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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

George Arnold
Fayetteville, Arkansas
20 April 2005

Interviewer: Tim Hackler

Tim Hackler: The way all of the other interviews began was I ask your permission for the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] Project to use this tape at a later point.

George Arnold: Certainly, you have my permission.

TH: I thought we could start with just a really brief overview first, and then we can come back and fill in the details.

GA: Right.

TH: Where were you born?

GA: I was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1946. I went to the University of Kansas and got a degree in English. I had this vague notion back then that I was going to go to law school. I got out of college in 1968 and went right into the [United States] Army and a tour in Vietnam. When I got out of school, I really had realized that law school was just nowhere for me. I didn't want to do it. So I worked for a couple of years at a couple of government jobs. My veteran status helped me get on with those.

TH: In what way?

GA: That you got extra points. You had to take a test, and then they give you like—I think there was ten extra points, so if you did well on the test, then with the ten

points, too, you were in pretty good shape. So I worked for the old Welfare Department for a year down in Hope, Arkansas, and then later for the Veterans Administration in Little Rock. They were both terrible jobs, but I met my wife in Little Rock. I was thinking at the time of going back to school, so I felt like I needed to do something to get into a job that I would enjoy. And I had always been interested in journalism. I was on my high school newspaper. That didn't amount to a whole lot, but I never did any journalism in college. I was just an old English major. I had gotten the idea of going back for a journalism degree. That's what we ended up doing. I went to the University of Missouri and was there for a couple of years.

TH: What year did you graduate?

GA: 1974. I worked at a couple of little papers in Missouri and Kansas. We had the idea that we wanted to get back to Arkansas. We got a chance to go to work for Cone Magie, who had the papers in Cabot and in Lonoke, and part of the Carlisle paper.

TH: Magie is spelled . . . ?

GA: An unusual name. His first name is Cone, like ice cream cone. C-O-N-E. And Magie is M-A-G-I-E. He was a great guy to work for. He was very encouraging. He pretty much let me do whatever I wanted to. I was kind of a one-man news department there. I did everything. Everything that we did, I did. And then we printed the paper on Wednesday. I delivered papers, too, after the paper came off the press.

TH: What was the circulation?

GA: Oh, gosh, a few thousand each. It wasn't very big back then. Cabot has grown so much since then. I'm sure it's a lot bigger now.

TH: And the papers were at Cabot and where else?

GA: Cabot, Lonoke, and Carlisle. I wanted to get to Little Rock. I wanted to get into daily papers again. That's what I had been doing before we came back to Arkansas.

TH: Where were you in Kansas doing dailies?

GA: At Lawrence.

TH: In Lawrence.

GA: Yes. And before that, in Warrensburg, Missouri. Anyway, I wanted to get on in Little Rock. I honestly don't remember any more of the process, but somehow I applied. I think I interviewed with Jerry McConnell.

TH: This was at the [*Arkansas*] *Democrat*?

GA: This is all hazy. At the *Democrat*. Yes. He offered me a job on their copy desk as the night editor. Of course, it was an afternoon paper. What they'd do, at the end of the day they'd get the next day's pages, and they'd set aside a few pages that could be filled in overnight before they came in in the morning and did the stuff on deadline. So I'd fill those, basically, fill the pages with whatever we had. If we had local copy that was already finished, we'd use that, or wire copy—whatever it took to fill up the paper. That's how I started out.

TH: What were your hours?

GA: It was something like 3:00 or 4:00 to midnight.

TH: And you'd have copies of what reporters had written, plus you'd have wire copy.

GA: Yes, I had access to the wire. I'd fill those pages up. There would still be a few people around, of course, when I got in. But as the night went by, everybody went home, and I was up there in that newsroom all by myself, going until late at night. And there would usually be one guy in the composing room, and he'd be putting pages together that I was editing.

TH: Right. And this was, as we mentioned earlier, when the newsroom was on the second floor.

GA: We were on the second floor. Yes.

TH: You went up that old metal spiral staircase to go to the composing room.

GA: Yes. I always thought those spiral stairs were cool.

TH: Weren't they?

GA: I liked that.

TH: Yes, me too. [Laughs]

GA: I can remember even the noise of clanging up and down those things.

TH: Did you work with the composing guys on actually laying out those pages?

GA: Yes, I'd send up a dummy, and they'd work on that. Then when they ran into trouble, they'd call me. I guess they'd buzz me down on the phone or whatever.

I'd go up and we'd straighten out whatever the problem was.

TH: Yes.

GA: I did that, I guess, for about a year or something like that. And I was working Tuesday through Saturday. The schedule around there—the Saturday paper was actually put out Friday night, like a morning newspaper. It may have been a morning paper back then on the weekends. But the full copy desk would be there

on Friday night, so my advance work—I didn't do that on the weekends. I'd be just working on the copy desk with the rest of the crew. And the same thing on Saturday night—same people putting out the Sunday morning paper.

TH: Who was the chief of the copy desk?

GA: The news editor was a gal named Patsy McKown. M-C-K-O-W-N. I really don't know a whole lot about her background. She went on to some other paper eventually, it seems like in California. But she was the one running the copy desk at the time. Her right-hand man was a guy named Lyndon Finney. He had been there quite a while. It seems like he—he eventually went—he was there a long time—he went from the *Democrat* to, I believe, the Medical Center in Little Rock. He started working over there, and may still be there. I haven't heard about him in quite some time. I remember Jerry McConnell was the managing editor at the time. A lot of times he'd be around on Friday night. In fact, sometimes he'd sit in on the copy desk if we were shorthanded. He'd do stuff over there. On Saturday night, Ralph Patrick, the assistant managing editor, was pretty much running the show. It usually involved—if we were on page one, you'd have to—when you wrote out your headlines or whatever, all those would have to be approved by whoever the supervising editor was that night. It was Jerry on Friday night or Ralph on Saturday night. I do remember we'd have to—we'd usually write them out on these little half sheets of newspaper—old newsprint, I guess.

TH: I remember those well.

GA: I'd carry them over there and hand them to them, and hope they'd say, "Yes, those are okay."

TH Did you enjoy writing headlines?

GA: Yes, I did.

TH: I always found that kind of fun.

GA: Yes, it was kind of a puzzle.

TH: A puzzle. That's exactly what it was.

GA: Yes.

TH: And, let's see—Ralph was city editor when I was there, so when did he become assistant managing editor?

GA: It was before I got there. I don't think it was a whole long time before I got there. I started work there in December of 1976, and Ralph was the assistant managing editor at the time. And a guy name Bill Husted—H-U-S-T-E-D—had taken over from him as city editor. They were thick. They were good pals. I guess Bill had been a reporter for Ralph for some time. He was the natural guy for that job.

