

Gazette Project

Interview with

Thomas Hamburger,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
18 September 2000

Interviewer: Anne Farris

Anne Farris: Start off by telling me what years you worked there because I don't know that.

Thomas Hamburger: I came to the *Arkansas Gazette* from the *Pine Bluff Commercial* in 1975, and I worked in Little Rock. I think it was at the end of 1975. So, 1975, the last couple months of 1975, the entire calendar year 1976 and in mid-1977, I left to go to work for the state desk for the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

AF: Oh.

TH: So Jimmy Jones and Matilda Tuohey were my [coworkers] when Ward Boody left the Washington bureau in mid-1977, and they invited me to come to Washington. So I had two terms there. One was 1976-1977 and another was 1978 until 1982, late 1982. The latter in Washington.

AF: The latter . . .

TH: In Washington.

AF: Tenure in Washington.

TH: In Washington, the Washington bureau.

AF: Right, right. Now, what compelled you to go back?

TH: To the *Gazette*?

AF: Yes.

TH: I guess not even — you know, I never really left. I had — even though I had been in Arkansas just a couple of years, it was the most intense and vivid experience, and my dearest friends were there. And I adored the *Gazette* and we'd been — I was working on the state desk to which Boody reported when he was in Washington, and everyone complained about him on the state desk at the time. I think that I didn't particularly . . .

AF: Why? Why?

TH: Because he wasn't an Arkie, and he was hired by, hired by, I can't remember, he didn't really know, he was a Washington hire.

AF: Right. But were they fair, or was it just an Arkansas bias?

TH: I don't think it was. It was Matilda Tuohey, "Tiger" Tuohey bias.

AF: "Tiger" Tuohey?

TH: Did you know that was her nickname?

AF: No, I didn't. I did not.

TH: Oh. Now, surely, Roy and you will get cassettes full of stories about "Tiger."

AF: I am sure we will.

TH: The first, one of the first women news reporters in the state I guess.

AF: Right.

TH: Covered 1957 and was an absolutely terrific reporter. There's never been — Matilda's nickname was "Tiger."

AF: “Tiger” because she was tough and aggressive or . . . ?

TH: I think so. She had a very gruff exterior. She had — when I first came to the *Gazette*, I started to work on the state desk, and “Tiger” would just come off when you would ask for something and only four of us working on the desk.

AF: Only four?

TH: Jimmy Jones, Wayne Jordan, Ginger Cyrus, and myself. We had a stringer out in Fort Smith.

AF: And you all were responsible for covering the entire state?

TH: We covered sort of out state. We didn’t cover beyond the metro stories.

AF: Right, right.

TH: Yes, for the entire state.

AF: So did that entail traveling a lot?

TH: Let me finish my “Tiger” story.

AF: Okay, sorry. I have so many questions to ask you.

TH: She came in and she didn’t speak to me and Jimmy Jones, who had taken over as state editor just that year shortly before I arrived or about the time I arrived from Leroy Donald.

AF: Right.

TH: Jimmy said, “Oh it takes ‘Tiger’ at least a year before she will talk to anyone.”
[Laughs] She didn’t bother learning names either and particularly Yankees.

AF: Oh, my.

TH: But we became fast friends, which I think happened with a lot of particularly

single men I worked with at the state desk or working at the paper. And she had the reputation for being tough and gruff, and she was really surly with people, but then she wouldn't care particularly for Boody every day when she would call in. Just hang up the phone and wouldn't say good bye. [Laughs]

AF: Hang up on him?

TH: Yes. And he used to let her, but she was a most wonderful, warm, really generous person.

AF: Deep inside.

TH: Yes, wasn't so deep.

AF: Not so deep.

TH: Yes, it was terrific. She was anything but a "Tiger."

AF: Yes. How did you befriend her if she was so gruff? You weren't put off by her?

TH: She had to do a lot of babbling, and I was pretty worried about her at first, you know. She would grumble about errors in the copy. What did I — I was always forgetting to put the apostrophe in "it's" when I was writing "it is" or contracting "it is."

AF: Right.

TH: And, you know, I had been there a week and, apparently, I had written this several times, and she said, "If I have to do this again, I'm going to wring his neck" [Laughs] And she had to do it several times, but we became very good friends, and it didn't take long. I wish she was still alive. I hope somebody interviewed her before she died, just last year. She had the greatest collection of

Gazette stories and also story, part of the gruff exterior was all about being a woman.

AF: Well, that is what I was going to ask you. How did she fare in that newsroom at that time as a woman? Was she accepted?

TH: She was accepted, but I think in part it was accepted in a way that a lot of other women — really it's not even that generation; it's our generation as well — had a very tough time kicking into the news business.

AF: Right.

TH: It was hard news. And if you wanted to, you really had to assume a lot of the affect of the male reporters.

AF: Right.

TH: And not only do what they did, but do it better.

AF: Yes.

TH: Which meant drink hard, curse, you know, affect a cynical pose and take on the tough stories, and she did all of it.

AF: Right.

TH: She cursed like a sailor. She was very funny, very well read, never married. She used to travel the globe, loved going to Third World countries. [Laughs]

AF: Oh, wow.

TH: And she would send us different photographs.

AF: Well, she must have been terribly enlightened. She was not parochial.

TH: Oh, no, not at all. She was a voracious reader. She'd bring in books. She loved

anyone who read books also, and she always kept a stack of them by her desk.

AF: Right.

TH: And she read both murder mysteries, and she read political non-fiction. She loved, devoured, campaign books each year. She was a real news person, just fabulous. Interested in everything.

AF: Yes.

TH: Loved to drink. Loved to cook.

AF: Was she always on the state desk?

TH: I think that she — no — because she went city side during 1957. I think she worked for [Bill] Shelton.

AF: Oh, well, yes.

TH: As a reporter she had some very tough assignments, and then when she sort of moved up to editor, I think she edited all the time at the state desk.

AF: Right.

TH: And we used to pick, Boody used to like to call in his stories. This was in the days of telefaxing and so forth, but often he would go to a bar. He was close friends with the Carter Administration, bilkers like him, Jody Powell, and frequently he wanted to call in stories from his favorite watering hole. And “Tiger” would get right out. “Tiger” got the call, which was usually the case.

AF: Yes.

TH: “Boody, Boody, I can’t hear you. I can’t tell what kind of a story it is. I can’t hear you. Damn.” And smash down the phone on him. [Laughs]

AF: And then he would have to call back from some quieter place.

TH: And hope to reach someone else.

AF: [Laughs] That's great. So were these your mentors? How old were you? You were pretty young.

TH: Twenty-three, twenty-four.

AF: Yes.

TH: Jimmy Jones was the state editor, and I was his young reporter, and I think he thought highly of me because the first assignment, and my most frequent assignment, was to go to Hope to cover the watermelon festival. Do a profile of that lunatic editor down there who used to write the column slice "Our Daily Bread, Sliced Thin by the Editor."

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: The remodeling of the Holiday Inn, just crazy stuff. Jimmy was from Hope, and his daddy was the school superintendent.

AF: Oh, I didn't know that.

TH: And so Hope was the center of the universe, and that's where we were. That's where all stories . . .

AF: That's what [Bill] Clinton says, right.

TH: Well, Clinton made it up, for Jimmy it was true.

AF: Right, you mean it was before Clinton.

TH: Jimmy never left. I mean when I was on the state desk. Let's see, Jimmy pinned, arranged for me when I was covering the watermelon festival, to have dinner at

his house with his daddy.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: Superintendent of school and everybody knew. It was so bizarre for a kid from Newark. The one thing, he would tell you this custom — I assumed it's a custom. I never encountered it anywhere before or since — and having Miss Jones prepare the meal for us, which was served on a table cloth in a very modest home, I could see it now, but she had the table cloth out and I think linen napkins, and she served us, Mr. Jones and me, lunch and then she left and ate in the kitchen.

