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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Gregory Adams
Telephone Interview
8 November 2006

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is November 8, 2006. I am getting ready to do a telephone interview with Gregory Adams, who is from Portland, Oregon, where he works for the *Oregonian*. Greg, at one time, if I remember correctly, worked twice for the *Arkansas Democrat*. Is that right, Greg?

Greg Adams: That's correct.

JM: Okay. Now, the first thing I need to do, though, is to ask you if I have your permission to make this tape and turn it over to the [Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville].

GA: That's fine with me.

JM: Okay, very good. Let's just start from the beginning, Greg, and figure out how you got to the *Democrat*, what you did while you were at the *Democrat*, and as I remember, I think that you actually worked there for a while when they made the switch to morning [publication]. But, at any rate, let's just start out and give me

your full name.

GA: Gregory Paul Adams.

JM: Gregory Paul Adams?

GA: Yes.

JM: Okay. Where were you born, Greg?

GA: I was born in Cincinnati [Ohio]. Dad had been in the army, and, after World War II, he was a civilian when I was born.

JM: Yes.

GA: And so when the Korean War started, they called him back in, and we went to Okinawa [Japan] and came back to the [United] States—spent just a few months in Georgia, and then he got orders to Fort Chaffee [Arkansas]. And that's how he ended up in Fort Smith.

JM: All right. Where were you in Georgia—Fort Benning?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, I've been there, but at any rate, when were you born?

GA: January 13, 1949.

JM: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

GA: Margaret Helen Wilder was her maiden name.

JM: W-I-L-D-E-R?

GA: Yes, Wilder.

JM: Yes, okay. Your dad's name was what?

GA: Otis David Adams.

JM: Otis David Adams. Okay. So when did he get sent to Chaffee?

GA: That would've been 1955.

JM: Nineteen fifty-five. Okay. And did you go through most of your schooling at Fort Smith?

GA: All my school—well, no, in 1959 they closed Fort Chaffee and we went to Columbus, Ohio. Dad had one year left in the army.

JM: Okay.

GA: And that was most of the fifth grade. And then I went back to Fort Smith.

JM: Okay, so except for about one year you had all of your schooling at Fort Smith.

GA: No, I had about three months in Okinawa.

JM: Oh, did you? Okay, all right.

GA: In Kindergarten.

JM: Did you ever go to college?

GA: Yes, I went to West Ark [Junior College].

JM: Oh, did you? Okay.

GA: Junior college.

JM: That's in Fort Smith, of course.

GA: I think it's the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith now. I went a semester at Central State University in Edmond, Oklahoma.

JM: Edmond, Oklahoma. Yes.

GA: And then I went one semester at [the University of Oklahoma]. And I actually started three semesters but only finished one.

JM: Okay, did you ever get a degree?

GA: No, I did not.

JM: Okay. So how did you get into the newspaper business?

GA: Well, I took journalism in the eighth grade at Darby High School in Fort Smith.

JM: Yes. That would be Darby Junior High, wouldn't it?

GA: Darby Junior High.

JM: Yes, okay.

GA: In the ninth grade my neighborhood was gerrymandered into Southside [High School] to keep Southside white. That's what happened then. It was a lot longer trip for me to go to school in the ninth grade.

JM: Yes.

GA: But I took journalism there, also. And in the tenth grade my neighborhood was switched back into the Northside [High School] District. So I did three years at Northside and took journalism each year. I started out in the yearbook and the newspaper. In the yearbook I was doing sports and had a couple of unpleasant incidents with the coaches at Northside that I just went to Hazel Presson, the journalism instructor, and I said, "I can't do sports anymore."

JM: That's P-R-E-S-S-O-N, right? Hazel Presson?

GA: P-R-E-S-S-O-N. Yes.

JM: All right.

GA: I just want to say about Miss Presson—she was a—she gave me a college-level education. Because I think the quality of the students she turned out—Mike Kirkendall, Ron Jenkins, Sandra [Fritchey?]-a lot of them stayed with journalism and did real well with it.

JM: Yes. Okay, well, I know Ron, of course—he's—I guess he's still at Oklahoma City with the Associated Press. But Sandra Fritchey, did you say?

GA: Yes.

JM: I'm not sure that I knew her, but at any rate—and, of course, I sure knew Mike

Kirkendall. [Laughs] Okay, so you took journalism, then, from Hazel Presson for three years?

GA: Yes.

JM: Okay. And then where did you go? How did you get into professional journalism?

GA: Well, let me just make one more comment about high school. The last month—at Southside High School the editorship rotated, because we only had ninth graders and tenth graders. And Mr. Oliver—I can't remember his first name—he was the instructor. He appointed me editor the last month. And I just thought that was really special.

JM: Yes.

GA: So, as it turns out, I'm probably the only person in Fort Smith's history that was the editor of both high school newspapers.

JM: Oh, okay. So then you got back to Northside, and you were editor of the Northside newspaper.

GA: Yes, in my senior year.