TH: When did Ralph leave the *Democrat* in order to start the *Arkansan*?

GA: That was—whenever it was that Bob McCord stepped down and John Robert Starr came in. I think that was late 1978. Right around that time, Ralph left, too. I've heard different stories. Ralph told me that he had actually been offered the managing editor job, and he turned it down because he wanted to start the magazine, *The Arkansan*, and went off to do that.

TH: I bet you wonder how things would have transpired differently in coming years if he had taken that job, then.

GA: Yes.

TH: He and John Robert Starr are two very different people.

GA: Yes. Right. I've heard stories, too, that Ralph just wasn't going to work for Starr. That had something to do, too, with him leaving. All the timing in there—I'm not sure exactly what was what.

TH: Oh, I thought you meant that he had been offered the job that Starr took.

GA: Right. Yes.

TH Yes, it would be hard to see them working together for any length of time.

GA: Yes.

TH: Now, McCord quit—he actually suggested to [Walter] Hussman [Jr.], as I understand the story, that he hire Starr—or that he at least consider it.

GA: That's what I've heard, too. I don't have any insight myself into what happened, but I've heard that story.

TH: How long would it have been, if you remember, after Starr came that Bob McCord moved on. Do you remember?

GA: I'm thinking within a year. He was with him a year. No, it couldn't have been much longer than that because he was gone by the time I left, and I didn't stay that long after. Just in my own chronology there, I had done the night editor and worked on the copy desk about a year, I think. I was home one afternoon getting ready to come into work, and I got a phone call from Bill Husted, the city editor. He asked me to come in and talk to him about an assistant city editor job over there on the city desk. So we got together. I guess we hit it off, and I ended up moving to the city desk from the copy desk. I worked with him for most of the

rest of the time I was there—on the city desk. These were times—it was just that the paper was struggling, and the city desk consisted of—I think we had seven reporters at the time to cover the whole of Little Rock and Pulaski County.

TH: Wow.

GA: Oh, it was not a big operation anymore. I think there were more copy editors than reporters at the time. So I worked with Bill on the city desk, and was there when all this change came up. I guess—well, I don't even remember anymore—I guess Jerry McConnell had to have left for the managing editor job to open up. I don't remember the timing when all that happened. Then Ralph—he left somewhere in that same period. Then Starr came on board and shook everything up and changed everything. The whole dynamics of the place changed. Everything changed when he got on board. Almost immediately, there was talk of going to a morning publication. He made me the first state editor under the new regime, and I set up the state desk, which was me in Little Rock, and I think we had four reporters out in the state.

TH: In bureaus?

GA: Yes, starting to cover state news, which we really hadn't done before. I remember on the city desk, it was a big deal if there was a tornado in Wynne or something, for us to send a reporter over there—to actually have a reporter on the ground instead of just picking up the AP [Associated Press] copy or something on the story.

TH: Well, the *Democrat* was, essentially, up until the newspaper war—it was primarily a central Arkansas newspaper.

GA: Yes.

TH: It had some circulation outside of Pulaski County and the surrounding counties, but it really didn't get out into the corners of the state much.

GA: Yes. Like I said, it was rare for us to send a reporter outside . . .

TH: But, you know, even the *Gazette*, which did have circulation—I don't think they really—I know they didn't have the bureaus.

GA: Yes.

TH: I think even a lot of the state news was pretty much phoned in by stringers in a situation like that.

GA: Yes.

TH: Well, you mentioned that the whole tone of the place changed when Starr got there. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

GA: Yes. My impression, when I got there and got on board—the idea seemed to be that you started out at the *Democrat*, you got on at the *Democrat*, and then you waited until you could get on at the *Gazette*, at the bigger paper—the much stronger paper. Once Starr came, then that began to change. There was the idea that you could actually stay at the *Democrat* if you chose to—if you could make it there. You didn't have to move on to the *Gazette* to have some sort of a career.

TH: Are you talking about—financially—are you talking about that the raised salaries and so forth?

GA: I think the salaries went up a little bit. I don't think they went up a whole bunch. But it was more the idea that the paper was going to survive. I think when I was first there, everybody pretty much sort of understood that the paper was in

trouble, and probably was not going to be around a whole long time. So it was to your advantage—you'd better plan to move on fairly soon.

TH: Right.

GA: But, yes, when Starr came on board, then there was the idea that it was going to be around for a while. So whether the *money* was that much better or not—you could actually stay there and make a go of it.

TH: And, again, what was the year that Starr came?

GA: I believe it was late 1978.

TH: Do you remember picking up the *Arkansas Times* one day and seeing the picture of John Robert Starr with a knife in his mouth?

GA: Perched up on the news rack. Yes. With the knife, and I think he had a helmet liner and something . . .

TH: Yes, he did have a helmet on. Yes, that's true.

GA: And a vest over his bare chest, I think. [Laughs]

TH: Walter Hussman . . .

GA: That was sort of throwing down the gauntlet.

TH: Well, it was. Walter Hussman says in his interview that I mentioned to you, that he was shocked when he saw that. He had Starr in [his office] and let him know that he didn't appreciate it too much. [Laughter] On the other hand, I guess, as you say, it was throwing down the gauntlet.

GA: Yes. Starr was always really good to me. I'd come up on the copy desk side, and he was *really* tough on the copy desk. I mean, even in print. When he started writing his column, he'd just complain about the copy desk and the dumb

mistakes that got made over there and all that. I don't know. I just didn't really think that was someplace that I wanted to stay under that kind of regime or that kind of outlook. I've heard it said, too, that he came up through the Associated Press, where they didn't have a copy desk, and never really understood the point of it or the value of it. So that could have had something to do with it.

TH: Before we pick up on that, at that point, when you were a copy editor at the *Democrat*, how many articles would you say you worked in a typical day?

GA: Oh, gosh. I guess it would depend on the day and how busy we were, and how big the news hole was—twenty or twenty-five—probably something like that. All the way from a big front-page story to little briefs on the inside. It could be anything. That was probably about the load.

TH: It's hard to have twenty-five articles—it's hard to have the time to take a big piece that's got all the information but it's not put together right to tear it apart and put it back together so it reads well, isn't it?

