

*Gazette* Project

Interview with

Wadie Moore,  
Little Rock, Arkansas,  
6 December 2000

Interviewer: Michael Haddigan

Michael Haddigan: The first thing I need to do, Wadie, is to briefly explain what the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History is about. I need to ask you for information during the interview. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you an opportunity to review the corrected transcript, at which time you will sign a release. All I need for you to do now is to tell me your name, indicate that you are willing to give the center permission to use this tape and make a transcription available to us.

Wadie Moore: My name is Wadie Moore, and the center does have permission to use this tape.

MH: First of all, let me just ask you, from what year to what year did you work for the *Gazette*?

WM: 1968 through 1991.

MH: Did you work exclusively in sports or did you work elsewhere?

WM: Yes, sports only. I started out part-time for a couple of weeks and full time the rest of the way.

MH: Let me ask you a little bit about your background, if I could. Where did you grow up, and where did you go to school? Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

WM: Sure. Little Rock all the way. I grew up in a small community out in West Little Rock, not too far from 12th and University now. I guess where University Parks is now is the neighborhood is that I grew up in. I went to the Little Rock public schools: Stephens, Dunbar, Horace Mann, and Philander Smith College. I was working at the *Gazette* while I was attending college.

MH: What about your family?

WM: I am from a very large family as a matter of fact. I have five brothers and five sisters. My father is Wadie Moore, Sr. He just turned 80. He is still alive and still working. He will not retire. He is in the pastry business at Shipley Donut in North Little Rock. My mother passed away at the age of 72 in 1994. I have five brothers and five sisters. My entire family is here in the Pulaski County area with the exception of one brother who stays in Vallejo, California, and a sister in Houston, Texas. So we have a pretty large family, but we stay pretty close together.

MH: Anybody else in your family involved in the news business in any way?

WM: No, never have been. I am the only one.

MH: How is it that you came to be interested in that kind of work? First of all, did you play sports in school? Was that a starting point, or school newspaper, or . . .

WM: Do you want the long version of this? [Laughter] I am serious, no one really

knows this. I can be totally honest because that is what you said. This is something no one—even my closest friends probably do not know. I played basketball in junior high. The coach wanted me to play in senior high. I made the football team in senior high. I didn't play basketball. I always wanted to work. I have worked since I was 13 at some job. If I was going to succeed in life, coming from a large family, I had to support myself. Not totally, 100%, but if I wanted the little extras, back then I had to. I always wanted to work. I got into it when I was in the tenth grade, DECA. It provided you with a job away from school. You went to school half a day, and you worked on the job the other half. I worked for a community shoe store. It was a shoe store that had a lot of problems with their customers stealing stock. Remember, I am 15 years of age, people coming in there and taking those shoes. They would just come in there and pull out the shoes and replace them and walk out the door. My manager, who was a female, thought I should wrestle them and stop them in the street. I said, "No, I can't do that." I know that's the long version. Eventually, because of that, they let me go. They wanted someone older in that position. I pretty much ran the store, lock-up, selling, but chasing folks with shoes in that neighborhood was not worth it. Not something I wanted to do at that age. I came back and without a job, I had to get out of that program. I had to become a full-time student. I had to pick other courses. There were two courses available: shop, which is bricklaying, and journalism. You're talking about somebody having a hard decision. I thought, "Oh, my gosh!" I have had shop. Every black kid that came up had to

take it in junior high. My older brothers did and had some experience in bricklaying. I was pretty good at it, but I knew that it was not what I wanted to do. So I said, “Well, I will give journalism a try.” I went in there with the nastiest attitude of anyone. I really did not want to be in that class. I had the greatest teacher in the world, Miss Rosetta Torrence at Horace Mann. She realized, I guess, eventually—she kept assigning us articles to write. She left it open. I would always write on the sports. She tried to encourage me to join the newspaper staff, but I wouldn’t. She tried to get me to join the annual staff, but I wouldn’t. Just about everybody in that class was a member of both. I made an agreement with her: if I didn’t have to join, then I would provide the articles for her. I’ll do these, if I just don’t have to join. I didn’t want to commit. So I did. Then my name started appearing in the newspaper, and people started noticing. I kind of liked that. She knew she had me hooked. The next year I became the sports editor of the paper and became the school photographer as well. As a matter of fact, at that school, I shot probably 80% of the pictures that we used in my junior and senior year. Not only shot them, but developed them and everything. Everybody thought I would go into photography rather than actual writing. I was a pretty good photographer. But it didn’t turn out that way. Anyway, that is how I got into it. A choice between bricklaying and journalism led me down that path.

MH: Let me just ask you and clarify a couple of things. The DECA program, I guess that is an acronym for something. What is that?

WM: It is DECA, Distributive Education Clubs of America. I can give you that. It's part of the program that I work with now. It is an activities program that is under our umbrella.

MH: Tell me what your position is with the activities.