JM: Yes, what's the name of that paper?

GA: *The Grizzly*.

JM: *The Grizzly*. Okay.

GA: And my senior year we won three of the four National Press Association Competition Awards. One semester—each semester they presented the award—one semester we didn't get one of them—either the Columbia Journalism Society or the National Journalism Society. Just as an aside, my wife, who I met in high school, was editor the next year, and she won all four of them.

JM: What is her name?

GA: Karen. Karen Beltz was her maiden name.

JM: K-A-R-E-N?

GA: Yes.

JM: And how do you spell her last name?

GA: B-E-L-T-Z.

JM: B-E-L-T-Z. Okay. All right. Just a minute.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Now, did your wife go into journalism after she got out of school?

GA: She worked at the [*Fort Smith Times-Record*] two weeks. She was doing obituaries, and she didn't like that.

JM: Yes, okay. Now, then, how did you get from—what happened after you got out of Northside?

GA: I didn't have any real plans other than to go to college, and I had no idea which one I was going to go to. [Laughs] I had worked on a farm each summer, so I just went back to the farm. And then Mike Kirkendall, who I had gone through journalism [classes] with all but the ninth grade, he called me one day and he said, "Where have you been?" And I told him. He said, "Well, Leroy Fry, the managing editor of the *Fort Smith Times-Record*, was trying to get a hold of me to offer me a job." I didn't know before then that the *Times-Record* would traditionally hire the *Bruin* yearbook editor and the *Grizzly* newspaper editor as copy editors. And so I hired on with the *Times-Record*. The *Times-Record* was an afternoon paper and the *Southwest American* was the morning paper.

JM: Yes.

GA: And at the end of the summer, you could switch over to the *Southwest American* so you could attend classes at West Ark Junior College, which is what I did.

JM: Okay. So after that—so then you started working at the *Southwest American* as what—still as a copy editor?

GA: Correct.

JM: And you were going to school at West Ark—the junior college? Okay.

GA: I also wrote a news column that appeared on Saturdays. We had—the *Southwest American* had a youth page—[it was] like, a third of the page was ads, you know, and the rest was news about the high school. That ran for probably a year.

JM: Okay. Now, was Mike working there, too, at this time?

GA: Yes.

JM: Okay. Now, this is Mike Kirkendall we're talking about. K-I-R-K-E-N-D-A-L-L, as I remember.

GA: That's correct.

JM: And that's the same Mike Kirkendall that is now with the *Los Angeles Times*. Is that correct?

GA: Correct.

JM: Yes, okay. All right, so how long did you stay with the Fort Smith paper?

GA: I believe it was two and a half years. I would've hired on in 1967. Ron Jenkins had worked at the *Times-Record* and *Southwest American*, and he went to the *Oklahoma Journal*. The *Oklahoma Journal* was a startup newspaper by Bill Atkinson, who had run for governor as a Democrat in Oklahoma, and E. K. Gaylord, who came to be the 100-year-old publisher that was still very active—he pretty much froze Atkinson out of the news columns. So after two unsuccessful

runs, Atkinson started this paper.

JM: Just as a challenge to the [*Daily*] Oklahoman, right, or the *Oklahoma City Times*?

To Gaylord, at any rate.

GA: Yes, to give the city a liberal newspaper as opposed to the *Oklahoman* and *Times*.

It had journalistic values, but there's also that grudge factor in it, I think.

JM: Yes, so you went to the—did you go to the *Journal*?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

GA: Ron Jenkins enticed me over. It wasn't hard to do because it doubled my salary.

JM: Yes, okay. [Laughs]

GA: In fact, just a reflection of the times—in 1967 I was hired at the *Times-Record* at minimum wage. And my first three wage raises in journalism were because the minimum wage increased.

JM: Yes, okay. All right. [Laughter]

GA: I've done better since then.

JM: Yes, all right. So how long were you . . . ?

GA: I was at the *Journal* for, oh, almost two years. And I got into a situation where I just couldn't go along with the—it was a small operation—probably had a staff of—may have had, at the most, eighteen. About four of us on the news desk and the news editor. So I hired on to the *Arkansas Gazette*. I was there three months.

The only reason I didn't stay longer is I wanted to continue my college [education], and Arkansas was going to charge me out-of-state tuition even though I had been raised in Arkansas and attended college there earlier. Well, I had just come from Oklahoma, where they had charged me out-of-state tuition,

and I kind of felt like the man with no country. [Laughs] So the *Journal* thought they couldn't do without me, and hired me back under the same news editor. I got along with him for another twenty months or so. Toward the end of that, Mike Kirkendall was hired on, and that was great because Mike and I were—Mike had been my best man at my wedding. I still consider him one of my best friends. But I came to find out—I mean, he told me he had been hired at a salary over me, and I just took exception to that. So I guess I wrote you at the [*Arkansas Democrat*. You were kind enough to take me on.

JM: Okay, so I hired you then at that point—correct?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay. Do you remember what year that was?