GA: Yes. And we talked earlier about just the physical parts of it. At the *Democrat* at that time, the reporters had [IBM] Selectric typewriters, and they typed up their stories on the electric typewriters. They turned them in to the city desk, and the city desk would hand edit them, and then turn them over to the copy desk by way of a clerk, who would go to an optical character reader [OCR], and scan those pieces of typed copy into the OCR, which would stop every time it hit a red mark that the city desk had marked to "type in copy." And then they'd have to look in the little window at the top and read the handwritten correction, and then type that in. At least half the time it would get garbled, or it wouldn't come out right, or it

would be in the wrong place, and whatever. So when the copy desk got the local copy, they'd move over to a computer screen and they'd call up the story. And, like I said, most of their work was correcting all the errors from the OCRs. You had to do all that before you could even think about rearranging sentences or rewriting anything like that, so it was physically difficult just to get through all that process. And then do it all under deadline. [Laughs]

TH: Right. So when a reporter handed in his copy to the city editor—talk a little bit about what kind of editing the city editor would do before he gives it to the copy desk.

GA: Well, first of all, grammar and style—that kind of thing. And then looking for holes in stories, double-checking quotes and name spellings. Basic things like that. It wasn't a really great system in terms of getting the writing polished. It was just moving a lot of copy very fast. That's the way I remember it. There wasn't time to do much more than that.

TH: Yes. They really weren't interested in style, so much. I mean, that wasn't their job, right? They were just trying to establish facts, and if there were important questions the article raised that it didn't answer, then they might go back to a reporter and say . . .

GA: Yes, exactly.

TH: Dick Allen, who was at both the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, and is now at the *International Herald-Tribune* in Paris as the news editor, told me that when he worked at *The New York Times* on the copy desk that he would ordinarily have *one* piece of copy to copy edit.

GA: Wow! [Laughs]

TH: And I thought, “Well, that’s *The New York Times*.” Can you imagine the luxury of having that much time to make sure it’s all right and the quotes are right and so forth?

GA: Yes. That’s quite a day’s work.

TH: Yes. Let’s see—so you left the *Democrat* in 1977, is that right?

GA: No, I was there through the summer of 1979. I made a really ill-advised move to a public relations job, if you can believe this. Somebody who really needed it—the U.S. Army Recruiting Services. Within five days—I started on a Monday—by Friday, I knew I had made a horrible mistake, and I spent the rest of, I think, four more months trying desperately to get back on either at the *Democrat* or the *Gazette*. I probably applied to both. Like I said, Starr was always good to me. He wound up having a job come open, and gave me a job back there. Then sometime in the next year, the *Gazette* called and said they had an opening, so I moved over there.

TH: And you went to the *Democrat* on the copy desk?

GA: When I went back. Yes. I was back on the copy desk.

TH: And on to the *Gazette*?

GA: Yes, on their copy desk.

TH: Who did you report to at the *Gazette*?

GA: Bill Rutherford was the news editor. I guess Bob Douglas actually hired me.

TH: Did you have more time to work on pieces when you went to the *Gazette* than you had at the *Democrat*?

GA: Yes. It was a calmer atmosphere. You had more time. You generally didn't have to do as much copy, although there was still a lot to do. I'm thinking there were six or seven people on the copy desk on a typical night, and that was to edit everything in the news section. So there was still a mass of copy that had to be done. We just seemed to have—like I said, it was just a calmer atmosphere in those days. Our end of the newsroom was very quiet. It was easy to concentrate.

TH: How do you account for that difference?

GA: I'm not sure. The atmosphere, I guess, was just considerably different. The *Democrat*, I'm wanting to say, was younger people, a lot of whom were just getting started—trying to make a go in the newspaper business. There were a lot of established people over at the *Gazette*. That may have had something to do with it. The *Gazette*, too, had this *long* tradition of being a really tightly edited newspaper. I remember when I was there, there was an old, looseleaf binder of typed-up notes—a local style book that I guess had been put together by J.N. Heiskell, the old editor. I've tried to remember some of the funny little things. Just very picky, little points. And it just went on for page after page after page. Of course, he lived to be a hundred, I believe, and he edited right up to the end. So he had a lot of time to work out all those details. It was as minor as when you said something happened in Arkadelphia, you didn't say "in Arkadelphia," it was "at Arkadelphia." But there was a whole notebook of things like that that you were expected to know. That was one of the first things when you started work over there and sat down at the copy desk—one of the first things they did was

hand you the “Holy Bible” and they expected you to read it and absorb it. At the *Democrat* we just generally went by the AP style book.

TH: Yes.

GA: That was pretty much it. It did not have that kind of tradition there. It was probably more freely put together. And it was a lot of fun at the *Democrat*. Again, it was pretty much all young people with a few old-timers here and there. They were people who were getting started, and were having a good time doing it.

TH: And who was the executive editor? Did they have that title?

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

TH: Who was the executive editor?

GA: There was none. Bob Starr came in and took over, and his idea was that he would be the managing editor, and there would be nobody above him—no one besides him. Managing editor was the top job.

TH: Who was the assistant?

GA: You know, I don’t think there was one for quite some time. I think the city editor was probably the next in line there at the beginning.

TH: And who was that?

GA: That was Bill Husted at first.

TH: Okay. What were his years as city editor, just approximately?

GA: He started some time before I got there, so it would have been, I don’t now, 1975, maybe, on into—again, he stayed. He was still there when I left, so it would have been after 1980 sometime when he departed.

TH: And who followed him? Do you happen to remember?

GA: There was a reporter, who's still at the *Democrat* now, named Garry Hoffmann, who was the city editor, but I'm not sure—he was the city editor for a long time under Bob Starr, but I don't remember if there was somebody else in between him and Bill Husted or not. I don't recall. But Garry was a longtime city editor there, really, in the height of the [newspaper] war.

TH: Was there a lot of what people might term “creative tension” coming out of Bob Starr's office—John Robert Starr?

GA: Yes, I guess you would call it that. Certainly, tension. [Laughter] The creative part, I don't know. I remember markups of the paper going up—papers looking like they were bleeding. The toughest thing I remember back then was him just berating his own staff in his column early on.

TH: I didn't—that's news to me because, of course, I wasn't here at that time. I find that almost shocking.

GA: It seemed pretty severe and unnecessary, even for some of the errors that certainly did get made—just to air that in public seemed to be—well, it was pretty brutal on some of the folks who were there.

TH: Do you think it improved people's work? I guess that would depend on the person.

GA: Yes, I guess so. I think it hurt morale in the long run. It *killed* the copy desk morale, which probably wasn't high to start with. I don't know. I've said and I believe this—there was probably nobody else in Arkansas who was as uniquely qualified as Bob Starr. A lot of the reason was that he had such distaste for the

Gazette, that he was willing to—there was probably nobody else who was willing to fight just as hard as he was in all this. We talked about that if Ralph Patrick had stayed, I don't—Ralph was a great guy and a great newspaper man, but I don't think he had that sense of—that hatred.

TH: No, he didn't hate the *Gazette*.