WM: I am Administrative Assistant. [Note: In 2002, Mr. Moore serves as Assistant Executive Director of the Arkansas Activities Association.] I am in charge of all publications, public relations, media relations, sponsorship. That's the biggest part, bringing in sponsors for our activities so that we can put on shows like we did last weekend. That's pretty much it.

MH: What was the name of your shoe store? Do you recall what it was?

WM: Yes. I recall. I didn't think you would say anything. The name of it back then was Hills Brothers. It was on Wright Avenue, not too far from Wright Avenue and High Street, if you can recall that area of Little Rock.

MH: You didn't want to be chasing anybody down in that area.

WM: No. Well, really, there were two of us in the store. It was a shoe store and clothing store. They let both of us go.

MH: That worked out for you. It changed your career.

WM: Yes, it did. It was a blessing for me. I got along with the manager. There was no problem there. I just told her that I could not do the chasing down the street of these men taking the shoes. I told her I would point them out to her. I could understand their position as well.

MH: You got some by-lines in school and got pretty well established. You had the

skills and knew what the job was. Then you went to Philander and started school there?

WM: No. Just about everything that happened happened in high school, for me, landing a job. I wrote an editorial column. It was kind of blasting the student body for our football team in 1967. We had a great football tradition, and it was one of our weaker teams. Everybody was down, and I wrote a column. The whole student body, especially the football team, really enjoyed the article. My father got a copy of the column. He worked part-time at War Memorial Stadium, which I did as well. One of the gentlemen out there at the time was Howard Pearce, formerly of U of A. He was the stadium manager. He used to be a football lineman at Arkansas and is in the Hall of Fame. He passed away last year. He was the stadium manager, and my father showed him the article. The way that I have been told the story, he showed the article to Orville Henry. Howard and Orville were very close because Orville covered the games out there most of the time. I don't know if that set the wheels in motion or not because no one told me the complete story. In my senior year the *Gazette* called Horace Mann, not directly asking for me, but asking for someone with journalism experience. They asked if they had anyone for recommendation. There were two candidates. The vice-principal, Mr. Willie Thompson, gave them my name.

MH: Again, that was your senior year?

WM: Yes, my senior year. My senior year in high school, before I went to Philander. Willie Thompson recommended that they talk to me.

MH: You suspected that Orville had already heard of you?

WM: Yes.

MH: So your name came in, and he said, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of this guy"?

WM: Yes. Not only that, but during Razorback games, I worked in the press box at War Memorial Stadium. I never made contact with him, though, other than handing him something. Maybe stat sheets or something like that. But never walking up and saying, "Mr. Henry, I'm Wadie Moore."

MH: You started in 1968. What month of 1968 was this?

WM: June 28.

MH: You remember that pretty well.

WM: I was working—get this—I was working a construction job! [Laughter] Back from the day that I graduated. We probably worked it three weeks. It was hot. We would go out early, 6 o'clock in the morning, and I probably got home about 6. When I got home, I took a bath and went to bed. At that time, I was making \$125.00 a week in 1968. It was pretty good. Orville called, and I came in. I'll never forget where I met him. Actually, met him in the old news room. He was going to the men's room, and I was coming in for the interview and we met right out there by the newspaper racks. After the interview, he said that he wanted to talk with Jerry McConnell, who was the assistant sports editor at that time. He said they would get back with me. Probably within 24 hours, Jerry called me. He told me if I wanted the job to come on in and they would start me off part-time. I'm looking at \$125.00. Now remember, my goal in life is to make money.

[Laughter] I am looking at \$125.00 in 1968, a part-time job over here, not knowing how much I'm going to make at minimum wage. It didn't take long for me to say, "I'm leaving this job and I'm going to take this one." It was something I really wanted to do. I ended up taking the job, not for the money, but for something that I had dreamed of doing.

MH: Sounds like it was the wisest thing to do. Do you remember how much you made when you first started?

WM: No. But my first pay check — they said part time, but I worked 40 hours. I brought home about \$40.00. [Laughter] I kept saying, "I don't think this going to work." After taxes and all that, I brought home about \$40.00.

MH: What were you doing, agate or. . .

WM: That's it, I was doing agate, answering the phone and filing pictures. If I took a report over the phone, I gave it to someone else. It was very valuable experience. People don't realize that I had the patience to do that now, but if you practice on those smaller things, they can lead to bigger things. That's the way I trained reporters that came under me.

MH: So you learned the importance of accuracy and details and all those things that are the basis.

WM: You can look at my files now, and I am still pretty good at filing pictures.

[Laughter]

MH: Can you describe for me the general atmosphere of the newsroom when you first started there?