GA: I used to be able to recite the year. That would've been about 1972.

JM: Yes, that makes sense. That's about right. Okay. So you came to the *Democrat* as a copy editor—is that correct?

GA: Correct.

JM: In 1972.

GA: As I recall.

JM: Okay, so . . .

GA: And I loved it. It was an afternoon paper. It was early rising—you know, get up and get off at 2:15 or 2:30 and have the whole afternoon. I thought it was great. I was there almost two years, and Mike Storey—no, not Mike Storey—his first name was Mike—had had hired on at the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis [Tennessee]. And the *Commercial Appeal* paid very well back then. He encouraged me to apply to the *Commercial Appeal*. Well, I eventually did and

was hired there.

JM: Okay.

GA: I was a copy editor and advanced to assistant wire editor. I stayed there four years and kind of burned out—just burned out. So I had taken up woodcarving a long while back, and I just did that for about nine months, and I was a Mr. Mom. We had our second child. We had put ourselves on a waiting list for a freighter trip to Europe. They called us, like, on Thursday. They said they had an opening if we could get to Baltimore [Maryland] by Monday—we could have that cabin. By some miracle, we were able to do that—empty our house—put everything in storage—and get on a Greyhound bus and go to Baltimore.

JM: Okay, what kind of trip was this?

GA: It was a Polish freighter. It can carry a maximum of twelve passengers—took ten days to cross. We landed in Rotterdam [the Netherlands]. Just took trains to Calais [France] and crossed over to England and spent a couple nights in Canterbury—flew out of London, back to New York, back to where we had parked our children.

JM: Where was that?

GA: Down in Louisville [Kentucky].

JM: In where?

GA: Not Louisville—outside of Louisville—Fort Knox.

JM: Okay. This was you and your wife, right?

GA: Right.

JM: Okay.

GA: So I was pretty broke—didn't have a job—no prospects of one. I went to my—

where my mother was raised in eastern Kentucky in Harlan County. I did some work for my aunts for a couple of weeks. At some point I called Leroy Fry at the *Times-Record* and asked him if he had any openings. He said no, but he'd keep me in mind. He called me and offered me a job. So I went back to Fort Smith. I stayed there about four months as news editor. I felt the paper had become pretty anemic in the interim. It was a lot slimmer, and the reporting staff was smaller.

JM: Yes.

GA: They weren't aggressive at all. It wasn't to my liking, so I called the *Democrat* to see if they needed a copy editor.

JM: Yes.

GA: They got back with me within two or three weeks and said, "Yes, we do," and I was hired back on at the *Democrat*.

JM: Do you remember what year that was?

GA: Well, that would've been that—1978.

JM: Okay, who hired you back? Do you remember?

GA: Lyndon Finney.

JM: Lyndon Finney. Well, good.

GA: Linden Finney was another product of Hazel Presson's classes. And he eventually, I believe, became PIO [Public Information Officer] for the big Baptist hospital in Little Rock.

JM: Yes. Okay, was he—I guess at that—what was his position at that time?

GA: He was kind of like the manager—staff manager.

JM: Yes.

GA: Bob [John Robert] Starr was the editor.

JM: Yes, okay. I had left in August of 1978, so this must've been after I left.

GA: Yes, that sounds about right.

JM: Yes, okay, and then Starr came in a month or two after I left and maybe fairly quickly—I don't know. But, anyway, you came back in probably late 1978 and then what happened?

GA: Well, I was hired on as copy editor, and I just thought it would be like my first stint at the *Democrat*. I was in for a surprise. I had been there about two weeks. The newspaper had gone from hot metal to the hybrid cold type and hot metal—computers and Linotypes with the perforated tape. After about two weeks, Lyndon said they wanted me to work the swing shift, plugging pages for the next day's edition. So I'd go in and plug two or three pages with, you know, long wire stories that weren't breaking news or anything. Pretty soon it was three or four pages. Then it was four to six pages. And this was a period of—two or three months had passed, and I went to Lyndon and I said, "This is getting a bit much. I can't get it all done. I probably need some help at night." By surprise, he said, "Yes, we'll put somebody else on with you." So we were doing up to, like, eight to ten pages a night.

JM: Okay, now, were they—had they gone morning yet?

GA: No.

JM: Okay. All right. Go ahead.

GA: Walter Hussman [Jr.] owned the paper. Well, there were the Hussmans. Walter, Jr. was the son. They also owned the Hot Springs paper and TV and radio [stations]. That's how they were keeping the *Democrat* afloat. And I didn't know it at the time, but they had already made plans to switch to morning publication.

So over a period of ten months or so, it got to where there were, like, four of us at night, and I was in charge of plugging these pages because the paper was pretty big. They were free pressing (distributing free copies statewide) a lot of the state with it. They had the free want ads. Page after page of free want ads. Then we converted to morning publication, and I became news editor.

JM: Okay. Do you remember who was working with you while you were plugging the pages at night—who the other three people were?

