and they started getting good readership. As the readership went up, classified went up. Walter and Paul were happy. And the *Gazette*—you know what they did?

JM: No.

DR: They *laughed* at us. They mocked us. They laughed at us. They thought we were crazy.

JM: Yes

DR: They said, "Surely, this is the last-ditch effort of a dying dog." Well, guess who had the last laugh?

JM: Yes. What date did you start the free classifieds?

DR: I just happen to have the first classified section right here with me—Sunday, December 3, 1978.

JM: 1978. Okay.

DR: Sunday, December 3, 1978. We were just getting started, now, and the first Sunday was twelve pages. And then, of course, it went up quickly to twenty pages and over right after that. But I was afraid we wouldn't have very many ads in that first section at all, and it is just *loaded* with all of these private-party ads.

JM: Okay. Go ahead.

DR: Well, it's also important to note that Walter made other changes, too. Now, the free want ads was the first major change that took place in the newspaper war that *really* made it a fight, and it was a very significant, important decision because it really affected the outcome of the newspaper war. And I think—you've talked to Walter—he probably would say the same thing.

JM: Yes.

DR: He made a *lot* of other important changes, too, that were major, but I really think—of course, me being a classified man, I would say that it was probably the major—and at least I know it was the first major change that was made. About the same time, we began to throw free newspapers on Wednesday. Every Wednesday our press run was greatly enlarged so that we would throw all non-subscribers in Little Rock and North Little Rock. They got a free Wednesday newspaper to introduce *Gazette* subscribers to the *Democrat* and let them see what a different and improved newspaper it was. That was quite a job, throwing to all the *Gazette* readers every Wednesday. I had to hire more inside sales people, more outside sales people, in addition to the free want ad people. We did more sales training. We needed to have a way to keep the classified display ads in the paper longer. The advertisers were kind of used to—for instance, the auto dealers liked to run their ads on Friday, so they would run the ad one time Friday and that's it. Well, I wanted to have a way to keep them in the longer—to keep that ad in the paper. So we came up with what we called a rate-holder system, where their rates were governed by what size ad they placed to run for thirty days. You could get a lower rate if you ran just a three-line ad for thirty days. That was

your rate holder. But not near as good a rate as if you put a little one-inch classified display ad in as a rate holder that would run every day for thirty days. And, of course, not near as good as if you put a two-by-five—ten-inch ad—which we had people do that—run a ten-inch ad every day for thirty days. Well, in classified advertising, repetition is important. An ad goes in one day and it's gone—it's not near as effective as an ad that repeats for several days. So we began that rate-holder system. In addition to that, we started a special program whereby classified display advertisers—now, these are the realtors and auto dealers, et cetera—they could run a ten-inch ad—it had to be ten inches or larger—on what we called our three-day special. They paid for two days and got the third day free. So the auto dealers—see, that way we could keep their ads in the paper longer. So instead of Bale Chevrolet running on Friday only, he'd put his ad in and run it Friday and Saturday, and then Sunday would be free. So it was a way for us to get our revenue up, keep the ads in the paper, make our classified section look bigger, and the advertiser got better results. A lot of them would run on Saturday—not auto dealers—but some of the other people would want it to run on Saturday and Sunday, and then *Wednesday* because *Wednesday* we had all these free newspapers going out. So they got total market coverage on *Wednesday*. So it was just amazing the way the paid advertisers responded to that, and they really began to get good results. Walter felt on the retail side that one of the keys was to get Dillard's [department store] into the newspaper. Dillard's was the largest retail advertiser in the market, and they never ran an ad in the *Democrat* at all. So he worked out a deal with Mr. Dillard so that Dillard's had what Walter called the “keys to the press.” They could run any space they wanted to, any day of the week, any

time of the month, and for some predetermined rate. And, of course, I don't know what that was, and that wasn't my area. But it really had an impact because all at once, now, not only did the classified section look great and have all these ads in it and all these new paid advertisers in it, but now we were getting more retail ads. And now Dillard's was running, I mean, several page a *day* in the newspaper—more Dillard's ads in the *Democrat* than in the *Gazette*. And, boy, I mean, that *really* upset the competition that Dillard's would even *run* an ad in the *Democrat*. Of course, I had to train these new salespeople, so every Monday morning we would have a sales training meeting. I'm a Christian, and, of course, I've told you about my call to ministry and over the last twelve years I've pastored three different churches, but I kind of carried my faith over onto the job. I wasn't so politically correct as maybe one would need to be today. [Laughs] But back then, on these Monday meetings, I would combine attitude and faith and courage and all—I would use scripture from the Bible that underlined those things. And, in fact, some of the people that worked in the classified department that really maybe didn't so much approve of what I was doing—instead of—they had a nickname for the sales meeting. They called it “Monday School” as a take on “Sunday School”—Monday school.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