GA: He thought well of it, as I recall.

TH: Yes. Right. Now, where did Starr's hatred develop?

GA: It had something to do with when he was working for the AP. Somehow, he got on the outs with them. I don't remember the specifics and the stories, but it went back to his AP days in Little Rock, and his dealings with the *Gazette*. I guess he developed the idea that they were arrogant, and that they needed to be taken down a few pegs. And he was just the guy to do it.

TH Well, I've heard that part of his problem was that they didn't use his byline.

GA: That's right. I've heard that. Yes. I don't know if that's true or not. Yes, now that you mention that, I've heard that story, too.

TH: Well, he was the kind of guy to hold grudges, wasn't he? Did he have any big grudges? Were there individuals that he felt that way about that ended up being reflected in the coverage of the paper?

GA: Reflected in the coverage—I don't recall that. You know, so much of what he did came after I had left. I had gone, and I didn't keep up with all those ins and outs—all his feuds with politicians and that kind of thing. That would seem to be in character, that he could have held a grudge. It would also seem to be in character that he would have done it just for the appearance of holding a grudge,

just to get people to read his stuff. I never really figured out my dealings with him—how much was real and how much was an act for effect.

TH: I believe that Hussman says that their surveys showed that his column was one of the most popular features in the paper.

GA: Yes, I'm sure it was. And he was writing, I think, seven days a week. I don't know how he did it. It was amazing he could do that and run the paper, too. IT was phenomenal.

TH: Did he have anything to do with bringing Paul Greenberg over as the editor of the editorial pages?

GA: I'm trying to remember when Starr retired. I really don't think so, but I don't know. I was in El Dorado by then. We carried Greenberg's columns syndicated down there, and I remember when Walter hired him, Paul dropped the syndication to all the papers that were picking him up in Arkansas because he didn't want to be competing with himself—for us to be competing with the *Democrat*.

TH: So who was syndicating him? Do you remember? It wasn't just an Arkansas syndication.

GA: No, it was national. It was some national syndicate. I don't remember.

TH: He's still syndicated, right?

GA: Yes, I think it's the same people. I think he just eliminated the Arkansas newspapers that were picking him up at the time.

TH: One thing that puzzled me is that Walter Hussman has said in several interviews that he and his father felt like it was important to have their newspapers to have all points of view represented so that while they personally might be conservative,

they would represent other views as well in their papers. But that doesn't really seem to be the case at the *Arkansas Democrat*.

GA: Today, you mean?

TH: Yes.

GA: The *Democrat-Gazette*?

TH: Yes.

GA: Yes, there are more conservative writers than liberal writers. They/we do a fair amount of putting opposing points of view on one issue—two different columns, say, on the same day. That's pretty common, you'll see that quite often. I don't know if that always breaks down into liberal/conservative. But, yes, it's pretty heavily conservative on the editorial page, anyway. Over on "Voices," you've got Gene Lyons and Pat Lynch—more liberal views there every week.

TH: Okay, well, we might come back later—we probably will come back later to the newspaper war.

GA: Okay.

TH: But you moved to El Dorado from the *Democrat*. Is that right?

GA: No, it's more complicated than that.

TH: Okay.

GA: When I left the *Democrat* and went to the *Gazette*, I guess different things were going on. Our kids were little. I was working nights, and we were interested in somehow getting back to daytime hours. Also, when I went over to the *Gazette*, I guess I had the outlook and attitude that that was the dominant paper, it was going to *stay* the dominant paper, and that was a place where you could stay and make a

career out of it. It certainly had the reputation of being a really good newspaper. So I went over, and I was thrilled to get there. I was surprised that the money wasn't any better than it was. But I had only been there a few months, and I remember a big staff meeting that Hugh Patterson called. Of course, Starr was really starting to fire up. The point of the staff meeting was to kind of calm everybody down and to let them know that things were going to be okay. But what I got out of the meeting was Hugh Patterson just kind of mocked the idea of the *Democrat* even thinking that they were going to compete with the *Gazette*, and that this was "nothing we needed to worry about—nothing we need to be terribly concerned about, so just keep doing your job, and don't sweat it." It struck me, as having come from the environment and having seen Starr come in and take over, and what a ball of fire he was, for all his overzealousness in some things—that just struck me as the altogether wrong approach. I certainly didn't have a crystal ball, but I did not feel that comfortable anymore, that things were just going to go the *Gazette*'s way without anybody worrying about it too much.

TH: And what month and year would that have been?

GA: Oh, probably sometime in late 1980. I went over there, I think, in the summer of 1980, and it was shortly—it wasn't long after I got there.

TH: Did other *Gazette* reporters and editors feel the same way you did?

GA: I don't think so. I think that attitude went over really well, that from what I could tell I don't think anybody could even envision what was going to happen in the next ten years or so. I think that was the farthest thing from anybody's mind. No, I don't think so. And I think part of it was that I was just so fresh. I had just

come out of that hotbed over there where, like I said earlier, I really think there was a change in attitude. It was no longer *just*, “I’m working here until I can get on at the *Gazette*,” it was “I’m working here, and this may work. This may click.” There was still both, and I guess that probably went on to the end, but the idea that the *Democrat* could succeed, I think, just kept growing over there. It made an impression on me. I sure brought it with me when I went over to the *Gazette*, and then heard this presentation. I believed that that really lead directly to the failure of the Pattersons, where they eventually had to sell out to Gannett. They just didn’t take it seriously. They tried to fight it in court, but they didn’t fight it very effectively, newspaper-wise, in the coverage. Their coverage was always good, but they just never figured out a way to respond to what Starr was doing, I think. And, of course, what Walter was doing, too, on the business side. They just seemed to be lost, and it cost them dearly.

TH: The suit was brought in 1983 or 1984—or something like that.

GA: That sounds right.

TH: And when they lost that suit—they knew that that was . . .

GA: That was pretty much it. Yes.

TH: But they still did business for another six or seven years. That’s a long time to be publishing, but at the same time knowing that they might lose the war.

GA: You know, I was long gone. I don’t know when that idea would have set in. I don’t remember how many years Gannett had it before it folded up. Everything I had seen and heard, they were just clueless.

TH: It’s just an unbelievable story of how stupid they were.

GA: Yes.

TH: Everything. But I think they acknowledge that now.

GA: Yes.

TH: Everybody they brought in was foreign, as it were, to Arkansas. So any newspaper, you had to think, “That’s pretty strange,” but a newspaper that has such a close relationship with the history of the state—it’s even stranger.

GA: Yes.