WM: You want a truthful statement, right? It was tough. It was tough. It really was. Management was ready for me. I don't know if the paper was ready to have a black in the organization. One of the things that helped me — I have to support the sports staff. Everyone in sports was tremendous to me. They opened their arms. Times got tough. They really did. One of the things I remember when I was hired, Hugh Patterson came down, and he said, "If you have any problems here, you can come straight to me." He didn't say to take it to anyone else. I had a lot of problems, but I didn't go that way. That was great knowing that I had the opportunity to take it to the man in charge if I wanted to. I thanked him for that about 15 or 20 years later. I reminded him of what he said when he was receiving an award. I would walk through the newsroom — back then you had all of this noise, ta-ding, ta-ding, machines just clacking, all the talking and people smoking—everything would stop except for the AP machine. I could turn around and every eye would be on me. I would think, "Did I forget to put my pants on or something?" [Laughter] It was tough. It really was.

MH: This is a crusading *Gazette* that won a Pulitzer Prize.

WM: The people were not mean. They were just curious. Every Sunday—this broke the ice—I worked weekends—they would pop popcorn in the news room. All the departments, even the back shop, they would get popcorn and take it back and eat it. I never would. I wasn't going to stick my hand in these folks' bag of popcorn. Matilda Tuohey, remember Matilda? She got up when the first part had been popped, she got a sack and gave it to me. From that day on, everyone in that

newspaper room started speaking and saying, “Hi.”

MH: How long had it been since you. . .

WM: Probably a month, maybe. It wasn't very long.

MH: She had a rule that she wouldn't talk to anyone for the first six months they were there.

WM: She didn't say much. She just said, “Here,” and went on back. I mean, that was it. I said, “Thank you.” Wayne Jordan, Ginger Shiras, they were all like that. Leroy Donald. They were all like that. Just right outside the sports department. I tell you, one of the best friends I had there was Jim Bailey. I would do anything for Jim. Jim and I, we have been around the world, I guess you would say, together. It took awhile for Jim to open up to me — I mean, not open to where we didn't speak. We spoke everyday. — He was like Matilda. He was just being himself.

MH: Was that a professional thing and not necessarily a racial thing?

WM: No, no, no, that was Jim. I wasn't the only person that he did that to. He felt comfortable being around you as a person. He didn't say anything to you. I remember I wrote a story in 1973, and I wouldn't swear that it was the best story I ever wrote, but I'll put it down if anybody asked me if it is because he told me it was. I said, “Thank you.” He said, “I loved that story.” When he said that, I thought, “I have made it, folks. I'm sorry, I don't care what anybody tells me. I did it once and if I don't do it again . . .” I was pleased. I will never forget that.

MH: Let me back up just a little bit, so we get this. Can you give me picture of the

social situation of Little Rock in 1968? There was still some hangover from '57. Were neighborhoods segregated? What were relationships like?

WM: Yes, the neighborhoods were segregated. I'll tell you about my neighborhood first. Then I want to get into that spring, summer of 1968 at the paper. That was a violent year in Little Rock. We moved from West Little Rock to Central Little Rock, not far from the Dunbar community, so I went to Dunbar High School. It was a mixed neighborhood. This was in 1964, 1963. I probably had been in that neighborhood for 3 or 4 months. I was dating a young lady. It so happened that I was dating a young lady a block away from me. To show you how tough it was in the neighborhood, her house was on this corner, and mine was on the next corner, a block away. I left off my front porch, hit the sidewalk and start walking up the street. I get to the next house beside mine and a policeman stopped me. He tells me to spread 'em, and I do it. He pats me down and all that and asked me where I am going. I tell him, "Up the street." He said, "Where you come from." I tell him, "From right there, I just came out of my house. That is where I stay." He said, "Okay, go on about your business." I take off and walk half a block up, another one stops me. He is on a motorcycle. He's got me. He says, "Where you going?" About that time a patrol car came up, too. He says, "Where are you going?" I say, "I'm going up there." He says, "Where you coming from?" "I'm going. . ." He says, "That's not a good enough answer." He got off his motorcycle, and then the sergeant with him said, "Wait a minute. Whoa, whoa, wait a minute." He said, "Son, you need to give this man direct answers.

Someone has stolen a white lady's purse in this neighborhood." I said, "Sir, I am going to 21 blah, blah. Anything else you want to know?" They let me go. I get in front of my girlfriend's house, and I am stopped again. This is a different policeman. When he stopped me, I just put my hands up and I said, "I'm going right here. I came from down there. I didn't do it." [Laughter] That was common. I said, "I didn't do it." By the time—my girlfriend had been watching all of this. Her whole family is out there, you know. The whole family is sitting out there and watching them do that. That second policeman was ready to . . .

MH: That was a violent summer across the country.