GA: I can't. [Laughs] I really can't.

JM: I didn't know whether Si Dunn was involved in that or . . .

GA: No, Si was the day news editor.

JM: Okay.

GA: He still worked days after we converted. There may have been a street edition, you know, to get the stock [market report] and the Oaklawn results in when it was in season—Oaklawn [horse] racing.

JM: Now, I think maybe Mike Storey was working that some. I think he told me that he worked some at nights and plugged the paper.

GA: That's probably right.

JM: Yes, okay. But you were named the news editor, right? That was of the whole paper?

GA: Well, Si was still—he was—it's like I was night news editor and Si was day news editor.

JM: Oh, okay. All right. Okay.

GA: [Laughs] There's kind of a funny story about that. Remember, we were going head to head with the *Gazette*. We were trying to—we'd get their early edition,

and I'm sure they got ours. "Oops, we didn't have this story, but they didn't have this story." Well, one morning—and I don't know, I think it was Starr, the editor—took exception to us not having the Social Security story on page one that the *Gazette* did. The covers were the big news stories—you'd get both of them—you get either paper, you'd get the big stories, you know, on page one. Well, one of the news editors at the *Gazette* was nearing retirement, and any time there was a Social Security story of any merit at all, he put it on page one. Of course, I was a long way from retirement. So word came from Lyndon that I was no longer night news editor. He changed the title, but he said, "It's because this story wasn't on page one—somebody thought that somebody needed to take the fall." He changed the title, but not my duties. [Laughter] I was still in charge, so I didn't take it personal or anything. The way I took it personal—I made an effort for the next week that every story the *Gazette* was going to have on page one—I had the feel for news, and I was successful at matching every story the *Gazette* had on page one. And I think the fifth day that happened, I compared—and I'd do this without knowing what they were doing. The fifth day, I woke up and compared the two papers—the page ones. I said, "That's it. I've done it. I can do it. Now, I'll news edit the way I want to." I went back to work every day—stayed on top of it.

JM: Yes, okay. You're staying you went back to what you thought ought to be on page one rather than what you thought the *Gazette* was going to put on page one?

GA: Yes, instead of trying to play that game, I was going to practice journalism.

JM: Yes, okay. Now, had the paper gone morning full time then? As I recall, maybe about January of 1979 they went morning with just one edition. And then a little

later in the year, then they went completely switched to morning.

GA: Yes, that sounds right. There was a transition there. There was one day of the week—I think it was Thursday—that it was a long day.

JM: Yes.

GA: Maybe it was a Wednesday, because they'd free press that Thursday edition all over the state. So we had a double shift. The way we did that—the day shift had like, five or six people, and the rest of us—I guess, twelve or so—would come on at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. and, you know, remake the paper with the day's news. That was pretty hectic. That eventually ended when they converted fully over.

JM: Yes, okay. So they would have—yes, okay, I follow you. Okay. So you had some long hours on some of those days, then?

GA: Oh, yes.

JM: Yes, okay. And so . . .

GA: And speaking of long hours, I had a great crew. Almost all of us were in our twenties and, boy, they were good, bright, and enthusiastic. For a while there nobody worked Sundays. So almost everybody had to split their shifts—split their days off, I mean—Sunday and one other day. A few lucky ones got Sunday [and] Monday. I don't think anybody got Friday [and] Saturday.

JM: Yes.

GA: They ask us, "You want to try working a four-day week with ten-hour days?" Boy, everybody said yes. Because that way they'd get two days off together and then Sunday. We tried it. In a couple of months, I called them together and said, "Well, what do think?" Because I was dragging. You work four ten-hour days—you know, at that pace it really—all but one of them wanted to go back to the

five-day week. You'd spend your first day off just recovering, and so we went back to the five-day week.

JM: Okay. Now, you said that you thought you had a good staff—a good crew. Do you remember who all you had on that staff?

GA: Oh, Jerry Bokamper, Celia...

JM: Storey—later became Storey.

GA: Yes, she became Storey.

JM: Yes.

GA: Amanda Husted. That's not her maiden name.

JM: No, it was Miller, I think, but at any rate—Singleton—she came to the paper as Amanda Singleton, then she married Bill Husted. Okay, but at any rate, I know who you're talking about.

GA: There was a girl, Deidra—D-I—I kept calling her—her name was Diedra, to me. That's what I said. For a month or two—and finally she came to me and she pronounced her name the way it was supposed to be (De-i-dra). [Laughs] I felt like a real heel. I apologized. Janice Cottingham, I think was her name—Karen Taylor, George Arnold, Terry Austin. Terry was hired away from us by the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* would periodically raid us—raid our copy desk. A couple of others [left] while I was there. George ended up going to a paper downstate—you know, a top editor.

JM: Yes, I think it was another Hussman paper—the *El Dorado Daily News*, probably. I know he was there for a while, but . . .