TH: And then, of course, the famous photograph that I heard about in Washington—everybody was talking about it—the Wal-Mart cheerleaders in Spandex in a color photo on the front page. [Laughs] Everybody told me, “It’s over. It’s over. Somebody ought to just shoot this dog.” [Laughter]

GA: Yes, that was a defining moment! [Laughter]

TH: So, you were . . .

GA: Oh, you were asking me, what happened then?

TH: Yes.

GA: Well, I had personal considerations and worries about the future of the place.

TH: Yes.

GA: Ralph Patrick, who had left and started his magazine—the magazine folded. He took a job as the editor of the daily paper up in Bentonville. I had kept in touch with him off and on. He was looking for a news editor. We talked. I made a trip up there and looked the place over. It wasn’t much to look at. But he offered me a job, and I decided it was probably a good idea and a smart move at the time. So we moved to Bentonville. At the time, the Bentonville paper [The *Daily*

Democrat] was actually owned by Wal-Mart—I was telling you this—and they even had the budget for the paper set up just in exactly the same format as they had the budget set up for one of their stores. Ralph got a job with the SNPA, the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, in Atlanta. He wasn't really thrilled with Bentonville or being up there. He left within a few months of me coming on—four months, six months—something like that. It was a pretty short time.

TH: So it would have been 1981?

GA: Yes. I went up there in 1981. It could have been early 1982 when he left. So I was hoping to get the job when he left, and there was a lot of strange meetings going on. Ralph left telling me, "There's something going on around here." And within a couple of weeks, Wal-Mart had sold the newspaper to Jim Walton, one of the Walton family, and his partner, Steve Trolinger. They came in and took it over, and named me managing editor. We did okay for a while, but Steve and I did not really see eye to eye on newspaper business.

TH: How do you spell his last name?

GA: T-R-O-L-I-N-G-E-R.

TH: And was he a Wal-Mart person at the same time?

GA: No. He had been working on some newspapers in Florida. I'm not sure how he was connected or how he and Jim Walton got together. But Steve was basically the guy who ran the newspaper, and Jim was the business partner. So I left there, and we went briefly to the *Marianna Courier-Index*, another weekly paper, with the idea of possibly owning the paper eventually. But we realized we didn't want

to put that kind of time into doing that. It was a bottomless pit. There was just no end to the hours involved in something like that.

TH: Who owned the paper then?

GA: Dorothy Caldwell. Her husband had died. He had really been the editor and the publisher, and he had died a year or two before, and she had been running it. She was looking for somebody to kind of take things over for her. We realized we didn't want to stay there, either. A fellow in El Dorado who had been the editor and was promoted to general manager down there had called and been in touch with us. He offered me the managing editor job in El Dorado. And I went down there. That's one of Walter Hussman's papers in south Arkansas. So this was in late 1983 that I went back to work, basically, for Walter. I stayed there fifteen years. Then I had a chance to come up here to northwest Arkansas and work for the northwest edition of the *Democrat-Gazette*.

TH: Did you come when they first started that zone edition?

GA: The northwest edition? Yes. I was here a week before the first one printed. I got here just in time.

TH: And what year was that?

GA: That was 1998. Yes. 1998.

TH: Is that the right terminology? Do they call that a zone edition, or do they . . . ?

GA: Oh, it's just the northwest edition. It's almost a separate newspaper. We've got our own news staff, copy desk, sports staff, business staff, and I'm the editorial page guy.

TH: It's more than most newspapers refer to as a zone, isn't it?

GA: Yes.

TH: Because most newspapers would say, “This is the zone for this county, and we have another zone for that county.” So you were in El Dorado—that would have been, with the exception of the *Democrat*—that would have been the Hussman’s largest newspaper, is that right?

GA: Texarkana was bigger. I think we were next. No, Hot Springs. Texarkana, Hot Springs, and El Dorado in terms of size.

TH: Right. And that’s the *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, the *Texarkana Gazette*, and the *El Dorado* . . .

GA: *News-Times*

TH: . . . *News-Times*. We were mentioning earlier that a lot of people in the news business seem to have come from El Dorado. Can you think of—you didn’t really come from there, but Ernie Dumas and—I’ve run across a couple of names that escape me now. Can you think of them?

GA: I want to say Leland DuVall.

TH: Yes.

GA: The whole Portis family was there for a while—Buddy [Charles] Portis, Jon Portis [and Richard Portis]. Their dad was a school superintendent, and he was in one of the Union County schools for a while. So they had a connection. Dennis Byrd was the editor at El Dorado, an editor or two before I was there.

TH: Where is he now?

GA: He’s with the Stephens—out at the Arkansas News Bureau in Little Rock.

TH: I’m not familiar with that. What is that?

GA: I guess that's the Stephens' Little Rock outfit that serves all their papers out in the state, like the *Morning News*.

TH: What are *all* their papers? We have the *Morning News*, which is a Springdale paper.

GA: Well, the *Morning News* goes into all those cities as the *Morning News*.

TH: That's more of a zoned edition, isn't it, because they have Rogers at the top for Rogers?

GA: Right.

TH: But it's very little different from the *Morning News* Springdale and the *Morning News* Fayetteville.

GA: Right. They've got the *Morning News* and Fort Smith, Jonesboro, I believe—several other smaller ones. It's a pretty wide reach. I guess Pine Bluff is one of theirs now.

TH: And that's the old Donrey chain.

GA: Yes, expanded.

TH: The Stephens don't own the Las Vegas paper, right?

GA: Yes. That's the same . . .

TH: Do they really?

GA: Yes, same outfit.

TH: Is that a monopoly newspaper in Las Vegas?

GA: In Las Vegas, I think it is. I don't think they have competition.

TH: Okay, so you came here in 1998.

GA: Yes.

TH: The northwest Arkansas edition has done very well, hasn't it? I mean, circulation wise, aren't they pretty pleased with . . . ?

GA: Yes. I don't know what the latest numbers are, but, yes, it's been growing, and they're very happy with it. And, you know, several years ago they formed this alliance with Community Publishers, which runs the paper in Bentonville and the paper in Fayetteville. So if you live in Fayetteville or Springdale and take the Fayetteville paper or the *Democrat-Gazette*, you get both wrapped up. If you live north of there—Rogers or Bentonville—you get the *Democrat-Gazette* and the Bentonville paper. So it's a package deal. As far as I know, that's unique in the whole country. Those other papers are separate and basically independent. We share the advertising, circulation, and I guess the business office, but it's three different news operations.

TH: So it's the old *Northwest Arkansas Times* here and the Bentonville paper is—what's that called?

GA: It's now the *Daily Record*. Way back when, it was called the *Daily Democrat*.

TH: So is that the old newspaper for Bentonville?

GA: Yes.

TH: Okay.