WM: It was a purse snatcher. That many policemen involved with a purse snatcher in that neighborhood. The people do not do that much purse snatching. If it was at the mall, maybe. Of course, you have a lot of people like that in the summertime. This is a neighborhood. Okay, that summer, you have King assassinated, Kennedy assassinated. They were rioting all throughout the country. That particular summer there were a lot of protest marches in Little Rock and downtown. We had a curfew. As a matter of fact, I had to have permission—I can't remember if it was from the state police or government, or what—to work after a certain hour. I think it was 10 o'clock to be off the street. We couldn't even be on the streets. I had to have a permit. By me being so young, my father or someone had to come down there and pick me up.

MH: Of course, the sports work keeps you there pretty late.

WM: I stayed there until midnight. I would be in the Sports department of the *Gazette*,

watching them march up and down the streets.

MH: This is a question people often ask of people who have done “firsts.” You were the first black employee in the *Gazette* newsroom as far as you know?

WM: Yes, as far as I know. I have never really traced it. There was—oh, what was Sutton’s first name? The gentlemen from Little Rock, his name was Ozell Sutton. I think he worked at the *Democrat*. Not actually in the office, almost like a correspondent, but he was a black man. He had articles that ran in the papers. I don’t think he was paid as a full-time employee. Like a stringer correspondent or something like that.

MH: Did you feel any special responsibility? You did feel like all eyes were on you for a time. Did you feel like you carried an extra weight?

WM: Yes, I did. I think that helped me. There were hard times, but my mother, a very religious lady, she reminded me of a few things to do to get over it, to trust in God. Just keep your head up and keep marching on. It helped me in a way. I have learned over the years. I will tell you another thing that helped me. I went to Horace Mann. — Horace Mann folded as a senior high in 1971. — I learned over the years that if you just go out and do a good job, try to do a fair job, people will recognize what you are doing. I never, when I was writing, played a favorite’s role. I wouldn’t say, “I wish this team would beat this team.” When I went out to cover a game, I didn’t care who it was, I reported the way that they won the game. I didn’t let emotions play into it or anything. I had a brother who played on a local basketball team. If they got beat, that’s just the way it was. I

didn't write anything negative. Just straight down the middle, that's the way it was. I never did try to choose sides. I never wrote that I thought this umpire or official was bad, or that he was trying to favor one team or the other. I never tried to do anything like that. Orville taught me — I guess I taught myself since I did it, but Orville taught me a good lesson once. I wrote about a Little Rock Central team, the one Houston Nutt was on in 1975. That was one of the best teams in the state. They were so good on offense. They were good on defense. They had four people in their secondary that started on offense at one time. The two cornerbacks and the two safeties, they started on offense, and now they were playing defense. I wrote that the offense was so good that they did not need these guys. These guys were rejects from the offense. I used the word "rejects," a bad choice of words. We heard a lot about it. They were good players over there. Robert Farrell was one. They were excellent players. I mean, I used that word "reject," and that was a bad choice of words. Orville would say, "You have a few phone calls. Just be careful. Just explain it as a bad choice of words. I would say, "Yes, you are right about that." Once I think about it—well, he said, "Just be careful. Remember you are writing for high school. Stay away from negative comments."

MH: Let me ask you about that. One of the things that strikes me about sports is that for a lot of people it is the best access they have to getting their names in the paper and having their deeds being documented. Did you see it that way when you were covering it?

WM: We always did. The key to our success and what we wanted to do was to put every kid's name in the paper that we possibly could. We wanted to make that kid feel good and let his mother and father have their proud moments to see their son or daughter's name in the paper. We tried to put names in there that were positive reports about as many kids as we possibly could. We really did. When I covered a football game, . . . I never mentioned, "Jim Jones fumbled at the four," unless it led to the winning touchdown. I'd say that Sylvan Hills recovered a fumble at the four. You can get away from that. The kid feels bad enough. He probably worked his tail off to get them down to the four. If I don't mention the good runs, I shouldn't mention that fumble.

MH: When you were in school, did you ever get your name in the paper for non-journalism things?

WM: No. I did for journalism, but not for anything else. I don't recall reading the paper in junior high. I didn't in senior high because I quit playing.

MH: What was your attitude going into the news business as you did? What did you think about newspapers? Did you read them as a kid?

WM: Oh, yes, I kept up with them. I really did. I figured you would ask me that.

MH: Are you one of these guys that memorizes stats and knew everything about everything?

WM: No, I kept up with them, even though at that particular time blacks were not allowed in Razorback games or Ray Winder Field. I had access to both parks. We stayed in that area. My great-uncle was a groundskeeper of Ray Winder

Field. I got to go and watch them with all those great teams that came through here. Adolpho Phillips, Fergy Jenkins, Clint Jackson, Richie Allen, “don’t call me Dick.” All those great teams. I watched all of them from the time I was playing Little League baseball all the way up. Half of the time after the game, they would take me home. Drive me home to keep me from walking home. I was always over there by myself. My father worked at the football stadium. He had arranged for me to work over there since the early 1960s. I saw all the Razorbacks games in Little Rock. You know, people think–It is going to be hard for people to keep stats in their minds now because of the computers. Let me tell you why. We couldn’t store anything away. Every year when I got ready to run something, I had to retype it. I’d refresh my memory on everything: this state champion, who won the state championship this year, who won it that year. I could tell you all the overall basketball champions, boys and girls, because I wrote it. Now with computers, you just add this champion here, and you never look at the list. You just continue to add on, and you really never study the list, so it is going to be harder. I am not going to say that I was great at keeping stats, but I did remember a lot because I had to write them a lot.