GA: He shocked me. He told me he had this offer and wondered what I thought about it, and George was my right-hand man at that time. I said, "Well, do what's

comfortable for you. I'd hate to lose you, but if that's best for you and your family—" And he said, "Yes, it's an opportunity. I'm old enough that I have to start thinking about the future and things like that." Come to find out, he was older than me, and I was just totally shocked. I thought he was several years younger.

JM: Yes. Yes, you know, George is still with the—or back with the paper now. He's their editorial editor for the northwest Arkansas edition in Fayetteville and Springdale.

GA: No, I didn't know that.

JM: Yes, he's back up there. So he writes a once-a-week column and everything. But, yes, George is a good hand. I hired him, too. But, at any rate—so, okay, how long did this rock along?

GA: Oh, I was there for two years as a news editor, whether I had the title or not. I want to go back and mention one thing. I believe it was Janice Cottingham and one of the other copy editors, and for the life of me, I can't remember his name. They became engaged and married in Bob Starr's office.

JM: Was that Omar Greene?

GA: Pardon?

JM: Was this Omar Greene?

GA: That doesn't sound right.

JM: That doesn't sound right. Well, I'll find—that was somebody. I think Leslie Newell [Peacock] told me about that. I'll go back and check that. [Editor's note: It was Omar Greene.]

GA: Oh, yes, Leslie Newell. I remember her.

JM: Yes. Okay, so . . .

GA: A couple of other things I'm just going to toss out. John Robert Starr wrote a—
did I say Bob Starr or John? It was John Robert, wasn't it?

JM: Well, that's what he went by later, after he got to the *Democrat*. For twenty
years, everybody had known him as—you know, while he was with the AP
[Associated Press] as Bob Starr. But, yes, I think he started going by John Robert
after he went back to the *Democrat* as an editor.

GA: There was some kind of an event—I don't know, the economic development
department or whatever—it gave out party favors at this banquet or whatever, and
one of them was a corkscrew. He wrote a column. He wrote several columns.
You know, that column was his soapbox. He just thought that the favors were
totally wasteful. He said, "It makes sense to give out samples of Arkansas
products, but a fancy wine utensil?" You know, it didn't make sense to him. So I
carved him a carving, and what it was—it was about two feet tall, and it was a
giant corkscrew going through the state of Arkansas. And the state of Arkansas
was kind of like the front of a suit and had a big star on it, like a sheriff's badge. I
showed it to him just to—I was real proud of it. He wouldn't let it leave this
office. He said, "I don't know how I'll pay for it, but it's not leaving this office."
[Laughs] And so I guess that was . . .

JM: Are you saying that he was proud of it?

GA: Oh, yes.

JM: Yes, okay. Yes, okay. All right.

GA: He thought that was perfect. He'd write subsequent columns, and he [created a]
tongue-in-cheek award he called the Golden Corkscrew Award.

JM: Yes, okay. So was this a pretty hectic time as you all—of course, you had let out the paper quite a bit—a lot more space, isn't that correct?

GA: Yes.

JM: Okay, and you were competing head up with the *Gazette* every day, so how was that going?

GA: Well, you know, we didn't get much feedback from the business angle. We were left alone as journalists. I'm sure Lyndon and Bob Starr knew what was going on, but it didn't filter down below that. We were being paid. I thought the salaries were pretty good. Of course, they could've been better.

JM: Okay, and then why did you leave the *Democrat* that time?

GA: Well, I lost my younger brother. And that bummed me out. And I, too, had gotten to George Arnold's point, where I wanted to provide my family with a little more security than I was able to at my salary. I'm going to go way back to shortly after I started working the evenings by myself. Around 10:00 each night, I'd have a computer screen just go blank. It would crash. And I'd have to reconstruct that story or stories—whatever was involved. And this happened almost every night, and so, finally, I went to Lyndon and said, "This is crazy. You've got to do something." He started investigating. About a week later, he said, "Well, it's just lucky we found what's happening. What's happening is that at 10:00 or around about, the pressroom starts webbing the press. When they turned those presses on, it sucks enough power out of the system to crash the computer." [Laughs] Can you imagine that? They got that fixed. But we did—we had a computer—Amanda Husted one time took me down there and showed me how to reboot, and you're in this computer room with all these toggle

switches. And she's showing me—there's kind of a handbook—throw these up, throw these down, push this button, watch for this to happen. And I thought, "My God, if I ever have to do this, it's not going to work." Because I'm not technically—I'm a technophobe. I never did have to do it by myself. But our computer system was real shaky. It would crash and they'd bring it back up. It was usually the techie guys there who'd restart it. I'd had to learn it that first time because I was working alone by myself at night. When we were up and running full speed in the morning we had a support staff. They'd patch it back together, and we'd get an edition out. The precipitating factor for me leaving the *Democrat* was one night it crashed. I think this was around 5:00 or 6:00.

JM: In the evening?

GA: Yes. And I can't remember deadlines, but I'm guessing it was around 9:00 p.m. or 10:00. Maybe even earlier—8:00 for the first edition. It was down past 9:00 p.m. It was down past 10:00. Things were getting antsy. I think we started the TTS wire maybe . . .