GA: Yes. The idea of having a newspaper called the *Democrat* in Benton County—it just wasn't going to work [laughs] for a whole lot longer, I guess. It may have worked in the early 1900s, but not anymore.

TH: Yes. As a brief aside, did you know that there was once a commuter railroad that ran between Bentonville and Rogers?

GA: No.

TH: I've seen photographs of it. It's an actual—just like you see on the Long Island Railroad.

GA: Wow.

TH: It was in the 1910s and 1920, I think. But I felt that was—somebody ought to go back and figure out how something like that made money, and why there was—how there could have been enough traffic between two towns—just those two towns. [Laughs]

GA: Well, you know, there's talk every now and then about starting up a train link up here—some kind of transit operation. It would be interesting to know how that would have worked.

TH: Yes. How real do you think that is?

GA: I don't think so. Yes. [Laughs]

TH: Federal funds for something like that are . . .

GA: Right. I think Mike Masterson has pitched that a couple of times. I don't think it'll be anytime soon.

TH: Yes. Railroads are expensive. But it's a proposition. What are the latest figures you have on the circulation in northwest Arkansas?

GA: You know, I think that's confidential.

TH: A-B-C numbers or . . .?

GA: Uhhh . . .

TH: Okay. [Laughs] It's a technical matter that would be of interest not only to journalists, but—if I were to look up the A-B-C figures on the *Arkansas*

Democrat-Gazette, I assume that would include the circulation of the northwest Arkansas edition.

GA: Yes, I would assume, too. Yes.

TH: Anything you want to talk about in terms of where you are now before we go back to the *Democrat* of the 1980s?

GA: No, I guess not. Let's go back.

TH: I guess I should say for the record that you have your own separate editorial operations here from Little Rock. You've got your own building. You've got your own press, as a matter of fact, right?

GA: Yes.

TH: What other—do you print other newspapers on that?

GA: Well, the Fayetteville and the Bentonville papers are all published up there, too.

TH: But not other little newspapers or something?

GA: You know, I don't know. It's possible that they do because . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

TH: What is the name of the corporation?

GA: Community Publishers Incorporated—CPI.

TH: How many people do you have in your local office here?

GA: Oh, gosh, I'd estimate sixty or seventy.

TH: And how does that break down for editorial and business and so forth?

GA: Business, meaning business reporting or the business office?

TH: Yes, the business office.

GA: Sixty or seventy are in the whole news operation, which are reporters—business section, sports, copy desk, advertising, business office—both of those are at the Fayetteville paper. And circulation is still in our old office in Springdale, but they're in the process of moving to Fayetteville. They were supposed to be there this month, here in April. There was some kind of delay. They're going anytime soon.

TH: The editorial offices are in Lowell?

GA: We're in Lowell.

TH: That's where the press is.

GA: Right. Just down the hill from the printing plant is a complex of about three business offices—three separate buildings, and we're in one of those now. We're not in the printing building itself.

TH: I'm surprised at that number. How many people would there be in the newsroom in Little Rock now? Do you know, approximately?

GA: Oh, gosh, I hesitate to guess. I've got a chart with all the phone numbers and the seating arrangements and everything.

TH: But sixty or seventy here, not including people in circulation and sales and so forth.

GA: Right. Yes, it's a substantial operation.

TH: You'd be the second largest paper in the state, probably, if you were a separate newspaper.

GA: Pretty close.

TH: I guess now—is it Fort Smith and then Pine Bluff, maybe? Would that be the—in circulation, in terms . . . ?

GA: Yes, I believe so. That was certainly how it was when I was in El Dorado. I think they were two and three—I guess Jonesboro would fit in there somewhere, and then Texarkana comes in pretty quick.

TH: Do you ever fill in on the copy desk when someone is gone?

GA: No. [Laughter] The separation between opinion and news is just absolute.

TH: What is your official title now?

GA: Opinion editor, northwest Arkansas.

TH: Okay. And who is the news section editor?

GA: The editor is Susan Scantlin.

TH: Okay. And what's her title?

GA: I think it's just editor, northwest Arkansas.

TH: How do you spell her last name?

GA: S-C-A-N-T-L-I-N.

TH: Do you have local columnists? Who are some local columnists that you run?

GA: Up here, you mean, or statewide?

TH: Yes, in the northwest Arkansas edition. Who would be running in the northwest Arkansas edition that you would not run in the state addition, or does it work that way?

GA: Yes, it doesn't really work that way. I write a weekly column that goes on the editorial page, and just depending on the content, it will either just appear up here if it's strictly related to northwest Arkansas. Or it will go statewide if it's got

wider interest. Of course, Mike Masterson is the main columnist up here.

Jennifer Hansen writes in the style section. She works out of Fayetteville. And Stephen Caldwell is the city editor up here. He writes a weekly column, also in “Style.”

TH: And those would appear just in the northwest Arkansas edition.

GA: I’m not sure. Caldwell probably does. Jennifer Hansen, I think, probably tends to get statewide coverage.

TH: Did she work in Little Rock at one point?

GA: Not that I know of. I don’t think so. I think she started out, I believe, at the Fayetteville paper and then moved over to us.

TH: Okay. So I guess we should go back to the newspaper war.

GA: Okay.

TH: We’ve talked about John Robert Starr’s drive as far as the *Gazette* was concerned. How much drive in the sense of wanting to “get rid of that other paper across town” was there on the reporting staff? Of course, that would vary from person to person, but was it a pervasive atmosphere, that “you’re here to drive them out of business”?

GA: I think it grew. I think it became that over the years more and more so. When I was there, it was just—that whole idea was just inconceivable. You just didn’t have that frame of thought, that frame of reference. It wasn’t something that occurred to you, that that could ever possibly happen. But that may have been Starr’s big accomplishment, too, was that he made that idea reality, that he turned it into something that was a possibility, and he made people believe in him. That

was another really—you have to hand it to the guy, it was a tremendous accomplishment to do what he did.

TH: Well, I remember I was—I guess this would've been 1982 or so—I was working for Senator [Dale] Bumpers, and Ernie Dumas was in town. We had lunch. He sort of delicately brought up—asked me what I thought about certain legal possibilities or situations. I don't remember the details at all.

GA: Yes.

TH: And, of course, he didn't say anything like, "We've got to win this case." But I remember that was the first time I thought, "My God, they're really worried that they might *lose* the war." As I recall, one of the points that Hussman makes in his interview, and I've heard this from other people, is that the *Gazette* hired some fancy Houston law firm to come up and represent them, while the *Democrat* had a really good local firm. I wondered whether that might not have a little bit to do with the outcome, since it was a jury trial in Little Rock. [Laughs]

GA: Yes. All those things come into play.

