

*Gazette* Project

Interview with

Ms. Donna Lampkin Stephens,  
Conway, Arkansas,  
March 10, 2000

Interviewer: Jerol Garrison

Jerol Garrison: . . . This is Jerol Garrison. I am interviewing Donna Lampkin Stephens at her office at the University of Central Arkansas at Conway. Our topic is the *Arkansas Gazette*. This interview is part of an oral history project being conducted by the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas Library at Fayetteville. The center will transcribe the interview and you, Donna, will have an opportunity to review the transcript and make changes before the document goes into the archives of the library, where it will be available to persons interested in Arkansas history. The aim of these interviews is to shed light on what kind of a newspaper the *Arkansas Gazette* was. Before we go any further, would you just state your name and state that you have signed this form which agrees to this interview and agrees to this interview being part of the archives?

Donna Lampkin Stephens: Donna Lampkin Stephens, and, yes, I have signed the forms and I give my permission for this to be part of the archives.

JG: And anyone interested in the history of the *Gazette* will be able to view the transcript in the future?

DS: Yes.

JG: Thank you. And you have signed the form to that effect?

DS: Yes, I have.

JG: Thank you. Donna, please describe the work you did for the *Arkansas Gazette* and the period of your employment.

DS: I went there originally in June of 1984 as a sports intern. I had just finished my junior year at the University of Arkansas and spent the summer covering golf and tennis and whatever other sports were around and went back to school, finished my degree, and while I was up there I did a little work from Fayetteville, helping with some football coverage, the Southwest Conference swimming meet, and things like that. Then I came back as a full-time sports reporter on an intern's salary in June of 1985.

JG: So that was a regular job?

DS: Yes, that was a regular job.

JG: And it was called an intern?

DS: I think I went back as an intern. They said, "We don't have a full-time job, but we have an internship, and you can be an intern. When something opens up, you will be moved in." So that is what happened.

JG: So, you were working in Little Rock or Fayetteville at that time?

DS: When I went back full-time, it was in Little Rock. I worked there from June of '85 till September of '90 when I moved to Fayetteville as part of the Fayetteville bureau up there.

JG: What did you do as a regular employee at the *Gazette*? What did you cover in the sports department?

DS: I did a little bit of everything. I was a very good agate clerk, as all young sports writers start out as, getting the scores from the AP wire, taking swimming scores over the telephone and things like that, filling up the scoreboard page. And I worked three to midnight, off on Tuesday, Wednesday. I got into covering golf pretty quickly. I had never been on a golf course, and when I went out for my first story I had to cover the golf tournament, so I was learning on the job. After that summer I became very involved in covering high school sports, as all young sports reporters do, football, basketball, then I focused on golf. I did just a little bit of everything, until. . . Then I moved from the high school beat to the AIC beat, which was the small colleges around the state.

JG: And that is Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference?

DS: Yes. University of Central Arkansas, Arkansas Tech, Southern Arkansas, Henderson State, Ouachita Baptist, at that time they were NAIA schools, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. And then we had a little shake-up in the *Gazette*'s Fayetteville bureau, and they were going to add a slot in Fayetteville for football season, 1990. By that time I had been at the *Gazette* a few years and that was my alma mater and I was wanting to sort of move up, so I applied to be one of the Razorback beat people. And I got the job and got a little raise and moved to Fayetteville, I think it was September of 1990, and I was there until the end.

JG: Who was in the sports department when you went there in '85? Who would have

been the other people in the department?

DS: Well, Orville Henry was the official sports editor, but he was based in Fayetteville, so he was rarely in the office. But James Thompson, I think his title was assistant sports editor, but he was really running the office. Jim Bailey, Joe Mosby, Nancy Clark, Kim Brazzel, Aris Jackson, James Gilzow. . . .

JG: Is that G-I-L-Z-O?

DS: Z-O-W. Jake Sandlin was there. Wadie Moore. How could I forget him? He had been there forever.

JG: That's W-A-D-I-E?