DR: But you know what? It *worked*. The salespeople had developed a good attitude. They were persistent. They knew how to go in and sell. The *Gazette* salespeople—they had had it so easy, they didn't have to sell anything. All they had to do was go by and pick up the ad. And I had all these young, energetic, fired-up people going in there talking about the newspaper, and they were excited. On Mon-

days we would have an award every week. For the month, we'd have a salesperson of the month. Of course, the newspaper began to pay *really* good bonuses, and we had lot going on. Another interesting thing happened that you would hear from me—I don't know if some of the others will probably remember this, too—but we also had weekly prayer meetings. Right across the street from the *Democrat* is the Episcopal church, and they welcomed us to come over during the daytime. We would come over and take about thirty minutes and just have prayer and pray for the newspaper and just ask God's blessing upon our efforts. I don't know—I guess I would tend to call it a miracle—but it seems to me that God *did* bless all that hard work and all of that faith. Listen, I know. I was *there*. I heard people so concerned that the newspaper would even be open the next week or the next month. I mean, we were living right on the edge, thinking that Walter might have to close it up, losing *millions* of dollars. But guess what? The first year I was classified manager, we were able to sell \$700,000 worth of classified revenue. Of course, it was a loss because it was costing a lot more money to operate the paper than what we were bringing in, but we were encouraged that that first year, revenue had risen to \$700,000 for the whole year. Then after a few years of the free want ads and all the changes that were made, the year that I left the newspaper, the revenue was \$7 million. So in less than seven years, it went up from \$700,000 to over \$7 million. And now classified sales is way up over a million a month, easily.

JM: Now, that was in 1988 that you left—is that correct?

DR: In 1988. Yes. Walter Hussman, of course, made other changes to the newspaper.

We had a bigger classified section and he wanted to have a big, overall page

count. And, in fact, he said, "I want to be able to bill the newspaper to promote the *Democrat* as being Arkansas' largest newspaper. And, in fact, there it was—right on the front page every day—"Arkansas' largest newspaper." Hired a lot of reporters. Added a lot of extra pages. Did more TV, radio, and billboards.

Added more color every day. Every section of the newspaper on the front page would have color. We had more local news. Began the high society section that ran on Sunday. It's kind of funny, some people call it the snob sheet. [Laughs]

JM: The "High Profile" section.

DR: "High Profile." Yes. But it was a brilliant move, and it included lots of photographs of people at their parties and all the [Arkansas] Arts Center [events] and all this. So that brought the people with money into the newspaper. They wanted to see if their picture was in there or see their friends' picture. So that was a really good move. And, Jerry, one of the most important things that happened was Walter hired John Robert Starr.

DR: John Robert Starr was the most unique individual. He was greatly loved and greatly hated. As the newspaper war was really heating up, you may remember that the *Arkansas Times* on the front page of their newspaper—the *Times* was the little weekly tabloid newspaper—they had a color picture of John Robert Starr sitting on top of a *Gazette* news rack with his chest bared, except I think he had a hunting vest on, and he had a machete or some kind of big ol' knife right in his teeth. And the headline was something like, "Bring it on. The newspaper war is on," or "*Gazette*, we're coming after ya." John Robert Starr was one of these "tell it like it is" guys. So many people *hated* him. I mean, he would tear into anybody in his column. He would go after the governor. It didn't matter *who* it was, he

would *nail* them good. But people either loved him or hated him. But a lot of people would say, "You know, that guy's right. I feel just like *he* does, but he's bold enough to say it." But whether they loved him or hated him, they *had* to get the *Democrat* and read him to see what that crazy guy was going to say today.

JM: [Laughs]

DR: And it *really* helped the newspaper and helped the readership. He did a great job, and that was a really smooth move when Walter brought him in. People began to change their minds about the poor little *Democrat*. Now it was big, it was fresh, it was bold, and it was full of want ads. Of course, the *Gazette* filed a lawsuit against Walter, and I'm sure you've got that recorded in other places. But Walter told me personally at the end of that lawsuit—when he won, he had a party at his house and the managers were invited in. He said, "Dave, we're going to have free want ads *forever*." He knew that the free want-ad program had really helped. Mr. Hugh Patterson at the *Gazette* actually came around to start their own free want-ad program, but it was too late then. The pendulum had swung the other way. To be quite frank, they had been really smug, really cocky. I mean, they felt like they had all the advertisers in the palm of their hand. But now they began to panic. And then, of course, eventually sold the newspaper to Gannett.

JM: Now, they first filed—if I'm correct, tell me this—that when Patterson was still there, they eventually—the first thing they did, I think, was go to the three/three/three. Is that correct? That they started saying "three lines for three days for \$3."

DR: Yes.

JM: That was their counter.