AF: Oh, my. That's archaic. [Laughter] Wow.

TH: But I thought, "Aren't you going to join us?"

AF: Maybe it was like a men's lunch, where men were going to talk business.

TH: I think that is part of the point, but I was told that Jimmy's wife, or his first wife anyway, used to do this, was required to do the same. [Laughs]

AF: Well, my — banished to the kitchen.

TH: So it was really weird.

AF: Yes, that is strange.

TH: And then we went around. Mr. Jones took me around and introduced me to his successor as the school superintendent, and we actually met everyone.

AF: So it was great for you in covering it because, of course, you immediately have this source in school. Not only are you covering school issues . . .

TH: I wasn't covering the school. It didn't matter. It was a social visit.

AF: No, yes, right, right.

TH: In fact, the newspapering was very social, too. Part of it was I think Jimmy's saying, "I'm sending our new hotshot down. I hope you have me go." And all his friends — Swampy Graves, who was in Nashville.

AF: Oh, yes, yes.

TH: And Jake — Jake Mahaffee in Texarkana. Does that name ring a bell? Did I get the right name?

AF: No, not to me.

TH: He was that kind of legendary editor who Jimmy had worked for and basically everyone in his past, and I would go interview these people and write profiles.

AF: What is that a job?

TH: It was. I had the best time. I loved Hope, and I loved the watermelon festival.

AF: I've been there. [Laughs] That's great.

TH: It was kind of a — I mean it's in part — they are wonderful people who you meet there, and they are all, every time you turn around, there is another Diane Arbus singing.

AF: Yes. [Laughs]

TH: Very peculiar looking people with bullet heads lining up for watermelon with a forklift. [Laughs] Off a rusty pickup.

AF: True. I am sure you were probably just wide eyed, I mean, not only by seeing the watermelon festival, but just by the news tradition.

TH: I was there during the historical moment of conversion from hot type to cold type.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: They still had the Linotypes in the back shop. They put all the terminals in the newsroom, but they still had the Linotype.

AF: Right. So was it a slow conversion or it did just overnight? How did that happen?

TH: I don't know. You know, when you are twenty-two it may have seemed slow. I'm not sure. I am sure it seemed very fast to the Linotype operators.

AF: Right. [Laughs]

TH: Who were great guys, but I mean that smell there in the back shop — and some pages were hard type and some were cold. And so you would have sort of — you would have to see both those systems working, and you would have to when you did things in the back shop. It was a thrill — big-city newspaper.

AF: Yes.

TH: *Gazette* seemingly.

AF: But during the time in which you had to file your story?

TH: I don't think so.

AF: You had typewriters.

TH: We had typewriters.

AF: Yes.

TH: To start. Then we converted to these . . .

AF: PC's? Personal computers.

TH: Not PC's, they were network. They were called — I can't remember what the

system was called. They went out of business one after the other, but . . .

AF: I remember when we converted, but I can't remember what.

TH: Before that, we filed with copy paper and carbons.

AF: Were there boys who came and got your — how did you — did you walk it yourself over to the editor?

TH: We just put it in a basket. We were right next to a news desk.

AF: Yes.

TH: And we just tossed it in. I think that's what — I think it went to "Tiger" and then over to Bill Rutherford.

AF: Yes.

TH: In that old kind of wonderfully seedy *Gazette* newsroom before remodeling. Wood floors everywhere, ink stained, and there were just the giants of Arkansas journalism that would walk through that room. Every one of them looked like a character or something larger than life. Orville Henry, who I got to know very well years later, you know, the guy who, legend had it, saved the *Gazette*. He would walk in with his pork-pie hat, and it looked like he never changed clothes, and his posture was perfect, and he would walk back there. The unruly mess back there in the sports department.

AF: Yes.

TH: And Ernie Dumas, who was a critical reporter and sort of, you know, he was the — this was the great — these were the gods on Mount Olympus.

AF: Yes. I mean, you know he had the quickest mind.

TH: He had worked at the *Pine Bluff Commercial* . . .

AF: Quickest mind of anyone — of any journalist I knew or ever knew. Amazing.

TH: How is he doing?

AF: How is he doing?

TH: You know he had open heart surgery.

AF: No.

[Tape Stopped]

AF: There is not enough. [Laughs] Oh, I know. All right we are on.

TH: We're having a great time.

AF: Good. All right, so where were we?

TH: Dumas.

AF: Dumas. Yes.

TH: Just what it was like in that newsroom?

AF: The job.

TH: The move to the *Gazette* was such a — you know, I worked in Pine Bluff before I got there. I'd always — I'd heard of the *Gazette*. I knew about it as one of the great papers and the way of — in Arkansas and not worked for the *Gazette* is to really to appreciate its power and influence.

AF: Right. Now you did feel like you are sitting in the middle of something great?

TH: Yes.

AF: I mean that doesn't happen much in life. You know, I mean . . . [Laughs]

TH: No, I have never had a feeling that compared with it.

AF: Right.

TH: And I went on, you know, worked for much bigger newspapers and bigger organizations, but that was exactly the way it felt. I was very conscious when I was there of being part of something that was great. The history of the *Gazette* was always — it was really front and center in everybody's mind. And one of the things that struck me when I got there in 1975, 1976, J. N. Heiskell had been dead for how many years by then? Many years by then.

AF: Yes.

TH: But he was still alive in that newsroom. You would hear people on the copy desk — I'd sit by them — who would still give as an answer for why they made some copy editing change, "Mr. J.N. says."

AF: I would like to meet these people.

TH: I'm sure it was kind of — that may have been done with a bit of levity, but it was big. I mean, I remember all sorts of things, the odd spelling of Vietnam, which I was occasioned by in many a story. You know, the *Gazette* style is not to separate it into two words: it's one word. "Mr. J.N. says."

AF: Yes.

TH: Then 1957 was, of course, huge and affected everybody. I think it was a — I've thought about it since — I think was a motivator for people that continued for decades after the event was done. And that has caused me . . .

AF: Motivated to?

TH: Of what newspapers can do, and there was a feeling that I am part of something

in this paper that had a very proud moment, that had a proud history. People told the stories all the time in the newsroom, about Bill Shelton, who was another one who didn't talk to anybody.

AF: I know.

TH: He was there when you were there.

AF: Yes, I know.

TH: And so, he was the embodiment . . .

AF: Probably still there. [Laughs]

TH: You know, he's still around, I understand. He, you know, he is the embodiment, he is the *Gazette*. He is a character of the word "doer." They ought to use that for the dictionary, just a picture of Shelton. [Laughs] The new dictionaries that have videos.

AF: Right.

TH: But everyone would quickly whisper the stories of Shelton when the woman came in — that's the segregationist woman who came in and spat upon him, and he just continued doing his editing, this calm figure in the storm. And we all knew that, and it gave a sort of appreciation to the senior people who were there and a kind of motivation to those who were younger.

AF: Right.

TH: And many newspapers don't have that kind of experience. Who does? There's maybe . . .

AF: Not many.

TH: Not many. They are really lacking something important.

AF: Right.

TH: There's the combination of it. One is this leadership, which continued decades after the guy, after Heiskell died. His persona was still haunting the place.

AF: Right.

TH: In a very positive way. And then this sort of personal, the conviction of the man made black and white. It made, it made *Gazette* editorials, Pulitzer Prizes — the combination of the two was very powerful and gave the newspaper a sense of itself.