DS: Yes, M-O-O-R-E. I remember my first morning, I popped in down there as an intern, and I had been told to find David Petty. I found him and he got me set up. The first person I met was Kim Brazzel, and Kim is quite a character. And you can imagine a little ol' country girl from Chidester coming into the *Gazette*, in the big city of Little Rock, and, of course, nobody is in the sports department at nine o'clock in the morning. You know, when they told me to be there. And here came Kim Brazzel, and boy, he was a talker.

JG: And how do you spell his name?

DS: Kim, K-I-M B-R-A-Z-Z-E-L. And he --- at that time, they had not banned cigarette smoking from the office — and so he would smoke cigarettes and he's a real practical joker.

JG: His title was?

DS: He was a sports writer.

JG: He told you what was going to be happening there and what to expect?

DS: Yes, what to expect. He had just happened to be working early that day. Then Thompson came in, and I met Wadie, and then Aris Jackson appeared like at midnight one night. I was up there working late and I had never seen him. He just kind of breezes through the building about midnight and I had no idea who he was. And it was just quite a group of people who cared about the paper and wanted to get out the best product. And it was just a good time.

JG: Who gave you your assignments?

DS: James Thompson.

JG: And that was true until you moved to Fayetteville?

DS: No, let's see . . . how did this happen? After Gannett bought the paper, James . . . I believe he went to Washington as a *USA Today* intern. They had those programs for three months or six months or something like that. And when he came back to the *Gazette*, he was in features, I believe. In the meantime, Gannett had hired some outside sports editors to come in. They hired . . . I guess Paul Borden was the first one to come in. He came in from the Jackson, Mississippi, paper.

JG: How do you spell Borden?

DS: D-E-N. A good guy to work for. He was resented, I think, by a lot of people because of the Gannett connection, but I thought a great deal of Paul. I thought he was a good newspaperman. Then with the shake-up in Fayetteville, let's see . . . Orville jumped to the *Democrat* and then . . .

JG: Do you remember what year that took place?

DS: It must have been '88 or '89, something like that. So, he went to the *Democrat*. And Nate Allen was based in Fayetteville, working with Orville. Some of the Gannett people determined that Nate was no longer necessary up there; they wanted to bring him back to Little Rock. Nate had never worked in Little Rock. They thought he had been there too long and just wanted to shake some things up. I don't think Paul had anything to do with that, but Nate quit. Nate decided he was going somewhere else, he was not coming to Little Rock. That opened up the whole bureau in Fayetteville. So, Paul Borden was tired of working in Little Rock in all that madness. I would consider him more of a *Gazette* person than a Gannett person. So, he went to Fayetteville, and Jim Harris and I were going to be the sports writers up there under Paul. So, the three of us were the Razorback bureau up there. So they had had Orville and Nate up there and wound up replacing those two with Paul and Jim Harris and myself.

JG: And that would have been?

DS: That was September of 1990.

JG: And that is when you actually moved to Fayetteville.

DS: I moved to Fayetteville. We had a little office across the street from the Hoffbrau in Fayetteville. And just the three of us had a . . . we were out of the Little Rock office politics, we thought. We were away from the day-to-day stuff. And it was really a wonderful opportunity to be out, sort of on our own, and do what we loved to do.

JG: Well now, you said you had an office across the street from Hoffbrau? So, you

had an office where the Walton Fine Arts Center is now?

DS: No, it was closer to the Court House. Is it Center Street?

JG: Yes. I was mixed up as to where Hoffbrau was.

DS: Like #23 Center Street, maybe?

JG: So, you were a long ways from the campus?

DS: Yes, we had to drive. We had parking permits. Yes, we were not on campus at all.

JG: Did the *Gazette* have a news reporter there, too?

DS: Yes, John Rice was there. He was already there when I got there. Then they brought in Patricia May, a business reporter. So, actually there were five of us there at the end.

JG: Do you remember some of the people that worked in the sports department and any particular stories that you would like to talk about, any special story that sticks in your memory.