DR: Yes. They decided they *did* need private-party ads, and so they would sell a few, but that didn't work.

JM: Yes.

DR: And then even when they came around and tried to give them away, people were so used to—by then, this had been going on for a few years. People were so used to having the *Democrat* free want ads, they just—it's kind of like, "Well, we don't need them now."

JM: As I remember, when they started out with three/three/three, the *Democrat* responded that said something, "Who needs three/three/three when you can get free/free/free?"

DR: That's *exactly* right. You're right. That's exactly right.

JM: Yes. And I believe—I'm not sure about this—but I think that it was Gannett that started the completely free want ads.

DR: That's true.

JM: After Patterson sold the paper in 1986, Gannett started the free want ads.

DR: That's right. And, of course, you know Gannett came in with a terrible mistake. They took the traditional, liberal "Gray Old Lady" and turned it into something that looked like *People* magazine.

JM: Yes.

DR: And central Arkansas *hated* the changes that they made.

JM: Yes.

DR: And then it was just downhill from there. Jerry, one more thing I want to say—although Paul and Walter are so kind in trying to give me a lot of credit for the free want ads—really, I want to tell you something. The real hero in all of this

newspaper war and in the outcome of it is Walter Hussman himself, and I say that because I've got such great respect for the man. You know, his newspaper chain was once known as the Palmer chain.

JM: Yes.

DR: And then, you know, Walter Hussman took a big risk. His family fortune was *on the line* and he risked everything that he had to fight this newspaper war. The *Gazette* was so far ahead. They had such an advantage. If they had responded and not just *laughed* at and turned their noses up at the competition, Walter never would have won this war. But he's the one who was brave, who had guts, and was a real fighter. And they really overlooked his tenacity. So if there's a real hero in all this, I would say that it would be the publisher himself because he's the one who had all the cards on the table and had stood so much to lose.

JM: Dave, that really gives me a good picture there. After you started the free classifieds in early December, how soon were you aware that the circulation was gaining, too—that more people were reading the paper?

DR: Well, actually, the circulation numbers began to go up right away. But about the same time, now, we started this Wednesday—where we were throwing these newspapers all over town, and that probably had an impact, too. We had special promotion offers. The circulation department, of course, could tell you a lot more about that. But as soon as we started the free want ads, the circulation numbers did begin to go up right away.

JM: Now, I think, also, and may have been in January of 1979 that he started switching over to morning circulation.

DR: That's right.

JM: I don't think he completely went right away, if my recollection is correct—that he went to morning just in the state editions first. And then it was later in the year, I think, when he switched the whole thing to morning.

DR: And that's exactly right. That was also a major change. Of course, looking at what was happening to evening newspapers around the country, the morning papers were growing, and evening papers were losing circulation. So that was a good move. And, again, there you see Walter's boldness in wanting to go head to head with the *Gazette* in the morning.

JM: Just as a matter of information, the *Chronicle* eventually won the newspaper war in Houston, right?

DR: That's right. But by then, I had been in Arkansas . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: One thing that I didn't ask you before was where you went to school.

DR: I went to school at South Texas Junior College in Houston, and then the University of Houston. And then, later—as I mentioned earlier in the interview—came to Arkansas to attend Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. I'm a licensed and ordained Southern Baptist preacher.

JM: Okay.

DR: So that's kind of my background. When I came to Arkansas and went to work for the *Democrat*, they sent me up to attend the Arkansas Press Institute, which is, you know, a seminar. I got some good information there.

JM: Where was that?

DR: It was in Reston, Virginia.

JM: Oh, the American Newspaper Publishers Association. Reston, yes.

DR: Yes. Right. American Newspaper—yes.

JM: Yes. Walter sent me up there for that one time, too. It was still in eastern Pennsylvania then.

DR: Yes. That was really interesting. It was. And especially—that was about the time we were considering the free want ads, so it was interesting.

JM: Yes. Which high school did you graduate from?

DR: I graduated from John Reagan High School in Houston, Texas.

JM: Okay. Now, then, we've recounted all this battle over the free want ads. You retired in 1988 from the *Democrat*. Is that correct?

DR: That's right. Yes.

JM: And then you—I presume, not too long after that—that you became a minister. Is that correct?

DR: That's true. Yes, I worked for a year as the interim director for the Union Rescue Mission and their ministry to help indigent people—you know, poor people out on the street—help give them a home. That was a really interesting ministry. But I was there just while they did a national search for a new director to come in. And then I went from there to First Baptist Church in Gillett, Arkansas. I was there for a number of years, and then went to Victory Southern Baptist Church in Conway and was there for a couple of years. And then my most recent church was Briarwood Baptist Church in Cabot and have been there for about seven years now.

JM: Are you still the minister there?