TH: Yes. When did you say—? Well, I guess, after that trial, I suppose Starr at least must have thought, "It's only a matter of time now." I guess probably pretty much the rest of the staff felt that way. Would you say?

GA: I was long gone, so I don't know. My sense is that that was a big turning point. I don't know if people realized it at the time, or all that kind of gradually came to pass. I remember thinking when they sold out to Gannett that "they just raised the stakes, and things had been going the *Democrat's* way for a long time, and maybe

it's not going to anymore." Who could've foreseen the way they stumbled [laughs] around. *That* may have been the biggest surprise of the whole thing.

TH: I think that's got to be the biggest surprise for me—how they could've misread things so fundamentally.

GA: Yes.

TH: Month after month, year after year.

GA: Yes.

TH: And whenever they tried to fix a problem, it just got worse.

GA: Yes.

TH: It was really kind of sad. Was the newspaper war something that people talked about in El Dorado? Was it on people's—I mean, outside of just journalists themselves?

GA: Yes. You know, it wasn't a huge topic of conversation, but there were certainly people who were interested who were watching and just kept up with what was going on.

TH: Yes. Well, it was sure a big story nationwide among people who follow journalism.

GA: Yes. Well, we at the paper—it was a big deal. We were tied into that, too.

TH: Yes.

GA: We had no idea what was going to become of us, depending on what happened in Little Rock. I remember during the lawsuit, our business office in El Dorado—the general manager—they had to provide all kinds of records. I mean, they were pulling stuff out of the attic to go back and get documents to send up as part of the

record of the trial. I don't know how all that figured in anymore, but I guess all the Hussman papers were having to do that.

TH: Yes.

GA: That was a little unsettling, too, because we didn't know how that was going to come out down there, and it was going to roll downhill to us, too.

TH: Yes. That's something I hadn't thought about before if the *Democrat* had lost that war. What would have been the results on other Hussman newspapers?

GA: I don't know what kind of protection he would've had for his other holdings. I'm sure he had some. It just would've gone back to a whole lot smaller operation than we were getting accustomed to.

TH: Well, at one point, according to Mr. Hussman in his interview, he says that he—in essence, at the lowest point, basically, after Patterson refused to even consider the idea of a JOA [Joint Operating Agreement], that he essentially offered to sell Patterson the *Democrat* for almost nothing. Presumably, though, that would have included debts. So had Patterson bought the *Democrat* at that point, I guess the rest of the Hussman holdings would have just kind of continued on unaffected, presumably.

GA: Yes.

TH: But, of course, had they lost that war, I guess Hussman would've been so deeply in debt at the *Gazette*.

GA: Yes.

TH: That's what you're talking about when you say the effects on the other Hussman papers, right?

GA: Yes. Right.

TH: That was *some* deal. How widely known was the effort by some people at the *Gazette* and other local people to buy out? Okay, everybody knew, although it hadn't been published yet, that Gannett was going to buy the *Gazette*. At that point, Ernie Dumas, Max Brantley, and six or seven others started exploring—was there a possibility for an employee buyout, or could they bring in somebody like Jack Stephens or that sort of thing? And this actually cost [the] Hussmans and the Pattersons, as it turns out, a lot of money because it extended the period of time before Gannett bought the paper by several months.

GA: Yes.

TH: And at the rate both newspapers were losing money at that point [laughs]—but was that something that was known around town? Of course, you were not aware of . . .

GA: Yes, not where I was. In fact, we didn't really pick up on the whole Gannett thing until it happened.

TH: Right.

GA: That may have been common talk in Little Rock, but it was news to us. [Laughs]

TH: Yes. Well, I guess we should talk a little more about El Dorado. When you were there, what was your title?

GA: Managing editor.

TH: You were the managing editor.

GA: Yes, the whole time I was there.

TH: Yes. What made you decide to come up here to northwest Arkansas?

GA: I guess I was ready for a change. The kids were out of school. We had been up here in this part of the state in Bentonville, and liked it. And, of course, the place was just starting to boom. It just seemed like a good idea.

TH: Yes.

GA: A good thing to do. It was an opportunity to just concentrate on writing, and not worry about the management and personnel and all those things.

TH: Because you came up here, I guess . . .

GA: I had hair when I went to El Dorado. [Laughter] Not really true, but if I had, I think I would've lost it.

TH: Yes. So you came up as the editor of the editorial . . .

GA: The opinion page guy. Yes.

TH: That must've been fun compared to running a newspaper—the whole part of it.

GA: Yes. It was tough down there just hiring folks. Circulation was about 12,000, and that's a fairly small daily. When I got into the business, you couldn't find a job. There were so many people in the business looking for work. It doesn't seem like that anymore. We struggled just to find applicants for openings that we had down there. It never got any better. Of course, we were hiring young people. El Dorado is a great family town, but not a lot to do for young folks. They had their eyes set on something else. From the day they'd get there, they were looking to move on to something else, so they'd move on very fast sometimes. Personnel, I thought, was pretty tough. We never solved the problem. Never could figure out a way to make it easy.

TH: How was it—I know you’re not directly responsible for this now, but I assume it’s a lot easier to find qualified people to come to work here—or not?

GA: Yes, I think so. They bring in very good reporters and editors.

TH: And most, I’m guessing, don’t come here from Little Rock—they probably come from other places.

GA: Yes. Right. Generally so. We did not start out in 1998 with our own copy desk. That was created. I forget when they did that. It was several years before we had the copy desk. When that was set up, a lot of those people came from Little Rock. That was kind of a one-time event. There is interplay, but it’s not necessarily—it’s not routine for all that to happen. More people from here are going to Little Rock than the other way around.

TH: I guess as a northwest Arkansas native, I’m surprised. [Laughs]

GA: Let’s keep the secret. [Laughs]

TH: Well, let’s talk about the technical aspect between Little Rock and Fayetteville, or the Lowell operation. Do you get a budget at the end of one day saying, “Okay, tomorrow this is the hole that you’re going to fill?”

GA: We’re talking the news side here. That’s kind of generally how it works, but I couldn’t give you a whole lot of details.

TH: You have the whole page, basically, to yourself.

GA: Yes. Little Rock pretty much decides what’s going where. I provide the copy and tell them, “This can wait,” or “This needs to go right away.” They do the page work on the editorial page down there. I’m strictly writing.

TH: Okay. I've never actually had the opportunity to look at the zone—the northwest Arkansas and the Little Rock edition side by side on the same day.

GA: Yes.

TH: But if I did, most of the editorial page would be the same?