DS: Well, let me talk about the people first. I was 21 years old, absolutely in awe. These were people that I had looked up to forever. And that's the job that I would have been at for the rest of my life. I started out at the apex of my career. That is where I wanted to be. Jim Bailey, what a wonderful writer and such a funny fellow with a dry wit, and before they banned smoking, you could tell when Bailey was struggling through a column because the rings of smoke would be circling above his head. His stories would just read so succinctly. His columns were just wonderful. Wadie Moore was always a hard worker and so meticulous. He was the high school editor and he demanded and he got excellent coverage

from the people who worked for him because we didn't want to let Wadie down. Wadie had worked so hard to get where he was. Of course, Orville wasn't around much, but he lived on in stories, even from Fayetteville. They used to sit around and talk about . . . late at night, you know, 11:30, while we were waiting for the paper to come up, we would sit around and talk, just Orville stories. They told about a trip to the Orange Bowl one year. They had all gone out to eat. Jim Bailey told this story. Nate had just taken his time eating this wonderful shrimp cocktail, just savoring every bite, and Orville finished eating before Nate. So he reached over and said, "Hey, are you going to eat that shrimp?" and grabbed the last one out of Nate's shrimp cocktail and ate it. And Nate just sat there like, "What am I supposed to say?"

JG: "Hey, you took the last shrimp."

DS: That's right. Aris Jackson had impressed Orville with some of his high school coverage or Arkansas State coverage. You can get the story straight from the horse's mouth with Aris. He got to make a trip with Orville covering something. I think they had a free evening, so I think they were going to a movie or something to spend some time. They were on the road somewhere, and they had read the time wrong on the movie or something like that. So, they arrived and Orville said, "Well, I guess we're late," and Orville had been the reason why they were late. And Aris said, "What do you mean we, Kemosabe?" So that became a little catch-phrase: "What do you mean we, Kemosabe?" They always talked about how Orville or Bailey — you know, when you are writing stories, especially the

young people, they'd be reading your story and they would be down to the fifth paragraph and they would say, "There's your lead, there's your lead." You were learning while you were there. And Kim Brazzel was sort of the cranky, old horse-racing writer who was very cynical but who had a heart of gold. You know, kind of the same thing there. Just great people, great stories.

JG: Could you describe the newsroom there, or the sports department at the *Gazette*? What were the furnishings like?

DS: We had red tables, or computer equipment. I remember the red tops of the computer tables. And we had these ancient — I don't know what kind of computers they were, looking back now, it's hilarious to think about. They had gotten an upgraded computer that they never taught me how to use. They just kept me using the old, they weren't Macintoshes, they were just . . .

JG: Hendrix?

DS: Hendrix. Maybe Hendrix was the new one. I don't know, one of these ancient computer things. James Thompson's office was, well, it was in the newsroom, but there was a little partition, so he sort of had a little cubbyhole for himself. Everybody else was just kind of out in little modular desks with computers around the office. And the phones would ring off the wall. And people would call with the strangest questions. I swear, one time I answered the telephone, "*Gazette Sports*." And some woman said, "What's the capital of California?" And I thought, "Why are you calling the sports department to ask that?" So it really became a, if you wanted to know something, you would call the *Gazette*, even if it

is “What’s the capital of California?”

JG: People were having a discussion and they were probably arguing over what the capital was. So somebody said, “Why don’t we call the *Gazette*?” You wonder how their call went back to sports.

DS: Yes, except we had a direct line and we were there at odd hours; we were there until twelve or one.

JG: So the switchboard would go home probably at 10, and the calls would come back to sports.

DS: Yes, yes.

JG: I don’t know what time the switchboard left.

DS: We had direct numbers that you could call directly if you had the right number. It was listed in the phone book.

JG: Oh, I see.

DS: On Razorback football days, because that is a big production, especially in the newspaper war . . .

JG: Let’s just take a minute and describe the preparation for covering a Razorback football game there in the sports department.

DS: Okay.

JG: You got involved in covering a lot of those.

DS: It was really a production by everybody. For the first several years I was there, I was in the office, and, of course, I was working on Saturdays as everybody did in sports. You would try to get all the other stuff done ahead of time that you could,