MH: What newspaper did you read? Did you read both papers?

WM: The *Gazette* all the way. That is odd, isn’t it? I never read the *Democrat* because my family never took it.

MH: Was there a reason for that?

WM: My father was a big sports fan and still is. He’ll argue all the way down about



sports. We never had the *Democrat* in our house. I don't know why. I guess when I got old enough, I was working at the *Gazette*.

MH: How do you remember the '57 crisis? You were pretty young then.

WM: I don't remember very much about it at all. The only thing I remember about it is that it hurt my brother. I have an older brother, a half brother. His name is Don Wamble. He played sports at Horace Mann, basketball, football, track and field. He lost his senior year of eligibility because of it. When the school closed—you see, Central still played and still had sports, but Mann didn't. Those kids—if you didn't go out of the city to another school, you went to work

[End of Side 1, Tape 1]

[Beginning of Side 2, Tape 1]

MH: You said you read the paper religiously.

WM: Correct.

MH: Did you read the news section as well? Did you keep up with all of that?

WM: Absolutely. I had to because when I was in high school—remember Sam Harris?

MH: Yes.

WM: Sam would come out to all the schools for Journalism Day to be a guest speaker. He said something once that made me want to read the paper everyday. He said he took the newspaper everyday, and he read it from front to the back. He could pass any test he wanted to that was ever given to him. I thought, “Wheww! That was something! I am going to start reading the paper!” As a habit, I started to read the entire paper, based on that. Back then, I was probably just reading the

sports section, but it became a habit to read everything. If you look at the old *Gazette*, it made it easy because they had the people in the news on the front page. It was always interesting, so you could just go from there.

MH: Did you ever consider being strictly a news guy?

WM: The only other area of the newspaper that I wanted to be in was something like what Sam did, marketing, public relations. I hate speaking, but I volunteered to do some speaking engagements. That doesn't make sense, does it? I don't mind doing the things that I truly believe in. I just believe in what the *Gazette* had to offer.

MH: Let me ask you a few other things before I ask you this other. First of all, what was it like working for Orville Henry? Did you have much contact with him?

WM: Yes. I don't know how he did it with the full load that he had. He had a lot of young reporters. He worked with us. I almost hated it when he was in on Friday nights, especially when things were in a pinch. We would come in, and I would turn in my story. He would say, "This is not it. Do it again." I would scratch it and do it again, and he would say, "Still not it. Do it again." Then he would say, "What was the key factor in this game?" Then he would say, "Then put it in the lead." He was right. He showed me a way, in just condensing a story, how to write a story and how to get things tight up towards the front, to make it flow so smoothly. Everybody seems to think they need thirty inches to write a story. He showed me how to do it in fifteen and get in what others used to do thirty. It was just as simple as that, without leaving out a name or anything, and give everybody

want they wanted.

MH: Anybody else who was influential in helping you to sharpen your skills?

WM: Jerry Schaeffer. Jerry was on a desk. He was later the S.I.D. of Arkansas State. I think, originally, Jerry was from North Little Rock. What you needed was someone tough and firm. He was not just going to say, "Give me your copy," and run it. Jerry was one of those types who would hand it back to you and tell you that it wasn't what they were looking for. If he said he wanted it ten inches and you gave it eleven, you better give him ten. I respected people like that.

MH: What did you all make of the news S.I.D.'s? There is a kind of traditional, I don't know, sort of a rivalry. There is usually some kind of dynamic tension.

WM: It may have been that in the later years. Earlier, I don't think there was rivalry. The staff was so close when I first started in the first part of the 1960s. Now the rivalry may have been there later when Gannett came. He was bringing so many people in from out of state to fill in those positions up there. The old staff was close. We used to do things during the holidays together as a staff. That ended. We no longer did things like that. It was great. You mentioned this rivalry. I would like for everybody to just say that we had a newspaper war. I just didn't see the war. It was a one-sided war. They wouldn't let us fight. They could attack us, but we couldn't attack them and point out that they were right or wrong on that.

MH: That wasn't the *Gazette* way.

WM: It wasn't their way. When Moyer was there and I was assistant sports editor, we

would have these morning meetings, and he wanted us all in there. Boy, he would get us in there and chew out this department and chew out that one. He had a *Democrat* up there. One morning he said, “How come you don’t have that in sports? Look here.” I am just sitting there listening and thinking, “Well, we ran that story two days ago. That was in yesterday’s.” They were paying more attention to the competition than to us. That was odd. Later he said, “Wadie, you don’t have to come to these meetings.” I said, “Thank you.” No one else was saying anything back. I said, “Man, I always believed in defending my people.” They would just sit in there and say, “Yes, sir. Yes, sir.”