JM: Tell me for the purpose of the other people what a TTS wire is.

GA: Oh, the old teletype.

JM: Teletype.

GA: It was like a typewriter. It typed sixty-six words a minute on fan fold, continuous paper. You'd put a box of paper under the teletype and run it through just like a typewriter. Click, clack, click, clack.

JM: Yes.

GA: UPI [United Press International] and AP had them. They converted to faster ones and faster ones, and, of course, now it's all online. Where was I?

JM: Okay—it had crashed.

GA: Yes, it crashed and it was 10:00—11:00. It got to be 12:00, and we were [laughs] doing nothing. All this was—and at some point, I confronted Hussman, and I said, “Why don’t you just go walk among the troops.” Or it was something like, “Why don’t you just get down in the trenches.” I thought that would boost morale. Lyndon told me that I came within a thin hair of being fired right then. Walter—out of my hearing—he said, “Walter turned and—” this is Lyndon talking—he said, “Walter turned to me and said, ‘What is he *talking* about?’” Lyndon interpreted for me, “I think he’s just saying if you just tell the people up there that you appreciate them being here, that would go a long way to helping things out,” and he did. He walked around the copy desk and thanked each and every one [laughs] except me.

JM: I’ll be darned. Hmm.

GA: That was okay. That was really okay because he—these kids were just—they were really frustrated. So we went out and sat on the front stoop of the building, and I—I don’t know—I pulled out a five dollar bill and I said, “Who wants to go get a six pack of beer?” And somebody did. Maybe they got two, because there were eight or ten of us there. A couple of them stayed up on the copy desk waiting for something to break. We sat and drank a couple of beers each. Somebody, I guess, shouted out the window at about 1:30 a.m. that we were back up.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: Okay, Greg. Now we’re—this is side two of the tape, and you were just telling

me that at about 1:30 a.m. they shouted out of the window that the system was back up. Then what happened?

GA: We ran back in. I had already drawn out all the dummies—where all the stories were going, and everybody knew what headlines to throw on them. My part of it, essentially, was done as news editor, and Lyndon came over. He knew I was just worn out. He said, “Go on home. We’ll carry the rest of it.” I did, and we had a great paper the next day.

JM: So they did get it out?

GA: They did get it out.

JM: But a little late.

GA: Well, I don’t know how late it was hitting the people’s doorsteps. I think they made it okay.

JM: Yes, okay, good. All right.

GA: I had wanted something better for my family, and this was the straw that broke the camel’s back. So I wrote to newspapers in the Rocky Mountains region and didn’t get a—got one positive response from, I guess, Cody, Wyoming. I wonder what would’ve happened if they had ever come through with an offer. I sat around for a couple months—didn’t hear anything. That’s about when I lost my brother. I wrote the papers on the West Coast—in L.A. [Los Angeles], San Francisco, Portland, San Diego. I would’ve written two more to Seattle, but I was just tired of writing the letters that night. I got the snottiest responses of any I have received in my lifetime from the two papers in San Francisco. I got a positive response from the *L.A. Daily News*, one of the San Diego papers, and the *Oregon Journal*—the *Oregon Journal* was the p.m. paper here in Portland. I

heard nothing from the *Oregonian*. Another couple of months passed, and I told my wife, Karen, “I’m probably going to start writing letters again. I thought maybe I’d try the Appalachian states.” And then the *Oregonian* news editor called me and asked me if I wanted to come out for a tryout. So two weeks after the May 18, 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, I came up to Oregon. There was still evidence of the great eruption—ash in the streets—cars couldn’t drive over twenty miles an hour to keep from stirring it up. I don’t know why the speed was restricted, because everything was wet. It rains up here quite a bit. I worked for a week. They paid me a week’s salary for, you know, a week. Toward the end of the first week, I called Karen and told her to come up here. She flew out for the second week, and the weather changed and cleared. We had sunshine and temperate temperatures. She fell in love with it. We went back to Little Rock and didn’t hear anything for weeks. I think about when we got back, a heat wave set in. We had twenty-nine days straight of 100-degree-plus weather. One day of ninety-nine, and then three more days of 100-plus. And I think it was someplace toward the end of that, the personnel manager at the *Oregonian* called me and offered me a job.

JM: And you took it?

GA: I took it.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] So that would’ve been sometime in 1980?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes.

GA: Yes, we arrived here in August. We crossed the state line on August fourth. We had taken the grand tour, including Rocky Mountain National Park and a couple

others—the [Grand] Tetons. We got here—arrived in Portland, I think, August eighth. Incidentally [laughs], we were gassing up, and my son looked—he was sitting out the window of the car door, and he was looking toward the north, and he said, “Dad, what’s that?” A big mushroom cloud. It was a thin mushroom cloud, but it was a big one anyway. It was [Mt.] St. Helens, which that August had another fairly large eruptive event.