all the high school stuff from the night before. And the day of the game, it was sort of waiting for everything to start. Everyone would sit around. If the game was on television, we would have a television on back there, kind of keeping up with things while we were getting things going as far as getting the paper together. Then after the game was over was when everything started. They would start filing from the game wherever it was. You would have lots of copy to edit. They had the layouts done ahead of time. It was a real orchestrated production to get that out. I realize I am wandering a little bit. When I went back to Fayetteville for my senior year, before I came back to work for real, one of my jobs at the Razorback football games was to type in the play-by-play. We used to run play-by-play, the whole thing, from the football game. Someone would have to edit that and make sure, because we were putting out two or three pages from the football game. They would buy food for everybody because nobody had a chance to take a dinner break. So they would have Sim's Bar-B-Que or US Pizza or something like that delivered to the office. We would sit around. Then everything would start after the game was over. The stories would come in and you would have a lot of editing to do and the more eyes that could see it, the better, before it came out on the page. When I became one of the writers, you know, you were just constantly working; especially for night games, it was really a production to try to get things finished so that we could get the paper out on time. But we got everything in because we were in the thick of the war. And there wasn't any waiting two days later to get the stats in.

JG: You said you typed in the play-by-play. Where did you get that play-by-play?

DS: Well, just as you go. As I remember . . .

JG: You would take notes on a lap-top computer?

DS: Well, it wasn't even a lap-top. It was this really ancient big bubble machine. Do you remember that? It was huge. It was almost half as big as this desk. It was a primitive lap-top I guess, but the screen was up facing you and it was just a big old computer there. And I think that . . .

JG: You were taking this play-by-play there in the *Gazette* newsroom.

DS: No, at the press box. It was when I was in Fayetteville as a student still. So I would come in, and the press box announcer would say like, "Eckwood two yards right" or something like that. I don't think they gave us a play-by-play from the sports information office at that time.

JG: Now, you say you also helped cover some of the Razorback football games. Now what stories do you remember writing and what years would that be?

DS: Well, regularly, I became a beat writer for the 1990 season. So I would have been a beat writer in 1990 and the few games in 1991 before the *Gazette* closed. Paul would do pretty well the game story and Jim Harris would usually do the Razorback sidebar and I would do the opponent sidebar generally.

JG: You would go to the opponent's dressing room?

DS: Yes. That's when they joined . . . well, that became a big problem because no woman had ever been in the Razorback dressing room. But Paul Borden and Jim were very firm about that — I was going to be writer there, so I was going to be

treated just like the rest them. Originally, in 1990, they brought players out to me.  
They did not let me go in the locker room.

JG: Now, are we talking about after the game?

DS: After the game, yes. You know you're on a deadline.

JG: Right. You have to move quickly.

DS: That's right.

JG: So you're there getting ready to do your color story after the football game and they would bring the players out to you one at a time.

DS: Yes.

JG: Were these Razorback players or opponent's players?

DS: Now, opponents, I could go into the dressing room whenever I wanted to, but the University had a rule that no women were allowed in our locker room.

JG: That's weird, that you couldn't do it for the Razorbacks, but you could do it for the opponents.

DS: I think that's why I wound up doing more of the opponent's stories in 1990. So they would, I would do some of the Razorback sidebars occasionally, and so I would tell somebody from the sports information office who I wanted to talk to, like Owen Kelly or Ty Mason. I am thinking about some names that were up there. And then they would bring them to me, which was fine because I just wanted to get my job done. I didn't care about going in and making a feminist statement, being the first woman in the locker room; I didn't care about that; I was just trying to do my job.

JG: What you wanted to ask is what it was like to catch that 50-yard pass or handle that major block that prevented a touchdown.

DS: Sure, I was just trying to do what everyone else was doing. Bringing the players to me worked until some of the *Democrat* reporters would hang around and sort of eavesdrop on my conversations with these people, when those *Democrat* reporters, who were all male, could have gone into the locker room and gotten them themselves. So that became a little problem. Then, when the UA joined the Southeastern Conference, in 1991 I believe, the SEC has an equal access policy, and so they couldn't just leave me outside. They either had to let everybody go in or bring players out to everybody. So that's when I became the first woman in the Razorback locker room, in 1991.

JG: What a shame that you got that wonderful privilege in the very last closing month of *Gazette* operations.

DS: Yes, but it was no big deal. I remember they had me write a first-person piece about what it was like to be in the locker room and I think I made a joke that all their teeth are straight and I know what color eyes they all have. But the players were fine. In fact, there was something like I had covered opponent's dressing rooms and the opponents had won more games, and the Razorback players were begging me to come in and do the sidebar because it seemed like I always covered the winning team, as it turned out. Whoever I was assigned to cover, that locker room wound up winning the game after three or four games that season. And so I had some of the Razorback players say: "Hey, we want you in our locker room

after the game. This guy's (Jim Harris) bad luck for us." So it became a joke.