MH: Let me bring this forward a little bit. You for a time were an agate guy, a sort of a clerk guy. You moved your way up into actual reporting and doing game stories and perspective pieces. That would bring us up to what, the mid 1970s?

WM: Yes. I am trying to actually think of— I will tell you what actually gave me my break in writing. They gave me the coverage of American Legion baseball. It was mine to do. I turned American Legion baseball coverage from two or three paragraphs into a big event. I won several awards for doing it. I went and covered the state tournament each year. I made photos and all that. I had a lot of people involved in it. They would write or call and tell Orville what a good job I was doing. Eventually, that led to me doing and getting more basketball assignments. Like you say, this is from the late 1960s to early 1970s. Then about 1971 or 1972, I was doing—I wasn’t in charge of the high school, but I was doing a lot of basketball top game assignments. I was not getting the football

assignments or the best football games. He wanted me to take over the whole works.

MH: So then you became. . .

WM: Sports editor, I mean, high school editor. In about 1972 or 1973, somewhere in that area.

MH: Now, I would think about that time, they were getting more black employees and getting hired. Aris Jackson came in 1974. Did it become more of a natural thing to have black employees in the newsroom? Or was it still a little unusual?

WM: You know, at that particular time—I will tell you something that I was really proud of. I didn't try to write from a black viewpoint. I didn't try to sound like I was a white writer. I just tried to be me. Let the readers follow from that. Coach Grafton Moore up in West Memphis, he used to tell all of his players that I was his brother. Grafton is white. We get a kick out of that now. He would say, "You do well, and I will write or call my brother, and he will write about you. He is my brother down there." Until I made a visit up there and then they saw me. They said, "Coach, you sure that's your brother?" [Laughter] You know, there were certain schools that were rivals to me when I was coming up. You would never know that because I gave them — if they won, I gave them their due. I tried to treat everyone equal, I guess that is what I am trying to say. Jennifer Hopkins was a good hire for the paper. Aris was as well. Then other blacks started showing up throughout the paper, especially downstairs in the main office. We made a lot of hires through sports as well, minorities. We opened it up to

women. That was something rare back in that time. We had maybe four women reporters on our staff during that time.

MH: Do you remember any of their names? Do you recall any of the early sports reporters?

WM: Yes. The first one that we had was Nancy Clark. She is in Des Moines working at the *Register* now. Donna Lampkin, she is at UCA. They were the full time reporters on our staff. Donna Lampkin Stephens. We had others on part-time roles, trying to prepare them for full time.

MH: Is that a big culture change for sports journalists?

WM: No. Man, I enjoyed working with those women. Those women, they were sharp. They are good for competition. You are sitting down there and say, "Oh, I will have this beat out, without any problem." These women had a way of getting some of the interviews that you can't get. See what I'm saying? They will keep you on your toes and make you work that much harder.

MH: Some people say that men grow up in a sports culture, and we are supposed to act like we know all about it. Women, on the other hand, they don't grow up trading baseball cards and all that stuff. They have to learn sports. Some say that women ask better questions because they are not assuming they already know the answer.

WM: I don't think either one of them had a sports background. They were good sports reporters. I enjoyed working with them. I worked with both of them on the Razorback beat.

MH: We are in the pre-newspaper war era. I don't know when the exact start of the

war was. I would guess about 1981 or 1982, somewhere in there. How did that work out in sports? What did the *Democrat* do and what did the *Gazette* do differently?

WM: To be honest with you, somewhere in between there I became assistant sports editor, but until Gannett came in, we just went about our business as our business. We always felt like the things we were doing were going to keep us ahead. We monitored the *Democrat*, but not to see if they beat us, just to monitor them.

MH: Did they beat you?

WM: No. There were things—in my job now, we have news conferences. I am in charge of presenting them. Like the Coaches All Stars deal. When they announce them, they have a certain date to announce them. We were going to have that story two or three days before. That was competition. That was the way it was. But Lou Holtz arrived in 19 whenever. It was either in 1977 or 1978. I was handling the recruiting. Lou made a statement that they were not going to release the names of any of the signees that first year. They were not going to release them. The *Democrat* ran that statement the day of the signing or the day before. We had the list of all thirty of them who were going to sign. One kid, Lou didn't even know had made a commitment to him. He called and said, "I didn't know that until I read the paper." [Laughter] They sat down on it because he said they were not going to release them. We jumped on it. We were aggressive back then. They got aggressive as they got into the war. The sports department really stepped up. I don't think we stepped our energy level up any

more. I always thought we had it at a high level. We went about servicing the people as we always did.