GA: A lot of times it will be the same. Yes. It's like writing my column—when we have editorials that are strictly related to northwest Arkansas, there will be two pages that day, one for us and one for them. When it's stuff—whether I do it or the other people do it—that's of statewide interest, then a lot of times it will just be the single page that runs in both editions.

TH: I'm not sure it breaks down this way, but on a flow sheet, do you report to Paul Greenberg? Is that how it works?

GA: Yes.

TH: And Greenberg reports to Hussman, and Hussman reports to God. [Laughter]

GA: However that works up there. [Laughs]

TH: Now, what's your wife's name?

GA: Barbara.

TH: And you met her when you were where?

GA: In Little Rock, before I went back to school in Missouri. I was working in one of those government jobs that I had after I got out of the army, when I really didn't know what the heck to do. I was kind of kicking around and trying to figure out—well, I had figured out I probably needed to go back to school. I met her in the meantime. We got married and spent our honeymoon in Columbia, Missouri, looking for an apartment for the school year.

TH: Did she go to school at the time?

GA: She has a two-year degree from ASU [Arkansas State University]. No, she was working—her and the G.I. Bill helped me to . . .

TH: What kind of work did she do?

GA: She worked as a secretary at the university for a guy in the Extension office there. He would go around and set up different classes out in the state a lot of times. I remember he'd set up horseshoeing clinics, even. Barbara used to—she loves animals, so that was a real kick for her to get to go out and do those things.

TH: Now, did you say where you went to undergraduate school?

GA: University of Kansas. I grew up in Leavenworth, and went to KU. I got an English degree.

TH: I noted earlier—at some point, you said you decided to return to Arkansas, and I guess your wife was the probably the person who considered it home.

GA: Yes. Right around the time I got out of college and went off into the army, my folks moved from Kansas to Benton, Arkansas. When I got out of the army, I was completely lost as to where to go and what to do. I just kind of drifted down there for a while, and got a couple of jobs in Arkansas. So I've pretty much been in Arkansas ever since then, off and on. So it was basically home to me at the same time that it was for her.

TH: So it's home to you, too. And you have children?

GA: Two sons, both grown. One is a lawyer in Rogers. He just got out of law school about a year ago. The other one is a writer in Memphis. He's a writer and editor

for a consulting company over there. He went to Rhodes College in Memphis, and then went to work over there.

TH: There's a little bit of journalist to that, but . . .

GA: Yes. They both seem to be able to write really well. I'm really happy about that.

TH: Is your son with a firm in Rogers?

GA: Yes.

TH: What's the name of it?

GA: Keith, Butler and Webb. There's another name in there. There's a fourth name. Keith, Miller, Butler and Webb.

TH: I grew up in Rogers.

GA: Oh, really? Yes, the Keith is Sean Keith, who's the son of Judge Tom Keith up in Bentonville.

TH: Yes.

GA: Nick clerked for them his last summer in law school, and they just all hit it off. They offered him a job when he got out of school, and he went right to work.

TH: This is a very general question—how would you compare—I can't use the word “vibes”—how would you compare what it feels like to be in a newsroom these days compared to what it was like when you were twenty-three or -four years old?

GA: Yes, good question. It seems to me that it was a lot more free-wheeling back then. It seems a lot more—I don't know if “corporatized” is the right word. It just seems more—stiffer, maybe. It's just not as loose. I don't think there's as much room for some of the old characters as there used to be. Maybe some of that was just legends that I heard about. I don't know.

TH: I don't know, I remember some characters [laughs] who could have a rough time in today's newsroom.

GA: Yes. [Laughs] It's different.

TH: I remember large Underwood typewriters being thrown across the room. [Laughter] I don't know whether that was because there was more passion or alcohol being consumed in those days. [Laughs]

GA: Yes, it's different.

TH: I guess copy editing has probably—which I loved, by the way. I really had fun.

GA: Same here.

TH: But that always seemed to be a place back in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, at the *Democrat*, anyway, where it was kind of a wandering tribe. I mean, people would come from God knows where and stay there two or three years and . . .

GA: And disappear. Yes. That was still going on when I was there.

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]

GA: In reading the transcript of our interview, I realized that I'd breezed over some of my early background. I think some of that is especially relevant to my decision to go into newspaper work, so I want to flesh that out a bit in this addition. My parents were immigrants from Germany. They came to this country between the world wars. Like so many others, they were looking for a better opportunity here. My dad came over first, in 1927. A relative helped him get work and get started in Leavenworth, Kansas, where there was a substantial German immigrant community at the time. He'd met my mother before he'd left Germany and he corresponded with her for something like eight years, finally proposing and going back to Germany to marry and bring her here in 1935. That wasn't long after Hitler had come to power, so it was a good time to get out. But leaving wasn't that much of a political decision on their parts. Mostly, it was economics. They knew they would do better over here. Even so, my dad did have great contempt for Hitler and the Nazis and what they would wind up doing to his old country. Eventually, two of my dad's younger brothers and a brother-in-law were killed in World War II, all three of them on the Russian front. By the time my folks settled in the United States, this country was in the middle of the Great Depression. They had to struggle, but my dad was always able to keep working at his job. He worked in a lumber yard for a furniture factory, running their dry kiln, where the wood was properly dried before being turned into furniture. During the Depression, he worked short hours sometimes, but he always had at least a small paycheck coming in. They would say later that they were better off over here, even during the Depression, than they'd had it in Germany during the severe post-

World War I depression over there. They raised their family in Leavenworth. At first, they spoke mostly German at home. My older brother didn't learn to speak English until he started school. I was the youngest of three kids—my sister was the middle child—and by the time I came along, my parents had learned English better and we were all speaking it at home. To this day, I've got only a middling grasp of the German language. I never really picked it up that well. I remember that when I was a kid, newspapers were an important part of the family routine. The *Leavenworth Times* was then an afternoon paper. My folks used the local paper as a way to improve their English. My dad was an especially avid newspaper reader. I can recall many times he'd be reading the paper at the kitchen table after dinner and he'd pass the parts he was finished with to me, sitting on the floor. I read the comics, of course, but I also developed an early interest in the commentary on the editorial page. Somewhere along the line, I discovered Russell Baker of *The New York Times* and began to look forward to his humorous columns. On Sundays, we'd pick up a copy of the *Kansas City Star* and I'd happily sift through all those sections. Getting that Sunday edition was a weekly treat at our house. That was my early, favorable exposure to newspapers. I grew up thinking of them as a valuable resource. Eventually, that would turn into a wish to be a part of the business itself, I suppose. But there was also this underlying sense of the importance of the English language around our house. Without me consciously realizing it, the language—the proper use of it—was very much a key to my family's assimilation into the culture of this country. So I think going into newspaper writing was an altogether natural course for me to take.