JG: So it really didn't cause a problem.

DS: No.

JG: I imagine some other colleges back east had broken ground there in earlier years, so it was coming to Fayetteville.

DS: Now Wally Hall wrote a snitty little column about "Why would a woman want to go in a locker room?" And I think mine became a response to that: "I don't want to go into a locker room, but this is my job and I am going to be treated the same way as your male reporters."

JG: Wally Hall was the sports editor of the opposing *Arkansas Democrat*.

DS: Yes.

JG: So either way you were able to handle your interview story after the game whether in the locker room or waiting outside for them to bring the key players out to you.

DS: Yes.

JG: So where did you go to write the story once you had those quotes that you needed?

DS: Well, we had again, not as primitive as the other big old bubble box, but we had these Radio Shack tiny little lap-tops, and so we would write. And that is how we worked from Fayetteville. I think the news people had big computer set-ups, but this was before e-mail. So the sports department just worked with these little Radio Shacks. And we would write the stories and then they had a coupler and you had to go through the send program, but you had to stick the telephone

receiver into these couplers. And you had to be sure that the mouthpiece went into the mouth coupler end and the ear piece had to go on the other and you had to do it on the telephone. And then you would push some buttons on the thing and it would transmit over the phone wires. Much more complicated than with what we have today with e-mail.

JG: It wasn't a voice going over the telephone wires, but somehow, electronically, you established an electronic coupling with the telephone.

DS: Right. You had a number directly to the big computer at the *Gazette* in Little Rock and then it would just go over, but often it would be just unreliable. You would have to send it and re-send it and sometimes you would have to end up dictating it. It was really a problem. And Nate Allen, who was not terribly technologically with it, would always moan, "Oh, why me, why is this happening to me?" when he would have trouble sending. That became one of the other catch phrases every time something went wrong: "Why me, why me?"

JG: So he would write the major story of the game?

DS: Orville would have written the game story, Nate would have been doing some of these sidebars like I did later.

JG: I see. So did the main game story, did it get transmitted in the same way?

DS: Same way, the same way.

JG: So I was wondering if you could talk about some of the very interesting stories you covered while you were working in the *Gazette* sports department.

DS: One thing that sticks out is that I got the scoop when the golfer John Daly decided

to turn pro and not go back to the U of A.

JG: And that's D-A-L-Y?

DS: D-A-L-Y. He was going to declare as a professional golfer and not go back to the University to complete his senior year. I was covering golf in the summertime all across the state, and we were at Longhills Golf Course in Benton, and I had heard a little rumor that he was not going to go back to finish his senior year, that he was going to turn pro. So I cornered him after his round, and I said, "Hey, John." I had a nice relationship with him. I said, "John, I understand that you are going to turn pro?" And he said, "Yes, I am, but I don't want you to write it yet because I haven't told my coach and I want to be able to tell my coach before you write it in the paper, but after I tell him, I will call you." I said, "Okay, I'll wait." So I went back to the office and wrote up my tournament story and told them that I was going to have a big scoop coming up. They said, "Oh, you'd better write that now, because he will never call you back, and the *Democrat* will beat you on it." And I said, "No, I told the guy I would wait and so I am not going to write the story." And, sure enough, two days later John Daly called and said, "Okay, I've told my coach; you go ahead and write the story." So we kept it a real secret, and I got a copyrighted byline on the front of the sports page the next day. And my friend from the *Democrat* whom I competed with, Steve Eddington, said he picked up the paper that day and said, "Damn it, she beat me on this story." He and I liked each other, but we were competing, really, because of the newspaper war. You were not to let the other side win. So that was fun.

JG: Now, that was a great one.

DS: Yes.

JG: What were the major Razorback sports that you covered?