AF: Right. I guess another reason by 1975, 1976, the same people were there. They hadn't left.

TH: Yes, that's true. [Laughs]

AF: I mean that's what the whole . . .

TH: Oh, yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: "Tiger" told about her interactions with Mr. J. N. They all cited this story about his last comment, which she thought we heard already.

AF: Oh, I think I have.

TH: When he retired.

AF: Yes, tell that anyway.

TH: "My one regret is that I can no longer fire Hugh Patterson."

AF: [Laughs]

TH: Hey, Dick. Fine, thank you. And you have had that story in abundance probably of Mr. J. N., right?

AF: Well, not from, I don't, but I am sure someone's taken it.

TH: Yes, everyone told it to me when I arrived there.

AF: Right. But I . . .

TH: So you got a sense of who everyone was and when Heiskell retired at the final dinner and there were toasts all around and lavish in his honor.

AF: Oh, is that when he said it? Oh, I didn't know that.

TH: And it was sort of his reaction to his retirement.

AF: Yes.

TH: And he said, "My one regret is that I can no longer fire Hugh Patterson." And I had stories of this woman whose name I will recall in a minute, who was the Fort Smith correspondent, Peggy.

AF: Part-time?

TH: It wasn't that, I know. She'd been there for decades in part because Mr. J. N. said. She had been — he didn't want to open a bureau, but he hired this stringer in Fort Smith, who was quite prolific.

AF: I don't know, no one I knew.

TH: And she told about coming to Little Rock for Mr. J.N.'s retirement, and she bent over and he had a hearing aid and he was kind of feeble — at this dinner honoring him, anyway.

AF: Right.

TH: She introduced herself, and he sort of grabbed her. I think he pulled her down either by him or onto his lap or something [] and said, “I know who you are darling. Talk to me for while.” And he just — this was a guy who had long since moved on, but was a huge figure.

AF: Right.

TH: And Trimble. I’ve read Trimble’s work, of course, and he just was — you know, I just remember getting a presence of these people.

AF: What made a lot of them such great writers? Those who were great writers — and there were a lot of them — boy, did they have raw talent or what?

TH: Well, I don’t know if I can — That’s, that’s a question for the ages, isn’t it? I don’t know.

AF: I know, you can’t define it.

TH: You could take someone like Trimble — Who do we think of as the great writers from that period?

AF: Oh, I think of Bob Douglas. You said Mike Trimble, and that’s what made me think of it.

TH: Trimble. I thought he was extraordinary. There was a guy that did the — Lancaster.

AF: Lancaster, right, that’s the other one I was thinking of.

TH: Who was there.

AF: Just . . .

TH: And I think there is exceptional writing in the South. In Trimble’s case, now this

is — I haven't met the man. I had heard some stories about him, but I didn't know what he would be like in person.

AF: Right.

TH: He was hilarious in print. He is even more hilarious in person. He is a natural, gifted storyteller. He was always telling about where he, you know, growing up in Bauxite — there was a Mexico camp for the Mexicans who were workers next to where he grew up. I mean these were fun. These were stories of another world. He was hilarious.

AF: And the anecdotes just flowed. And I don't think they took too much liberty in hyperbole. [Laughs]

TH: No.

AF: I think they were pretty much on the mark. [Laughs]

TH: Oh, I think so. Trimble's life was not, I mean Trimble's whole life story is in the headlines. You can't exaggerate that kind of stuff. Down to his marrying the ex-nun and playing canasta or whatever in the hell he is doing now. [Laughter]

AF: Right.

TH: Oh, when I was there he was quite the vagabond single guy.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: He'd come in kind of disgruntled some days and he'd say, "They turned my power off again. I forgot to pay the light bill." I remember hearing about a party at his house. I think it was before I got there, but they had, Mike also had trouble because they had great party at his house . . .

AF: No, I've not heard this story. These are great. I've heard lots of stories I haven't heard yet.

TH: And the party got out of hand and he was celebrating. This is so apocryphal, I'm repeating this probably fifth hand. But the party got, the party was so successful that they took all of his furniture out of his home — I think he told this — and they put it out on the lawn and built a bonfire. He organized it, but they, you know, can't remember. Maybe they didn't have power and they needed the heat, I don't know, but all the furniture was gone the next morning, and Mike woke up on the floor.

AF: With no furniture. Yes. [Laughs]

TH: And, you know, stories like this abounded there.

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: Jeb Smith waking up wherever he was and just didn't know what happened the night before, but he'd brush something off his face and it was a black brassier. [Laughs] And then I attended some parties that were like that. They were just wild. Good parties.

AF: Talk about the culture in the newsroom, too. I think that's . . . Did they assign you stories when you first got there, when you worked on the state desk? Did "Tiger" say, "Get out there and run this down" or . . . ?

TH: Well, I think, you know, one of the things that I had come to really . . . I was so thrilled with Arkansas. I just loved being there. And here I was on the state desk, far from the . . . So I got to go to the best stories in the wildest places.

AF: I know.

TH: I was in that section, what is it, sort of north of Jonesboro? I don't think there were many paved roads around there.

AF: No.

TH: And one of, an economist at Arkansas, some Arkansas technical college, in a poor city. Where I don't know.

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: Walnut . . .

AF: Yes, there's one up there.

TH: Walnut Ridge, Walnut Ridge.

AF: Yes, right.

TH: Had written the chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank. He had written an ad saying, "We believe in something about monetary policy, and if anyone challenges us on this, we will debate them anywhere, anytime." This guy challenged him, and they ended up having a debate in Walnut Ridge.

AF: In Walnut Ridge?

TH: And it turned out to be, and this guy from New York . . .

AF: Came down?

TH: The chief economist of Chase Manhattan Bank flew to Memphis and then took a limo over to Walnut Ridge. Past Crowley's Ridge, you know. It was such a fabulous tour. The whole town and everybody from all way from Helena, Mariana, and Paragould, this was the social event of the season.

AF: Because they hadn't seen a limousine? No, I was just kidding.

TH: No, it was just such a cool thing. It was national. It was national. You know, it became, you can imagine, it became a national story.

AF: Right.

TH: And this guy, who had — maybe he had his master's degree in economics — had challenged the chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank.

AF: Took him on.

TH: Took him on, but in a way he was, he was completely blown over by the guy in the debate, but that isn't what counted. It became a moment of pride for this community. They built a new auditorium.

AF: Right, yes.

TH: There was a cocktail party before and a big buffet dinner afterwards. There was something out at one of the old plantations, and so we wrote it sort of like a social story.

AF: Cool. I think it was. Yes.

TH: And everybody who was anybody was there, you know. Anyway, I sent the stuff back to "Tiger," and she was just thrilled. She loved social stories. It was such a window into what was going on.

AF: Right.

TH: Swisher had hilarious cartoons about the limousine asking for directions in Possum Grove.

AF: That's great.

TH: So, so we, let's see, I had, I thought I had the best stories in the state. Well, we were jokingly talking about everything was in Hope.

AF: Right.

TH: There was the watermelon festival.

AF: Yes.

TH: And then get up in the hills some and I got to do a — I had my favorite statewide was from the town I just mentioned Possum Grove. Possum Grove, which never incorporated, and one other towns near it were losing their post offices. And we went, and I interviewed the old postmistress who was close to ninety and weeping when they were closing it down. Even Senator McClellan couldn't do anything for it.

AF: Oh, if your senator can't do anything for you, something is wrong.

TH: There wasn't anyone who lived there anymore.

AF: Right, right. [Laughs] It's the only reason. Oh, wow.

TH: So the state desk was the place to be. I remember . . .

AF: I guess.