MH: A lot of things changed when Gannett came. A lot of shuffling the deck in a lot of departments. What happened in sports?

WM: We had so many people coming in and out of there, it was frightening, especially when Orville left. First, he left Little Rock and went to Fayetteville. Then he left the paper and went to the *Democrat*. We started bringing in a lot of people from Gannett, from Florida, from Denver. We started bringing people in from all over the country. They just didn't have a feel. They were good newspaper men. They just did not have a feel for Arkansas. You had the old group there and the new group coming in. There was some tension. It was a pretty bad time. It was an all time low.

MH: Did the Gannett people push the sports department to follow more of what the *Democrat* was doing?

WM: Yes, they did. They treated us like we were behind, but they wouldn't let us attack. We always felt like we were holding our own. They were doing a good job, but we felt like we were there. We were giving our readers what we had always given them, plus more.

MH: During that time there was a lot of staff raiding. Did the *Democrat* ever approach you to come over?

WM: You are the first person to ever ask me that. Twice within the week that they bought it. They said, "You know what is happening." I would say, "Yes." They



would say, "You can come over now and go to work for us." I would say, "I like the offer you presented, and maybe when this is all over, I will consider it, but for right now I have been with these people for twenty-five years, and I couldn't walk out on them. And I won't walk out on them. And when it happens, I will be there in that line without a job." They called me twice. They had two different people to call me. I knew it was over before most staff members. I had a friend who worked in the Governor's office who told me that it was a done deal back in May or June of that year, what was transpiring. I heard about it before it even hit. I worked in the newspaper office on Friday nights. I never went home. After the football games, I was there—we had a TV show—I was there until about 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. Somewhere around August or September, I had been cleaning out my desk. I am in there that morning. I guess Moyer did not know that I was there. He is cleaning his office out. I'm serious. We never said a word. We just smiled at each other. I was taking stuff to my car, and he was taking it to his car. We never said a word about it.

MH: The final day, can you tell me what that was like?

WM: It was a Friday. I had a radio show that morning. You won't believe this. When I finished, I said, "Guys, this is probably it, but I have really enjoyed it." They said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I don't think I am going to be here next week, unless you invite me back. I think we are going to fold pretty soon." They said, "No." I said, "No, I am serious." I left there and went back to the office and got everything ready for that night's football. I was supposed to go to

Carlisle for a football game. Nancy Clark—she was working in another department then—I said, “Something is going to happen. When it does, call me. I will be at home.” She looked at me like “What do you mean, something is going to happen?” I said, “It is going to happen today. I just feel it. I am not going to a game. It is going to happen.” I get home, and I guess about 11 or 12, she says, “You’re right. You might as well come on down. They are going to make an announcement here shortly.” I tell you what, I don’t know where I got that from. That’s the way it was. I came down. It happened, and I accepted it. I got a call from Oklahoma as soon as it hit the wire, and they offered me a job.

MH: From the city paper?

WM: I guess it was, wherever Jerry McConnell is.

MH: *Tulsa World.*

WM: No, that wasn’t it. I think it was Oklahoma City, wherever Jerry was. David Lanier’s desk was next to mine, and I said, “I’m not interested. I am not leaving the state. I have a guy here beside me. He may be interested.” I put him in touch with them.

MH: After the paper closed, you did not go to work for the *Democrat*?

WM: No, they never called.

MH: And you did not call them?

WM: No. I never called them.

MH: If they had called, would you have taken the job?

WM: I would have listened. I was told that they were going to. I didn’t get mad or

angry. That was their call. That was a business decision. I went to work for the *Pine Bluff Commercial* for half the money I was making for the *Gazette*. It was a struggle, but I enjoyed doing it. I just wanted to see if I still wanted to be in sports. I came back in 1994 to the job I have now. I seldom attend a sporting event. I can spend more time with my family and things like that. I just don't go out to the football and basketball games as much as I used to.

MH: What was it like for you, a veteran newspaper man, working for this institution in Arkansas, one of the three or four leading institutions in the state's history, your employer and your interest in your life, and that horse is shot out from under you?

WM: That hurt more than anything else. Are you talking about when the Pattersons sold?

MH: I was talking about the end.

WM: When the Pattersons sold, that hurt more than the closing. You could see the actual closing coming. The *Democrat* had asked them to buy them out several times, and they didn't. Then Gannett comes in, and the first thing they told us was they had "deep pockets." We enjoyed the good life with Gannett. Don't get me wrong. We would go on trips and, man, they treated us nice. We got the best accommodations when we traveled. It was nice. They did know how to treat their employees to a certain degree. Expense was no problem. They did not mind that. You know, I guess I am in denial. I stay away from it. I guess in staying away from it, is an admission that it did hurt. I hold it within me. I won't go in a press box now. If I go to a game, I sit as far away from a press box as I can.