DS: Before I moved to Fayetteville, I became the main writer on track and cross-country as far as traveling to cover meets, national meets and things. I had worked with (UA coach) John McDonnell when I was sports editor at the *Traveler* at the U of A, and so I knew John, and Nate had so many things to cover up there because Orville did the big stuff and Nate was just overworked, so he let me do a lot of the track and cross-country, and I went to three or four or five national championships even before I moved to Fayetteville, and when I moved up there, it made it even easier because I was covering them all the time. I went to Raleigh, North Carolina, and Eugene, Oregon, and somewhere in Iowa, Iowa City or somewhere, for national championships.

JG: Now these were track and cross country. . .

DS: National Championships.

JG: National meets. The Razorbacks.

DS: Were big winners.

JG: Big winners.

DS: They didn't win all the ones that I covered, but they always were in the top two or three. So that became big news obviously. That was a lot of fun.

JG: You continued to cover track and cross country when you were based in Fayetteville for the last year?

DS: Yes, in addition to everything else. . . tennis and golf and everything else that they had up there, including the Lady Razorbacks. We tried to cover everything. With the third person up there we could really bone up on that, coverage of the stuff that didn't get covered before. Because really, with Orville doing the main stuff, Nate was left with everything else. Which was really too much for one person.

JG: I wonder if you could discuss the changes that occurred following Gannett's purchase of the *Gazette* in 1986?

DS: We got summoned for the meeting to announce that Gannett had bought the paper and there was a lot of fear and the unknowing, the unknown part of the --- you just didn't know what to expect. Now, I was young enough and naive enough to think that this was just going to be great, not that I was anti-Patterson at all. I was thinking, you know, this is the future and we're going to focus; we're going to make this work. Gannett really tried to talk about all the wonderful opportunities I would have as a woman; they really wanted to stress that. But the longer that Gannett owned the paper, and I am sure my thoughts are colored a little by the way it ended, but it really became, "Oh, my God, what are you doing to our paper?!" The impression that we had was that these outsiders were coming in and thought we didn't know how to run the paper, and they were going to show us how. They brought people into that sports department who were unbelievable, that I don't know how they got jobs elsewhere. Some came in as sports editors. I don't want to name names for this. Some of them were nice guys, dumb as bricks; some of them were smart, but mean as snakes. It really became

uncomfortable. Even the things they focused on us covering, you know, the Old Gray Lady. I will never forget when the front page of the *Arkansas Gazette* had a full color photograph of the spandex dance team uniforms at UALR.

JG: The University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

DS: Yes. Oh, my gosh, we were aghast that, one, that had even been covered, but, two, that it was a page-one story. Please.

JG: Was it the dance team?

DS: Dance team.

JG: Part of the Theater Department?

DS: No, like the cheerleaders.

JG: Oh, the cheerleaders.

DS: The Trojans dance team. I am sure that all the old *Gazette* people were spinning in their graves to think about that. I mean, we were horrified, but we couldn't say much.

JG: How about what happened to you when the *Gazette* was closed, when the *Gazette* ceased business, were you still in Fayetteville?

DS: Yes, the first thing we heard about it was . . . I think Jim Harris, we were living in Fayetteville, but Jim Harris had been to Little Rock one weekend, like Labor Day, this was in September, and he called me when he got back and said that I would not believe it, but apparently Gannett was going to close the paper and sell it to the *Democrat* or something like that. We had no clue anything was happening. We knew that they continued to lose money, but nobody told us their plans, and for

six weeks we were at the mercy of what we saw on television. They never addressed what was going on, which led to a great deal of turmoil because you just didn't know. That was in September and in July, I had turned down a job to go to the *Orlando Sentinel* to cover the University of Florida sports because I didn't want to go that far from home and I wanted to continue at the *Gazette*. I had never had a resume until Orlando called me. And looking back now, maybe I should have gone, but, no, I needed to see this through till the end. Things just kept getting worse and worse, and nobody would know anything and it was awful. And so, things progressed, and they began to write things in the paper about how the *Gazette* employees were trying to buy the paper from Gannett. There was a push there at the end, and I think they had talked to Doug Brandon, about him possibly investing in the paper and some other moneyed people in Little Rock. Of course, newspaper people didn't have enough money to buy the paper. October the 18<sup>th</sup>, I had a dental appointment in Little Rock and that was a Friday before the Arkansas/Texas game on Saturday at War Memorial Stadium. Things had gotten worse all week, and I packed everything up from the Fayetteville office and put it into my little car on about Wednesday, expecting the worst, but hoping for the best. I didn't unpack it at my house. I hauled all my stuff in my car down to Little Rock for my dental appointment, and that was that Friday. And after I went to the dentist, I came into the *Gazette*, and everybody was just saying, "It's over. They are going to have an announcement later on this afternoon." It was the most bizarre thing. Wadie Moore was sitting there working on his high school football

predictions for that day; it was right in the middle of high school football season, and the computer went off. They were turned off.