TH: Every day was like, I thought it was like a — You know, the whole — the news business was such a hateful place, and you would go into that newsroom and Jimmy Jones and Matilda would ask me to go someplace or pick a — The assignments were all wonderful. I went to some place I'd never been before and it was out state Arkansas.

AF: Right.

TH: And the *Gazette* was so open to me as a writer.

AF: Yes, definitely.

TH: If you had an idea, something you wanted to write about, go ahead.

AF: Right.

TH: So long as you did your turn writing obituaries, which I also liked.

AF: I bet those can be fun.

TH: Oh, they were. The whole experience was good. My favorite was calling. We had to call the funeral homes — or maybe we called them back. I can't quite remember. I think we called them, to see what they had. And then we called Gross Mortuary, in Hot Springs. The guy who would answer the phone had that very rather common Southern name of Stich. But I was a Yankee. I didn't know it before, and I thought he was saying Stiff. He'd say, "Gross Mortuary, Stiff speaking." [Laugh]

AF: S-T-I-C-H, Stich, right.

TH: Right. But somebody was saying. . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 1]

AF: Now. So tell that — she was a stringer at first.

TH: She was a stringer at first, and she was living in Fayetteville. I don't remember why, but she was. She was a terrific writer and reporter and did lots of stringing for the *Gazette*, and I can't tell you how long a period of time. It was probably just a few months.

AF: Before she came . . .

TH: To Little Rock.

AF: Yes. This is good.

TH: So there was a, it was a mostly Arkansas crew, but there were people who'd been — let's see, it was this sense of it being a big and a national drawing card. And there were people who came in periodically, especially the longer that I was there.

AF: Right.

TH: At first it seemed more, maybe a little more Arkansas then, and then more — I think as Hugh got increasing worried about the *Democrat* and them bringing in more consults.

AF: Right. Talk about Hugh Patterson.

TH: Well, I got to know Hugh in — First, he was just another of these figures who would walk through the newsroom, and this is the publisher from central casting.

AF: He was.

TH: With that flowing hair and booming voice of his.

AF: And ruddy cheeks.

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: And he had this patrician air about him and very delicious. But I didn't know him very well in Little Rock. There were . . .

AF: Well, you probably wouldn't.

TH: No.

AF: Because he was not, you know, when he came to the newsroom, he didn't linger a lot.

TH: No.

AF: I mean, you know . . .

TH: He would occasionally post notices on compliments he'd received by mail from one salesman or another on the bulletin board, with a little petit that said, "A compliment to be shared by all." Written from the guy hawking comics or something.

AF: What was the word about him in the newsroom?

TH: Well, he had the famous railroad car out by the — he had a railroad car that was ornate and kept on a siding someplace. That was his personal retreat for drinking and assorted activities.

AF: No, I didn't know.

TH: And it was apparently quite plush and had a fancy bar, and I never saw it. I always wanted to. But just the idea of having this was pretty wild.

AF: Really, really.

TH: In some ways he was the publisher, too. He was a little remote. He'd call his managing editor Bob Douglas and have Bob Douglas tend to it. There was something. Maybe it's the comment of J. N. Heiskell that made me think he was viewed a bit — it was clear to me that he was the son who'd married in this paper. And that he had succeeded Heiskell and those must be enormous shoes to fill. I think the feeling in the newsroom was — this is how I remember it — was

that he couldn't fill, he wasn't really quite up to it. I think . . .

AF: Right. Think he was supposed to be a figurehead, or was he more substantial than that?

TH: Well, I had two different views of him, but my view at the time was that he was kind of a figurehead, kind of a bumbler who looked the part. And lived very well and liked it and was sort of more into the apparatus associated with being publisher than actually J. N. Heiskell was, which was engaging in the substance of it. That was the rep. I am not sure it was right.

AF: Right.

TH: And then I since have heard from Hugh, confirmed by Dumas, who heard it from Harry Ashmore, of course, that the person — and he told me the story when I was back in Little Rock this last year covering the Clintons at the Daisy Bates memorial. Hugh and I — I ran into Hugh and we had lunch. And he told me that it was he who, in 1957, saw the opportunity and even recognized it at the time, to do what was right, with the newspaper and the stand and everything.

AF: Wow.

TH: And that Mr. J. N. was actually not as enlightened. He was a very, he was actually — Mr. J. N. was the law and order type. He didn't like defying the federal courts, but he wasn't particularly — he was progressive in many ways, but his attitudes toward race and desegregation were not among them. And it was Hugh who pushed for it.

AF: That's very interesting.

TH: And I have, if you want, that can be another discussion, but I have a tape of that. And Dumas, I told Dumas the story, and he said that Ashmore told him that that was the case. That it was Hugh who had made the case to J. N. when they talked on Sunday, the Sunday after to find out what the *Gazette* should do.

AF: Well, Patterson sure didn't get the credit for that. I mean that's not what was — I think it was J. N. who got all the credit for, you know, what the *Gazette* did.

TH: In the newsroom and then maybe in the public mind.

AF: Yes, right.

TH: I think that some of Harry Ashmore's books make brief reference to it and credit Hugh some, but . . .

AF: Yes, but I mean, overall, publically he is not the one credited.

TH: Yes.

AF: Maybe just because he was not at the top of the editorial board masthead.

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: So . . .

AF: That's interesting. So there was perhaps more substance there than met the eye.

TH: Well, than he was reputed to have.

AF: Right.

TH: Because I couldn't really judge at that time. I didn't have my contact with him in those early years. I did later on when I moved to Washington. He was very interested in maintaining his ties to the national Democratic Party politics.

AF: Right.

TH: And one of the jobs that the Washington correspondent to the national conventions, then at meetings — publishers meetings, was to look after Hugh a little bit and we'd see his wife.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: There was one story that I love. Struck me sort of as the plain talk of the old newsroom. This also occurred before I got there and might be apocryphal. But you remember that little sort of roof — you could go through a small door and be out on the roof — outside the newsroom?

AF: Yes, yes.

TH: There was a randy copy editor, a woman copy editor — for many years we desegregated the copy desk — who used to go out there on occasion and have sex with a lover or various lovers from the newsroom. And the roof wasn't visible to anyone but Hugh. When he was standing up, he could see out there.

AF: Wow.

TH: And apparently he was standing up and saw something that did not appeal to him going on on the roof, and he immediately did what a publisher would do. He called Douglas on the phone.

AF: Right.

TH: And said, "I want you to put a stop to this." And Douglas wrote one of the memos — memos were posted on the newsroom wall in those days when it was mostly male newsroom — anyway, it just said, "To staff. From Bob Douglas.

No fucking on the roof.” [Laughter]

AF: That is so Douglas, too. I thought you were going to say fraternizing, but no.

TH: No.

AF: It was just so Douglas. Oh, my.

TH: And, you know, nobody writes punchy sentences anymore.

AF: What a great story. I love that story.

TH: But that describes. It certainly is part of my memory now of the *Gazette*, part of the historical memory that I have, because you can imagine it happening.

AF: Yes, oh, yes.

TH: Whether it did or not.

AF: No, no, I am sure something like that happened. But also it, I think, exemplifies the type of just journalism there was. It was just one cryptic no-nonsense sentence.

TH: Right. Yes, right.

AF: I mean that epitomized the writing style even at that paper.

TH: Right, yes. And something about the translation as it came from publisher into the newsroom, too.

AF: Exactly.

TH: Because Hugh would have said [no].

AF: Yes, right, he would have, but Bob Douglas would not.

TH: Though Hugh could be, despite that pose that he had. He could be earthy himself.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: At the conventions we — There was only one convention that I attended actually for him, 1980, and Bill Clinton was governor and Hugh . . .