DR: I have retired there and stepped down. The church—when I went there, we met in

two mobile homes—one for Sunday school and one for worship. Since then, we've built a new worship center that will seat 300 people and had it all paid for in four years. And now [we] have started on a 17,000 [square foot] youth center that will cost about a million dollars. That's under construction right now. But when I retired, an interesting thing happened. About a year and a half before I retired, they called my son, who is also an ordained Southern Baptist preacher, to be their associate pastor. So he and I got to work together in ministry for about a year and a half, and that was just wonderful. When I retired, then they called him to be their pastor.

JM: Okay.

DR: So that's kind of—and now I fill in at churches, you know, around—from time to time, and when they ask me to come and speak. I enjoy fishing and playing golf and oil painting. I'm a little bit of an artist—not a very good one, but that's my hobby. And, of course, my wife and I have twelve grandchildren, so now I get to spend more time with grandkids. So I'm enjoying my retirement.

JM: Is your son still a pastor out at that church?

DR: He's still the pastor at Briarwood Baptist Church, and my wife and I still attend there.

JM: Oh, do you? Okay, Dave. Now, I'm just wondering if there's anything else that you can think of on the *Democrat* and the battle with the *Gazette* that we didn't touch on that you need—anything else you can think of that you need to go back and talk about on those issues?

DR: I can't really think of anything, Jerry. You know, really, these notes that I've kind of glanced at this morning were things that I wrote down just this very morning,

and are things that I've remembered. You see, I left in 1988, so what is this?

JM: 2006.

DR: So that's been almost twenty years ago.

JM: Yes, it has.

DR: So surely I've forgotten some things, but I think I've touched on most of the highlights.

JM: One thing. Were you aware before you went to the free classifieds and, say, the year or so in there that you were the ad manager—were you aware of how desperate the *Democrat's* financial situation was at that time? Did you know what was happening with circulation and finances and everything?

DR: I knew what was happening. I did. Paul Smith and I became really close. He not only was my boss, he was the ad director then—of course, since, became the general manager and now the president of the company. But he and I became really good friends. He went through a divorce during the time I was there, so I was able to pray with him and kind of help him through that. So he and I became really close friends. He would share some things with me about what was going on inside and about how serious it really was. So he had great concern and, of course, I did, too. Yes, we just—I mean, when Walter pulled the stops out and went for everything, it was an absolutely—those were desperate moves.

JM: Yes.

DR: And we didn't know—it was *hard* back then, Jerry. Really hard. Hard on my family, because we never knew if the *Democrat* would make it or not—whether I'd have a job for long or not. But, my goodness, what a miracle it turned out to be. What a turnaround.

JM: Yes. A big surprise to, I guess, everybody that had watched newspapers over a period of time, that it turned out that way.

DR: Yes.

JM: Okay, Dave. If you can't think of anything else—well, I think we've really covered that aspect of the newspaper war very thoroughly, and as everyone has said, that was one of the really significant developments and perhaps the first big one that happened at that time.

DR: Of the newspaper wars that I knew anything about, probably the most lopsided competition was in the Little Rock market between the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*. I just stand amazed to this day that it came out like it did. It's an absolute miracle.

JM: How aware were you of what was going on at the *Gazette*—how they were responding or not responding? Did you have any feedback on what was going on over there?

DR: Well, you know, we would hear things—well, from advertisers. The *Gazette* would laugh with an advertiser and make fun out of this and make fun of us and talk about how desperate we were. And, which, of course, that was sure true.

JM: Yes.

DR: But they just really—they were so fat and sassy and arrogant. I think advertisers in Little Rock maybe were ready for a change, so we came along with a heart to serve, and worked hard, and just went right in and ate their lunch. Just stole it away from them. They responded so slowly. This didn't have to happen.

JM: You think that if they had responded earlier and quicker that they might have won the war or at least still be in business?

DR: I think both newspapers would have been—see, Walter went to them and offered

them a Joint Operating Agreement.

JM: Yes, I knew.

DR: And they turned him down. No, I think today—if they had responded—if they had someone in there who—if I had been there, I certainly would have been talking a lot different than the way they were responding.

JM: Yes.

DR: I'd be saying, "Look, these guys are *serious*. You better respond to this. Let's make some changes. Let's start treating the advertisers right. If they want a fight, let's *fight*. We've got all the resources. We can win this thing, easy!"

JM: Yes.

DR: But they didn't do that. They just sat back and thought it was just—there's no way. They were so big and so powerful, there is no way—with eighty-five percent of the revenue—the difference in the circulation of the two papers—there's no way they could lose this war.

JM: Okay, Dave. Very good. Well, you gave me a really good picture of all those developments over time, and I really appreciate your cooperation on this.

DR: All right, Jerry. Glad to help. I hope it was a help in some way.

JM: It'll be a big help. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce101006]