JG: This was around noon?

DS: About noon. And Wadie Moore just slumped down in his chair.

JG: Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1991.

DS: Oh, my God, this is really it. We had waited and hoped against hope up to the last second that it wouldn't happen. Then they called a meeting with everybody, finally, and this stretched on till about 3:30 in the afternoon, and people were smoking — they had banned smoking from the newsroom. They even brought out champagne. I don't remember who had this, but Pat Patterson, the photographer, was swigging it. I know there were others, but I have a photograph of him. It was the most unbelievable scene I had ever seen. People were standing up on top of desks to hear all the announcements coming in. Crying and hugging, just absolutely the most bizarre thing I had ever seen in my life, before or since. Of course, I was shattered. This was the only place I had ever wanted to work.

JG: That was really weird --- you had been in Fayetteville and had been back at the *Gazette* office in Little Rock for how long?

DS: Well, I had occasionally bounced back in when I was in town for work or pleasure. But, no, I am so glad that I was there. It was like almost losing a parent or something; you wanted to be there for the end. So the next day they honored our press passes for the Arkansas/ Texas football game. So Jim Bailey and Wadie Moore picked me up and we drove over to the game at War Memorial Stadium.

We were just lost. We didn't know how to act; we didn't know anything. And we got off the elevator at the press box, and Orville Henry, who had gone to the *Democrat* earlier, reached out and put his arms around me and hugged my neck, and we all started crying again. Nobody knew even if the sun was going to come up the next day, because it was so awful.

JG: So did you watch the game from the press box?

DS: We watched from the press box. We even went down to the field just to kind of be there. Of course, we didn't have anybody to write for, but we were just kind of there.

JG: Did you find yourself taking notes even though you didn't need any?

DS: No, I don't even think we took a notebook. But, the next week Jack Crowe, who was the UA football coach at the time, I got a call from his secretary. I stayed gone for several days, and I went back to Fayetteville about Wednesday. There was no need to go back. And we got a call from Jack Crowe's secretary, and Coach Crowe had autographed game footballs from the Arkansas/Texas game for me and Paul and Jim. And Arkansas won, which was a big upset, the last time they played until the Cotton Bowl this year. When she called and said come by and pick up this football, we started crying all over again because we were lost; we didn't know what to do. We had no idea.

JD: Well, Donna, after the *Gazette* closed, what happened then?

DS: Well, I was very bitter, very hurt, just crushed. Lots of my co-workers were sending out resumes all across the country. But my home is in Arkansas. I didn't

want to move anywhere else, going to the *Democrat* was absolutely not an option. I had no desire to do that. And I don't think the small papers could have . . . that sort of entered my mind, but I thought, "Well, maybe I'll just retreat to graduate school." So I had been enrolled in Roy Reed's "Literature of Journalism" class that fall. They had started a master's program in journalism at the U of A, so the rest of that fall I just finished that one class, and in the spring I went full time and in the summer. So I finished my master's except for my thesis, which I took a little while to work on. But I taught at West Fork for a year, still bitter. I wouldn't take the *Democrat*. The *Democrat* would come to my house, and I would call the circulation department in Little Rock and demand that they not throw this rag of a paper in my yard anymore. But they just kept throwing it and throwing it because we still had this payroll deduction, because I was still drawing a paycheck for a few months or a few weeks, however that would happen. And finally, I got some person in the circulation department, and I said, "If you don't quit throwing these papers into my yard, I am going to haul them all to the . . ." — I can't remember if I said Walter Hussman's or John Robert Starr's house — ". . . and dump them in his yard. Stop throwing this paper." And finally they did. And it took years before I subscribed to the paper again. But time helps a little bit, and now I am not quite so bitter. I taught at West Fork for a year, English, high school English, and then moved back to central Arkansas. I was dating a fellow whom I have since married who was living in Conway. So I taught for a year at Pulaski Oak Grove, English and journalism. Then I went to the Arkansas School for the Blind