AF: Did Clinton go?

TH: Clinton went. Bill and Hillary went. And one of my jobs was to make sure Bill Clinton was invited and accepted Hugh's invitation to brunch at the St. Regis Hotel . . .

AF: Oh, really?

TH: . . . in New York and that he and Hillary attended and I should pick them up. And Clinton, as you might imagine, was networking like, I mean he was all over the convention.

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: And here is this twenty-four-year-old reporter from the *Arkansas Gazette* following him around saying, "Please come to lunch with the publishers." And . . .

AF: Now, that's not a responsibility that most reporters usually have.

TH: True, but this was *Arkansas Gazette*.

AF: Right.

TH: And the publisher wanted Clinton for lunch. And Hugh — remember Hugh was coming, and I became aware at this time of Hugh's sort of stature as a Democrat, as a liberal newspaper editor in the South, when we — there was a reporter's breakfast with Jack — Can you recall this guy's name? Carter, a Carter aide from Atlanta, one of the brightest guys who was domestic policy chief or something for

Jimmy Carter. Jack Hayes, Jack Fox, Jack — Anyway, it will come to me later.

AF: Yes, oh, gosh.

TH: There were these national reporters around. Jack knew a few of them, Adam Clymer and Johnny Apple and said hello. But most in the room he didn't know. And we went around the table, and then he says, "Oh, there's my dear friend Hugh Patterson."

AF: Interesting.

TH: And that would happen again.

AF: Tough guy? Okay, never mind, sorry. I know, I know who you are talking about, yes.

TH: But that would happen a few other times. We'd be walking down a hallway and there would be, you know, we'd see Alan Cranston, the senator from California, walking down the hallway, and he would say, "Hello, Hugh." And I don't remember that it was Cranston. It was just someone who was not from Arkansas, a national figure.

AF: Right, right.

TH: But Hugh Patterson was known to them.

AF: And Arkansas was not like it is today. People didn't even know where it was, so, you know, most people in America didn't know where Arkansas was. [Laughs] I remember the *Wall Street Journal* published an article about something going on in Arkansas, and it had a map and they had Arkansas above Oklahoma.

TH: Oh, come on.

AF: Yes, yes. It was like such — I mean, it was all over the newsroom. We were all laughing, and someone wrote them a correction and said — I don't know — whether it was Carrick Patterson or whomever — wrote them a correction and said, "You are going to get it, right. This is where Arkansas is." [Laughter]

TH: If I had known that, I wouldn't go there.

AF: Go back and find out. It was during the 1980s, like late 1980s sometime.

TH: Wow.

AF: But Arkansas is a small state, and I know the *Arkansas Gazette* was a prominent newspaper, but it showed what sort of inroads Hugh had with Democrats.

TH: In all sorts of things. I remember while we were there, the convention came just after, the then head of the Urban League, Vernon Jordan, had been shot in an assassination attempt.

AF: Yes.

TH: I believe it was in New York or maybe it was in — no Chicago, I guess. Whatever it was, Hugh was late to meet me at the some appointed meeting at the convention because he had visited Vernon Jordan in his hospital room.

AF: Yes.

TH: So this was a guy, this was a national figure. And he's known to all the publishers, of course. And he is very active. I think the group he was most active in is the Inter-American Press Association.

AF: Really?

TH: Which is the group that sort of promotes freedom of the press in Latin America.

AF: Yes, yes. Wow.

TH: When I came to Washington, I had a knock on my door, and it was the Russian correspondent for *Oristado de Brazil*, San Paulo's, one of the biggest newspapers in the world. That guy had a pretty big staff here. He just said, "Hugh Patterson suggested it. [He's] a great friend of our publishers and we all know him."

[Laughs]

AF: Wow. Now, did this help you as a reporter, to have Hugh sort of cutting a swath for getting to the sources?

TH: Working for the *Gazette*, working for the *Gazette* did. Hugh's legacy, which I think if you compared it — I don't know whether he made campaign contributions or not. I didn't bother looking that up at the time, but I am not sure of all of his — It helped in that, shortly after I arrived, I had this wonderful friend from San Paulo who was here that was great.

AF: Right, right.

TH: It wasn't the sort of entrees that I turned into sources on the — He wasn't close to the Arkansas congregational delegation at that point. J. L. Powell was very close to Bumpers, but even there there was a — never understood that an editorial was different, a little different than news, that we were at — He would attend all the big dinners in Washington, press dinners. There was one honoring William O. Douglas before he retired from the Supreme Court, and Hugh came up and brought Carrick and bought a table. And he invited his cousin, who was a legal affairs reporter for [cable network station] Court TV. It used to be CBS News.

You know that cousin, a first cousin of Hugh's, was Fred Graham.

AF: Fred Graham is a cousin of Hugh Patterson?

TH: Yes.

AF: Oh, I didn't know that.

TH: And at one time I think his family had an interest in the *Gazette*.

AF: Oh.

TH: I can't quite remember how it all worked. But Fred thought about working for the *Gazette* at one point. I don't think he actually did.

AF: Yes.

TH: He worked for the *Times* early in his career. But Fred was there, and Hugh would invite everyone to that. So he was a real he liked being a national personage.

AF: Yes.

TH: And he used his influence to do that, but not so much to help me with stories. We lived pretty well. We were doing regional reporting for Arkansas.

AF: Right. Well . . .

TH: And his connections weren't as strong there.

AF: I was wondering what kind of stories they were looking for. I mean, obviously you covered the Arkansas delegation there and very closely, but I wondered if Hugh had an interest beyond just Arkansas? Some of your coverage was more national and international out of Washington.

TH: Well, let's see. Remember, I had been on the state desk in the Boody era.

AF: Yes.

TH: “I can’t hear you, damn.” He [Boody] was calling in and . . .

AF: Right, now what happened to you then? When you got picked on.

TH: Yes, well, Matilda did not only feel — it wasn’t just that she couldn’t hear him. She didn’t want to hear him. Because Jim was calling in sort of tidbits about goings on in the White House in the Carter administration, which probably, at least in her view at the time — and this is what I absorbed . . .

AF: Right.

TH: . . . would have been terrific for the *Washington Post* probably, but not for the *Arkansas Gazette*.

AF: She’s right. She’s right about that, yes.

TH: And so it was pretty clear to me, and I think that is one of the reasons Jimmy Jones was eager to promote me for the job — he was in charge of Washington, and they wanted someone there not only who would respond to him, but also who would write news with a real understanding of Arkansas and an interest in it.

AF: Yes.

TH: And the perception was — whether it’s right or wrong — was that Boody had neglected the delegation coverage to do more of this sort of insider national stuff. And so I subscribed then, and still do, to the idea that the first job of a Washington correspondent for a regional paper is to cover . . .

AF: The region, things of interest to the . . .

TH: To that state or that region.

AF: Right.

TH: And more, and following what the representatives are up to is huge part of it.

AF: Right.

TH: That's what I did.

AF: So, was "Tiger" your editor or Jimmy Jones your editor when you were in Washington?

TH: Jimmy Jones was state editor. "Tiger" was assistant state editor.

AF: Okay.

TH: And . . .

AF: So you could get either one when you called in?

TH: Or Ginger was on the desk for awhile.

AF: Oh.

TH: But she moved up north to open the north. She was a stringer and then worked for the *Springdale News*.

AF: Oh.

TH: She wanted to move back to the hills.

AF: Oh.

TH: And there was a guy on the state desk named Steve, who was nowhere, who was kind of in the ranks of the AP. I wonder if you guys have his name, Steve Russo.