JM: Yes. Have you been with the *Oregonian* ever since?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay. So you’ve been there since 1980, then—August of 1980.

GA: Correct.

JM: Yes, okay. And so as I recall, at one time you became the news editor of the paper or assistant news editor?

GA: Well, I wore several hats but never news editor. After about a year, I got into “TV Click”—the Sunday TV supplement. I went back for a two-week vacation replacement, but the vacation replacement kind of screwed up and got fired. So I got stuck in purgatory for, I guess, about sixteen months. They had a real character in charge of the section. Eventually, I got back on the copy desk for just a short period, and did another vacation replacement in the op-ed [opinions/editorials] page. And then in 1982, the *Oregon Journal* and the *Oregonian* merged, and when they merged, they preserved all the features of both newspapers. So we ended up having a two-page op-ed section. I became the assistant editor of that and stayed there for a couple years. That was wonderful. That was a—about like the TV job—they were both day jobs. Then I went back to the copy desk.

JM: Okay.

GA: I worked my way up to slot and assistant news editor, which is dummifying either the metro cover or, later, the page one cover. Then it came to be that I was assistant news editor for the afternoon edition. We still had an afternoon edition, but most of the paper was morning, of course. That lasted for about five years, I guess.

JM: Yes, okay.

GA: Sometimes I'd—some weeks would be page one, some weeks would be metro cover. Some days the person I always worked with—he would have migraine headaches and just couldn't function. I can remember at least three times I had to cover his job and mine, too. That was hectic.

JM: Okay, but you're still there—still going strong.

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay. That's great. Let me go back to the *Democrat*—a couple of things. One—the first time you were there, we hadn't gone to computers yet, had we?

GA: No. No, it was hot metal. And, you know, those old Underwood [manual] typewriters.

JM: Yes. And you must've left about 1974, and that was about the year we started getting ready to go to computers.

GA: Right.

JM: Okay. Now, then, when you came back the second time, were you—did you have a lot of problems with the computers—besides just this one episode you mentioned? Were you having problems getting copy processed on the computers and keeping them running and everything?

GA: Oh, they were problematical.

JM: Okay.

GA: When they worked, they were great.

JM: Yes.

GA: Just like computers now, you know?

JM: Yes. [Laughs] Yes, when they don't work, they're the worst things in the world.

GA: Yes, they're—it was semi-reliable.

JM: Yes.

GA: Well, it was bad enough that when it crashed that hard I just said, "There are better situations than this."

JM: Yes. And they didn't have a backup computer—didn't have a backup mainframe computer—just had the one mainframe computer at that time, right?

GA: Well, yes.

JM: Okay. What was your experience with John Robert Starr while you were there?

GA: He was a funny guy. He did all his—he worked through Lyndon—Lyndon Finney. If he wanted something to happen, he delegated to Lyndon to make it happen. He interacted socially with the staff. It wasn't like he was the manager. I never got that sense. No, he was quite happy to pound out that column.

JM: He probably might've been more active with the actual—with the reporting—over what was being reported and everything, maybe, than he was with the copy desk. I've heard that, but I'm not sure of that.

GA: That's true.

JM: Yes, at any rate—okay.

GA: As I say—well, maybe I *should* say—as news editor, my purview was the copy

desk. The city desk staff—that was that other world that I seldom ventured into.

JM: Were you having—was the paper having much turnover at this time—do you remember?

GA: Well, you know, aside from those I mentioned earlier—not a great deal. The staff would evolve, but mostly we had a good retention rate.

JM: Okay. Okay, then, and then the first time you worked there from 1972 to 1974—that went okay, I take it, but you just started looking for more money.

GA: Yes. When I went to the *Gazette*—I mean, when I went to the *Commercial Appeal* from the *Democrat*, I think I doubled my salary.

JM: Yes.

GA: Again.

JM: Yes.

GA: So that would be the second time in my life. When I came to the *Oregonian*, I almost doubled it. But, yes, I was trying to take care of my family.

JM: Yes, I understand that. Now, as I recall, Mike Kirkendall, your great friend from high school—he also went to the *Democrat*. Is that correct?

GA: Yes, and I—that must've been the first time I was there.

JM: Yes, yes, it would've been the first time you were there, but were you there together for a while?

GA: Yes. Mike and I worked together at three newspapers.

JM: Yes, okay. And then another—as I remember, I think that I hired another friend [laughs] of yours from Fort Smith, Bob Merrick. Is that correct?

GA: Yes, Bob.

JM: And had you worked with him at Northside, too?

GA: Oh, yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

GA: He was a year younger.

JM: Yes.

GA: He was a great—he lived with us in Oklahoma City for, oh, three months, I'd say.
When he was an Army recruiter.

JM: And then he was at the *Democrat*. He was working in sports, as I recall.

GA: Yes.

JM: He was a really good makeup man.

GA: Yes, I think he was always in sports. That's what he did in high school.