for three years, and I taught English and journalism and finished a master's degree in teaching visually impaired children at UALR. Then I was at Mayflower for two years, teaching English, journalism, speech and drama, before I bumped into Ernie Dumas last summer, who was retiring from UCA, and he encouraged me to apply for his job. It was very late in the summer, I mean, two weeks before school started, and I said, "No, I am not going to do that. I have got a pretty good situation at Mayflower," but he kept calling and he had the chair of the department call. And so I went for an interview four days later, and they hired me three hours later. So I have been here this year and just love it. I feel like I can focus all the passion I had for the *Gazette* and journalism with kids who — I can share that with kids who are serious about it and who want that same thing, which you can't do in public schools.

JG: And your title is?

DS: Currently, I am an instructor of journalism. I have applied for next year; it will be a lecturer position, which will not be a year-to-year hire. It will be potentially a roll-over contract. I should find out next week.

JG: And your husband is Ken?

DS: Ken Stephens. He is a . . .

JG: S-T-E-P-H-E-N-S.

DS: He is a long-time football coach in Arkansas. He coached at North Little Rock and here at UCA, built this program and got it on the map. And then he went to Lamar University and Arkansas Tech, and that's where I met him. I was covering

the AIC for the *Gazette*, and so I met my husband there on the football field at Arkansas Tech. Now he is retired from football coaching, and he is actually the golf coach here at UCA this spring. So we have quite a sports-related background, very happy.

JG: Gives you a lot to talk about.

DS: Yes.

JG: So you have how many college degrees?

DS: Three.

JG: And they are?

DS: Bachelor's degree in English and journalism from the U of A, a master's degree in journalism and English — it's kind of a major/minor — from the U of A, and a master's degree in teaching visually impaired children from UALR.

JG: That must have been very interesting to be teaching the visually impaired students at the School for the Blind.

DS: It really was. Of all my high school teaching, that was the most rewarding, because those kids appreciated me, needed me, maybe not more than the quote normal high school kids did, but they didn't bring a lot of the . . . they just had different problems from the typical high school kids, and I just loved it. And I thought that was the direction my career would take from there, but as it's turned out, this is what I am supposed to be doing.

JG: Now, besides your work at UCA, you also do some freelance writing, don't you?

DS: Yes, I have developed quite a little business, and I am quite proud of it. The year

that the *Gazette* closed, I guess I didn't do any more freelancing for that year. But in the next year when football season rolled around, Nate Allen had suggested that the *Springdale News* hire me to cover some high school football, and that worked into high school basketball. Then I moved back to central Arkansas and I've been a stringer for the *Log Cabin Democrat* here in Conway since I've lived here six or seven years now. And then I am also the sports editor of the *North Little Rock Times* and the *Maumelle Monitor*, which is a little part-time job that we do. Kim Brazzel — actually, my *Gazette* connections are how I ended up at that job, too — Kim Brazzel was doing it and he needed to get out of it to go cover Oaklawn, so he asked me if I would sort of take over. So Jim Harris and I were reunited in the *North Little Rock Times* and the *Maumelle Monitor* after we had been together in Fayetteville. So we combined on sports there. And I do some work for the Arkansas State Golf Association. I do their yearly publication. I do several stories for them.

[Tape Interruption]

JG: You were talking about your freelance sports writing, and you said something about the amount of money you make.

DS: Yes, with all my freelance clients, I almost make more money now than I did as a four-dollar-an-hour intern at the *Gazette* when I first went there.

JG: Do you make that much from your freelance work or combined with your UCA teaching?

DS: No, just from my freelance work. UCA provides the main salary and the health

insurance, and this is fun because I am able to share my passion with the students, and the *Gazette* lives on, because I really refer to it often in my classes. You know, writing and journalism are passions and I am able to continue to do that and that makes me very happy. I feel quite fulfilled now.

JG: Thank you very much.

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[End of Interview]