AF: Well, Steven Steed, but that would have been — that's not the same one because that would have been too early.

TH: No. No, it starts with a B and he was Oklahoma. I think he became quite famous during that Oklahoma City bombing because maybe he was the bureau chief

there.

AF: Oh.

TH: And he was kind of a kid. Much maligned by, abused by all of us, because he was our copy boy.

AF: Yes. [Laughs]

TH: He was our copy boy. He was a nice kid. From a small town in Arkansas. But I'd get one of those guys. They were my buds. You know, they were the people I liked, but they were much older than I was.

AF: Right.

TH: And we got along very well because I think I was doing, you know, the sort of coverage they were looking for.

AF: Yes.

TH: And they must have — I don't know what the inside discussion must have been like, but I think Jimmy must have gone out of his way to help me get that job. You know, I was a kid.

AF: Well . . .

TH: I wasn't in Washington.

AF: Yes, but you're good.

TH: But I think part of it was they were — you know, I was raised up by, these were my first editors. [Laughs]

AF: Right. Yes, they made you well.

TH: I knew journalism referred to by Jimmy Jones and Matilda Tuohey.

AF: Right.

TH: Which meant when you went to Jimmy's house, he — Matilda used to invite us over for wonderful dinner. She had a house in the Heights with a swimming pool. Everybody cooked steaks.

AF: Oh.

TH: Jimmy, though, used to invite us or he often when — I think he may have separated from Pat or she was away. I don't remember. He said, "You got to come over and try — I am going to make my special." So I get to his house, and I say, "What are you making?" He said, "My special recipe, creamed corn." And he would have left about six, and I was supposed to sort of close down the state [] state room.

AF: [Laughs]

TH: And it is nine o'clock and I think I am starved going to this dinner at the editor's house.

AF: Yes.

TH: And when we get there Jimmy's stirring this yellow mess on the stove. [Laughs] Going, "Yes, this is an old Jones family recipe. It's going to be a little while. Have a drink. How many fingers of scotch?" And it didn't matter what you'd say, you'd just get a tumbler full of whiskey.

AF: Yes.

TH: And I don't remember anything else that he made. I think it was just creamed corn. I got absolutely blotto by the time it came in. I could barely get up from the

chair. [Laughs] And I think Trimble was there and a couple of other people from the newsroom. I remember Trimble was there. He said, “Jimmy’s whole plan is to serve dinner around midnight. We’re so drunk all we can do is exclaim over it.” But he later said, “Isn’t it good? What do you think of the texture?”

[Laughter] He cared more about his creamed corn than he did a story.

AF: Isn’t that funny?

TH: I think Jones was a quite a good cook. I think it was very good corn. We might have had some barbecue with it.

AF: Right. [Laughter]

TH: We had to wait for the creamed corn, and it was about midnight when we ate. But the *Gazette* was a writer’s paper. I got interested from being at the state desk. I mean, I didn’t have any in it so, but it was the late 1970s and there was this pretty serious downturn in the farm economy. Arkansas was moving very rapidly towards corporate farming, as was the rest of the country. But I think it may have been extreme in some areas of Arkansas. And so I got it into my head that there was this social transformation going on.

AF: Why, there may very well have been.

TH: I think there was. The small towns were really depopulating quickly.

AF: Right.

TH: It was happening in every agricultural area.

AF: Right.

TH: So we wrote a serious [article about agricultural] change in rural Arkansas.

AF: Wow.

TH: But whatever you wanted to propose. You want to do that.

AF: They'd say yes.

TH: Good. Yes.

AF: But they . . .

TH: They'd give you comments on the side, like, you know, do an advance obituary on John McClellan or something. You would have to do something ghastly as hell, but you do that and you can go off for a few weeks travel all over the state.

AF: But that's what I wondered, if they gave you the time? If they'd say, "Yes, do that, but you still have to put out your daily copy?" So I mean . . .

TH: The crap desk or whatever you call it, the obits. Maybe I did that once a week.

AF: Right.

TH: And then sometimes you'd come in the morning and shovel some things out and then get out to McCurry or wherever you needed to go.

AF: Right, but they would give you the time and let you go.

TH: Yes, they, I think, they supported that.

AF: Yes.

TH: They were interested in it.

AF: Well, that's what made them a good newspaper.

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: They were willing to do it. They were sort of ambitious, and they certainly didn't

get in people's way. I remember "Tiger" told me when I came in — I went to this farmhouse and they got this, losing his farm and weeping. And she says, "After all, farmers are always crying." It's always the worst year.

AF: [Laughter] There is never enough rain. There is too much rain. There's not enough this — Yes. That's funny.

TH: But that was a nice challenge because I then had to prove to her that something was really going on out there.

AF: Right, more than just the normal crying. Yes.

TH: And so that was her way of — she challenged me. Challenged all of us all the time. And she was also quite a good writer and a really good, very precise editor.

AF: Yes.

TH: That joke about the it and it's serious.

AF: Yes.

[Tape Stopped]

TH: Then I remember, and then they sort of liked the idea of sending me to these odd things that were always going on around Arkansas.

AF: Right.

TH: There was a school desegregation fight going on in Eudora. Is that Eudora, Arkansas?

AF: Well, there is a Eudora, Arkansas, but I am not familiar with . . .

TH: I think it was Eudora, and I can't quite remember what it was. Why they were, maybe it was a busing issue. They had to call out the state police. And it wasn't

terribly ugly and it wasn't like the sort of thing that reporters . . .

AF: Right. Like Selma.

TH: Your father lived through it. Did he cover some of that or something?

AF: Yes. Oh, yes.

TH: This wasn't the Selma march.

AF: Yes. [Laughs]

TH: It was a little bit scary though. I got there at night and there was still a lot of teenagers on the street. And there was a lot of cops, state police cars out.

AF: Really?

TH: I wrote a sort of a story about the town, what the atmosphere was like. And I quoted some racial epithets from some of the kids. I got . . .

AF: Could you print those, to your recollection?

TH: I can't remember whether — I don't think anyone even said nigger. It was, you know, "Don't pollute our school," or something like that.

AF: Right. Yes.

TH: They quoted.

AF: I think that is an interesting journalistic point. I mean whether it is used verbatim or you know.

TH: The *Gazette* used verbatim, and the story had a lot of color in it, especially from that first night. I remember, because I got there late, after dark, and I had to file by 10:00 or something, so I only had a couple of hours. I was out on the street interviewing people quickly, and there were some outspoken black activists and

some outspoken white kids and, you know, put it together and the story was done.

AF: Right.

TH: But I remember the next day — maybe I stayed over two days, but came back [].

AF: What about doing stories that were unpopular?

TH: I got this call. It was the first really, really angry call I've had as a journalist. I had had some tough and angry calls, but this one, this guy was threatening to break my legs and . . .

AF: Yes.

TH: Oh, and he started it, you know, by saying, "You have ruined the reputation of our lovely town." And I thought he was going to complain that I had overdrawn the conflict. He said, "You ain't nothing but a nigger lover." Then threatened to break my legs.

AF: Oh.

TH: And this kind of stuff, you know. I hung up the phone and [called Jimmy Jones.] "He called you, too, huh." "Yes, he called Douglas this morning, he called the publisher, he's called everybody." [Laughter] And I said, "What are we going to do about this guy?" I wondered if I needed police protection. But, anyway, Jimmy's attitude, which was the same with anyone that criticized anything that we did, was fuck them.

AF: And you're doing your job.

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: And I sort of felt that there was this feeling also of being — the *Gazette* was very much that way.

AF: Right.

TH: You know there were not that many papers that size that had that strong feeling of standing for something bigger.

AF: Right.

TH: And . . .