Usually each time I go into a press box, they want to do an interview or something. I don't want to be the man that "was." I am too young to be a "was." I just stay away from it. If someone else is doing it, let them have at it. It is their time under the spotlight, so I stay away.

MH: When the paper closed, did you ever consider moving entirely away and working in Atlanta or New York or wherever?

WM: Yes. When we were walking out the day we closed, Moyer said, "If you ever need a job, call me. If you change your mind two or three years down the line, call me. You can come to work for me." He gave me that option as well. At that particular time I was not interested in leaving the state. My mother was very ill. It wasn't a good time for me to leave. I'm glad that I didn't leave. Everything has its reason. I was the first black to work at the *Gazette*, the first black sports editor, one of only five black sport editors in the United States at the time. When I took the job, I was one of five black journalists in the United States at the time. I got a job offer at *St. Louis Post Dispatch* in 1973 offering a lot of money. San Francisco tried to lure me there. The position that I am in now [2000] is administrative assistant, the first black to hold that position. Really and truly, I think the first time I was hired was because I was black and a minority. I don't think the second two hires had anything to do with it. I know they didn't. It just happened to fall like that for me to become the first.

MH: Is journalism something that you would recommend to young people today?

WM: Sure.

MH: Would you tell them to take the bricklaying class instead?

WM: No, no. You have to go with your heart. If it is something they want to do. The road is paved different now from the one I traveled down. It is totally different. There are so many more opportunities out there now. I think if they want to do it, they should do it. I guess the first thing they ask, you know, about going into journalism is if you have computer skills. It is less of your writing skills or your background in that sport.

MH: What are your feelings about these “firsts”?

WM: It was rough. When I first started at the *Gazette* and would answer the phone, people would use the big “N” word on me a lot. They would say, “Wait a minute, I thought I was calling the *Gazette*.” I would say, “You do have the *Gazette*.” They would say, “I must have someone else. I know you aren’t working down there.” I had some threatening phone calls, and it wasn’t funny. I was mad and upset at first. I learned to laugh it off. They would say, “No, I don’t want to speak to you. Let me speak to someone else.” I thought, “I know the scores just as well as someone else, but I’ll let you speak with them.” People would say, “I’ll just come down there and take care of you.” I added, “I work until midnight. I can’t leave. I’m here guys.” I received a lot of threats. I didn’t take any of them serious. One guy did come down. It wasn’t actually a threat for me. It was for someone else on our staff. I got a lot of that. One of the guys that used to do that all the time, he told me he was from Mississippi. He rode me and rode me and rode me. He probably rode me harder than anyone else. He ended up

apologizing. I met the guy. I actually met him. We had a mutual friend. I actually went over to his house once. Then he started calling me “brother.” That was his name for me.

MH: I had some casual conversations with some of the other black employees at the time that I was there. They told me that they thought there was sort of a racism under the surface, even though promotions were often made with race in mind. They felt there were other things, even though not overt. Other things were still there. Did you see that?

WM: I probably did. Again, a lot of them were angry about it and felt that way. I did not feel that way. I don’t know if I was satisfied or just dumb. I didn’t think that much about it until we lost our editor Paul Borden. Everybody at the office said I should apply. I said, “Right. I ought to apply. Great chance.” In the back of my mind. We had—Oh, who was the editor that the company sent the black orchids in when he came here? Do you remember him? He was from Denver. He had done something like that. He was there, and I forget the name of the publisher. I have erased a lot of that stuff from my mind. I am serious. Malone was there. I am sitting up there, and he comes up to me and says, “Wadie, let’s go to lunch.” We had never been to lunch. I said, “Okay.” We walk up there, and he asked me what were my goals and what do I want to do. I am an assistant sports editor. He said they had a lot of plans for me. They want me to do this and do that. Then, when we finished with lunch, he says, “By the way, you don’t plan on applying for that sports editor job, do you?” I said, “Well, I haven’t really thought about

it.” A second editor took me out to lunch and asked me the same thing. I was asked that twice.

MH: They wanted to make sure you wouldn’t.

WM: Yes, that is what they were doing. As if I did, it would be a lot of pressure for them to put me in there. I had no plans of applying for it.

MH: Let me ask you just a general question about the *Gazette*. Can you tell me in a couple of sentences what the *Arkansas Gazette* was to you as an employee and as a citizen of Arkansas?

WM: The *Gazette* was my way of life. It was the way I wanted to live. I thought it spoke the truth, honesty, and everything. Not only did I just want to read that paper, I wanted to live my life to where people would be as proud of me as they would that paper. I had a lot of respect for the “gray old lady,” as they called it. I really did. The people who worked there made it a great paper. All those veteran writers, I looked up to them.

MH: Wadie, we are running out of time. I want to thank you for doing this interview. I enjoyed talking with you.

WM: Thank you. This is the first time I have sat on this side. It is kind of nerve racking, but I appreciate it, Michael.

[End of Interview]