JM: Yes, okay. I didn't remember. Last I'd heard, he was at the *Kansas City*
[Missouri] *Star*, but I'm not sure that he's still there.

GA: Yes, okay—*Kansas City Star*.

JM: But, at any rate, I want to try to—I still want to try to trace him down. Do you
still talk to Mike Kirkendall every now and then?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes.

GA: Yes, we went down and took the grandkids to Disneyland, and Mike took a day
off to visit with me.

JM: Yes, okay. Okay, that's great. Okay, yes, I talked to Mike, but it's been a couple
months since I've talked to him. I'm going to try to set up something and
interview him, or he may come in to Fort Smith. I don't know—I think he still
has relatives in Fort Smith, doesn't he?

GA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

GA: Well, I think his sister is in Sallisaw [Oklahoma]. And the other sister is nearby. And the brother is there. So, yes, his immediate family is all there.

JM: Yes. You must've left the *Democrat* before—and I've heard, since I was gone at that time, too, that they had another crash. I think it must've been later on, where they were down for maybe two—a couple of days or something like that, and had—and they were flying stuff down to Texarkana to try to get stuff processed down at Texarkana. I was told that I think they only changed page one for a day, and otherwise they ran the same paper for a day or two. But this was after your time, I guess, wasn't it?

GA: Yes, I have no knowledge of that. But it doesn't surprise me.

JM: Yes, okay. Okay . . .

GA: Can I add one more thing?

JM: Yes, you can add anything you want to.

GA: Karen Taylor was one of the copy editors, and she showed up standing by my desk here a year ago. Just out of the blue. Once she spoke, I recognized her voice. We just caught up on old times. She was here for some conference—not very long. So I was curious. I just asked, “Well, how did the copy desk do after I left?” I really liked those kids.

JM: Yes. What did she say?

GA: Well, I'm trying to get my composure here.

JM: Okay.

GA: They made me look real good. Anyway, she said, “They fell apart.” She used another word that I won't repeat. She said, “It went to—” She said it just fell

apart. She said it took months to get back to being anywhere near as efficient. It was painful to hear it was hard on them, but it was personally gratifying.

JM: Yes, I understand. Well, as I remember, and you know this—I always thought you were a hell of a hand, so I'm not surprised they had trouble replacing you.

GA: Well, I'd like to think part of the reason you thought this [was] because you were a hell of a boss.

JM: Well, thank you.

GA: I really tried to do good for people that appreciate it.

JM: Yes, well, I appreciate that, and you did have some good people there. Some of them are still—you know, Celia is still there.

GA: Celia should be in *charge* of that place.

JM: Should she?

GA: She's that good.

JM: Yes, yes. Yes, she's a good one. And, of course, you know, Mike is still there. You know, she eventually married Mike Storey.

GA: Yes.

JM: I can't remember who else is—well, there are some other people still there that weren't on the copy desk then. Eric Harrison is still there.

GA: Now, I was just going to ask you if he was there. I figured he would be.

JM: Yes, he's still there. And Gary Hoffman left and then came back. He was a reporter. I'm not sure. He may have been a reporter in the interim while you were going to Memphis or something like that, but at any rate . . .

GA: Yes.

JM: But there are a few that are still there that were there about the same time you

were there. But, at any rate, Celia—yes, Celia is a good one—smart girl. Okay, Greg, anything else you can think of—anything else you've forgotten or haven't mentioned that . . . ?

GA: No, I'd just say that if I could design the perfect newspaper, it would've been that first stint at the *Democrat*. Just hot metal, TTS machines, and big lead pencils and glue pots.

JM: [Laughs] You're talking about your first stint at the *Democrat*, right?

GA: Yes.

JM: Okay. Well, I've had other people tell me that they were really enjoying it at that time, too, and then we went to computers, particularly for the copy desk, you know—it started getting to be a hassle. And so—because we only had four terminals and the system was crashing a lot, you know. So it was—when they first started on it—and, in fact, about the first month or two it would crash at deadline every day. So that drove people wild. So I know some people, you know, that left at least partly because of that and everything. But, at any rate—okay, Greg, anything else you can think of?

GA: Oh, probably not. Probably not.

JM: Okay. Let me ask you one thing about Mike. My experience with him then, and it may have changed—now, I'll ask him when this—that he was—there wasn't anything on the copy desk that he couldn't do real well, but he hated to manage people. He hated telling other people what to do. [Laughs] Did you ever have that experience with him?

GA: Well, you know, I was so close to him, I didn't look at it objectively, but that sounds accurate.

JM: Yes, well, probably with you, he didn't have to tell you what to do—if he was handing you something, that you'd do it and do it well, but, at any rate—so Mike was a great hand, too. There were some pretty good people I hired out of Fort Smith Northside. Okay, well, if you can't think of anything else, we'll cut it off here and I've got one other thing to tell you. So nothing else you can think of?

GA: No.

JM: Okay. Well, if you do, you can stick it on the end of your interview. [Tape Stopped]

[End of Interview]

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