AF: Well, I wonder too if — I mean, I think one sentiment of the paper was to give the readers what they wanted to know about. If they want the watermelon festival, we are going to give them a story about the watermelon festival because everyone wants to read about it. But also wonder if there was the sentiment we are going to educate the community, too, and give them more than they might want, but we feel we have a duty to do that, to publish certain stories.

TH: Sure, sure, we knew that was a huge part of it.

AF: Yes.

TH: It wasn't, it didn't happen to be a mood. It wasn't particularly part of my Washington assignment. They wanted that to be sophisticated.

AF: Oh, really? That's interesting.

TH: But I remember from my first days there learning about the wire desk and meeting Pat Carruthers, who was the wire editor. Was he the wire editor when you were there?

AF: Yes, yes. The best around.

TH: He was really terrific.

AF: But apparently he had been doing it for so many years that somebody else's — it was just second nature almost.

TH: Well, he just . . .

AF: He was so astute, and he was so worldly in his selections, I thought.

TH: Yes. And there was so much national and international news on the front page and everywhere else.

AF: Yes, yes.

TH: That was a huge part of what the *Gazette* was.

AF: Right.

TH: And Gannett wanted, saw to, or did undo that.

AF: Yes.

TH: But when I was there, I remember Pat telling me that he subscribed to as many wire services as the budget would stand. And you know we combined them, and he was very proud of that wire operation, which used to be called telegraph, I think.

AF: Yes. I forgot about that. [Laughs]

TH: I remember Trimble telling me. But I did get in trouble. People complained about me before I left and the response, was it because . . .

AF: Were any readers complaining?

TH: Readers or when I was doing, I did, you know the *Gazette* was very responsive, as

you were saying. I hadn't quite thought about it until our interview, but I thought the *Gazette* was very responsive if you wanted to do something ambitious.

ACORN [Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now] was growing in Arkansas, if you remember, a huge horse.

AF: Oh yes, I think that was the headquarters.

TH: Yes, it was. It started there.

AF: Yes.

TH: And I thought, "This is, you know, this is kind of national. Certainly a statewide political story that's growing, bubbling up. It's a really interesting group of people. They are always in the news in Little Rock."

AF: Right.

TH: And we should just find out who they are. And sort of get behind ACORN, get inside ACORN. They said, "Good, go do it."

AF: Right.

TH: And they did have me do it. But Wade got really very defensive because I started, you know — all of the organizers, of course, were generally from Ivy League schools. He came from Harvard.

AF: Right.

TH: And from out of state. And I was paying attention to all of that to do the story. I was quite in awe of what he was doing. Wade went berserk and started writing these letters of complaint in advance that the story was going to be biased and demanding that I be pulled from the story.

AF: Oh. And did they crumble under the pressure?

TH: Buckled.

AF: Yes. [Laughs] You know, you have such a great critical attitude to have.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

AF: But what about — So they gave you the nod philosophically and then would give you some time, but what money? What about budget? Did you . . . ?

TH: You mean, when I was in Arkansas?

AF: Yes. You know, the expense, or what?

TH: There was — the pay.

AF: And the pay was . . .

TH: The pay was pitiful.

AF: Yes. [Laughs]

TH: Wasn't it?

AF: Nobody seemed to care. [Laughter]

TH: No. It seemed like a lot. You know, I came from Pine Bluff.

AF: That's right.

TH: I started at Pine Bluff for \$95.00 a week, and I think when I went to the *Gazette*, I was making \$140.00.

AF: And that probably seemed like a lot.

TH: Oh, yes.

AF: You had hit the big time. [Laughs]

TH: Yes. And you know you had it — You could pay rent and go out drinking.

AF: Yes, on that low amount of money. Yes.

TH: When I worked at the *Gazette*, I moved in to a place we called the mansion. What did we call it? This old mansion had been subdivided into apartments on Lee Highway at Ridgeway near Dumas. And a whole bunch — Trimble had lived in there and then Ann Henry, who was Ann Bennett, the homes editor, lived there while I was there.

AF: Yes.

TH: And she became one of my best friends. And it was a hilarious apartment.

AF: Sort of like a *Gazette* dormitory almost.

TH: It was a *Gazette* dormitory.

AF: Yes.

TH: She had these five teenage daughters, just gorgeous girls, who were climbing in and out of the windows from my apartment to hers. I don't know what it looked like from the streets. I'd occasionally hear friends who would go by and people would honk at us. [Laughter] And we would sit out — it had this balcony and we got a table with a martini vermouth umbrella and we used to eat out there off and on. We'd eat out on the balcony and have so much fun. Oh, I was going to tell you the story of moving in. I moved from Pine Bluff, where I had rented a furnished place for the year I was there. And I didn't have any furniture. I didn't even have a bed. And the night that I moved, the first week that I started, I think I was sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag. I just didn't have time to get a bed. I

had to go to work.

AF: Right.

TH: I came home one Saturday night, and I came in the main entrance of the old mansion where it used to be, and the place was packed with people, including Jimmy Jones and Ernie and Anne. And they are in the middle of the room with a “Happy Birthday, Tom” across a double bed, mattress and box spring. The *Gazette* had bought . . .

AF: They bought you a bed. [Laughter] I love it. Wow, that’s great. Hey, what more could you ask for. When has a newspaper reporter ever bought you a bed since? [Laughter]

TH: And that was part of the *Gazette*, too. There was such a sense of comradery in those days.

AF: I don’t know why that place was unlike any other that I have ever worked in that sense. There was a similar sense of mission.

TH: Yes.

AF: And there was a certain type of person who was working there anyway, so you tended to get along with them. And we socialized outside of the office.

TH: Yes.

AF: But maybe those are the explanations — maybe you have some others, I don’t . . .

TH: It all depended on where I worked, but that was the small. When I worked in Pine Bluff, where we got pretty close too because it was intense.

AF: Yes.

TH: I think the *Gazette*, though, did have some sense of mission, a sense that you were special to be working for the *Gazette* and that you had been through something, and we even inherited the rights to feel like we had been through something even if we weren't there in 1957.

AF: Yes.

TH: That was really a stunning moment in journalism history.

AF: It was. It was.

TH: When I talked to Hugh about it, he said — when I talked about the risk they took, he said — “We didn't think we were going to lose. I guess it was a possibility. We lost a million dollars,” Hugh said, “in 1957 alone.”

[Tape Stopped]

TH: Thank you.

AF: Yes, you knew you were special if you were at the *Gazette*. And you knew it and you didn't take it for granted. You knew you had to stay there, too. You had to remain special. You couldn't rest on your laurels because everybody else was special, too.

TH: Yes. Ernie and Elaine described the way, too. You know Trimble. I read some of Trimble's “Arkansas Traveler” columns before he got fired. I think he got fired. [Laughs]

AF: Yes, but you read them?

TH: Yes, he was. He was still [].

AF: Ones that were never published?

TH: No, they published them for a matter of months, I think.

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: He was the best “Traveler” there ever was. He made fun of things everywhere he went.

AF: Yes.

TH: But also Jim said that he would stay up all night trying to figure out what to do. [Laughs] I am just remembering this story of — Well, most of the *Gazette* stories, of course, are apocryphal. [Laughter] I can’t remember when I lived through . . .

AF: Telling this first hand? [Laughter]

TH: I’ll skip that Trimble story.

AF: What about the competition? What about the *Democrat*?

TH: We really disparaged the *Democrat* when I was in Little Rock. It was just not considered a force in — we just felt like the *Gazette* was out running them and was better.

AF: Yes.

TH: That changed, of course. And the *Gazette*, on a story that I did, we didn’t have — the *Democrat* wasn’t as much of a statewide paper. Though they would do things like the Walnut Ridge story, they would be there. I remember being conscious of the competition and I remember some very good writers who were writing on page, and they had columns, they held a column, that sort of thing.

AF: Right. Well, do you think . . . ?

TH: It was good for us, but it wasn't a huge factor on the stories I was writing in Little Rock.

AF: Yes.

TH: In Washington it was.

AF: Oh, right.

TH: Hussman's sister was the first *Democrat* correspondent.

AF: Right.

TH: And she was replaced pretty quick, not long after I arrived, and was not happy about it. She was forced out by her brother.

AF: Oh.

TH: There was a series of people. One was a guy named Jeff Johnson, who was a good reporter and who is now editor of *Fresno Bee*. And then Pam somebody, who is now married to Ribertario, who worked at the *Gazette*. She had worked at the *Democrat* and came up here.

AF: And were you on speaking terms with these?

TH: Oh, yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: Actually, Hussman's sister was not very nice to me. She was on the correspondence committee. She just made everything hard.

AF: And you were a one-man bureau.

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes, right. Because now they have — I don't know what they have, two, three maybe or something. But do you think that the *Gazette's* smugness, and some people would even say arrogance, contributed to its decline?

TH: It may have been that they woke up too late to how serious the threat was. Journalistically, I always felt we were the, that they were sort of, that the political coverage was often nuts.

AF: The *Democrat*?

TH: Yes.

AF: Yes.

TH: The news was so reliable.

AF: Right.

TH: And our Capitol coverage was better. I took it as a matter of maybe we — you know, I knew we weren't supposed to be weak in Washington.

AF: Right.

TH: And I don't think we were very often. So I don't know that the *Gazette* was slowing. I didn't see that the *Gazette* was slowing journalistically. Lose our edge at some point. I don't know. I didn't see that.

AF: Yes.

TH: I never felt that the *Democrat* was surpassing the *Gazette* with the quality of its journalism.

AF: I never did either. You knew it was out there, sort of, as the competition.

TH: Yes.

AF: But it was not a serious threat.

TH: Oh, you know who they sent up for a while there? That woman who was [John Robert] Starr's protege.

AF: Meredith Oakley.

TH: Yes, Meredith was here for a little bit and at the convention.

AF: Oh, really?

TH: And it got sort of snippy again. [Laughter] But she was also a workaholic and she was imbued with this sort of Starr's craziness, I think. And she worked very hard, really did..

AF: Right. You know she was a force to be reckoned with. More so than probably anybody else over there. But . . .

TH: But there were very good people over there. Pam [], who was a really good journalist, and so was Don Johnson.

AF: Yes.

TH: So it wasn't, you know, it wasn't a — it was good competition, I thought, with those folks that I interacted with.

AF: Right.

TH: The Capitol, I don't quite remember who they had at the Capitol. Bob Lancaster was writing for them for awhile.

AF: Right. I know it is hard enough to keep track of the *Gazette* much less them.

TH: I know. But in Washington there was a similar kind of, and I loved that, challenge. I loved working for the *Gazette*.

AF: Oh, yes.

TH: There was a sense of being able to run. It could also be . . . It was always a place where you could sort of do what you — you know, they would give you your head.

AF: Yes.

TH: Sometimes watch them hand it to you. We could do — you know Carol Matlack and I did a series looking at Washington's budget power and how the South was getting all this money in defense appropriations but was really short changed in the whole of the formulas for . . .

AF: Welfare?

TH: Welfare, social welfare.

AF: Social policy. Yes.

TH: Energy assistance. Just any of that.

AF: Yes.

TH: Any of that stuff. All the formulas were skewed against us, and nobody really knew this. [Laughs] Because we're not on any list.

AF: Right, but that hasn't been . . . That's a good series.

TH: But you could do something like that and I remember you'd get a reaction. People would react to it. Such a satisfying state right. For the *Gazette*, right.

AF: Yes, people read your stuff. [Laughter]

TH: Yes, they never did in Pine Bluff. I never heard anything. But in Little Rock you know the Capitol and you would hear from the Clintons. I think it was on that

series on how the South was shortchanged, because he saw, he had in his mind that he was ready for Senate. [Laughs]

AF: Right, right. He needed a good [issue].

TH: But he would take off on that sort of thing. So, you know, I never encountered a place that was quite like that. Yes. And I do think, as I look back on it, that in some ways I wondered if . . .

[Tape Stopped]

AF: What happened on that invitation from Hugh to Clinton?

TH: He didn't want to go.

AF: Clinton did not want to go?

TH: Not really.

AF: Yes.

TH: Why does he want me to go there?

AF: Because Clinton didn't need to make Arkansas inroads?

TH: Right. Yes.

AF: He needed to make national inroads.

TH: And I just had to keep telling them that this is not something a reporter wants to do. I should have just said no, but I was twenty-five.

AF: Right, right.

TH: I told Hillary many times and they knew what was up. So they came over, stumbled out of their hotel at nine in the morning — who knew what Clinton had been doing the night before! [Laughs]

AF: Yes. Oh, boy, we all know! [Laughs]

TH: But, anyway, he stumbled out and came to Hugh's place and in which they served . . . Hugh was drinking Bloody Marys and they had some, and he'd ordered for us lobster crepes or something. You know the St. Regis Hotel. It's like being in a mausoleum.

AF: Yes.

TH: There were tapestries all over the place. I had never been in such a place. It was like a European castle. [Laughter] And Hugh's room, I remember, had tapestries hanging in it, and we were sitting [there] and we had just run out of conversation. And Clinton says, "You know, I hate to do this, but it's 10:30, I really have to go." And Hugh actually for about the last half hour had been terribly fidgety. He would keep calling down to the front desk saying, "Where is another lobster?" And then Clinton said, "I'm just going to go. I am sorry."

AF: Yes.

TH: "I had the governor of Arkansas on a settee in my room, and he is about to leave without a bit of lobster in his belly." [Laughter]

AF: The people at the St. Regis probably thought, "Who is the governor of Arkansas?" [Laughter]

TH: But then Clinton had to wait, and they sent this parade of guys. They were like out of a Marx Brothers movie. They came with silver and pushed trays and stuff. [Laughter] And they'd get this stuff out and then Clinton would get this saying, "You know, I really have to go."

AF: Why was it so important to Hugh that Clinton be there?

TH: I think that it was part of his, you know, he had a presence at these conventions, and he wanted it to continue into this next generation.

AF: Yes, and be known.

TH: And he and this young governor. He asked, you know, some inside stuff — what's going on and what do you think of Kennedy's speech?

AF: Right.

TH: I mean he's up on [politics].

AF: Right, and do you think . . .?

TH: And Clinton was very good in his answers.

AF: Right.

TH: But there was so much tension about the fucking lobster that I don't remember what they were. [Laughter]

AF: Exactly. Also maybe let Clinton know that he was a presence.

TH: Yes.

AF: Not only in Arkansas, but outside of Arkansas. And maybe that was important.

TH: I think so. I don't know if it was that important for Hugh or if I was the young reporter taking these instructions.

AF: Well, but he, it sounds like he was pretty bent on having Clinton there.

TH: Yes. He wanted Clinton there.

AF: Yes.

TH: "Please invite him and please have him here at [breakfast]." Clinton couldn't be

late. He wanted them there at 9:30 a.m. “Please have him here. You pick him up.” But I don’t know if I would have said, “Clinton can’t do it” or know what he would have done.

AF: Right.

TH: He had plenty of other people there.

AF: Yes.

TH: So I have to go, unfortunately.

AF: I know. I know.

[End of Interview]