

The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
University of Arkansas
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-6829

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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Patti Cox
Little Rock, Arkansas
12 August 2005

Interviewer: Mara Leveritt

Mara Leveritt: This is an interview with Patti Cox. It's taking place in Little Rock, Arkansas. The date is August 12, 2005. [This interview is part of the *Arkansas Democrat* project for the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville] And, Patti, if you could say a few words [to test this out?]

Patti Cox: I can do that.

ML: Okay, Patti, I hope you will relax and enjoy this. You were at the *Democrat* at the same time I was.

PC: That's true.

ML: But I only remember you on the copy desk, is that right?

PC: That was the extent of my life there, although I got to be weekend wire editor some of the time. We all did a lot of different things.

ML: And what years, what period of time was that? When did you begin and when did you leave? Do you know?

PC: I've been trying to remember. I came in 1975. And it was shortly after Jamie and I got married, but I'm not sure.

[Tape Stopped]

PC: It was probably in the late fall, but I can't remember exactly when it was. We left Little Rock in August of 1977, so, actually, my time at the *Democrat* was very short, just under two years, but it seems longer, doesn't it?

ML: Yes. And why do you think that is?

PC: Well, I've been thinking about it a little bit, since I knew we were going to do this. I know it was a real important time in my life, and I don't know if the experience was enhanced simply because we were so impossibly young, or if it was an intense period in history. It was when the Watergate burglars were being sentenced. [Editor's Note: Reference to the 1972 break-in and illegal wire-tapping at the Democratic National Committee that left a trail to the White House and led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974.] And Patty Hearst, you know, her trial. [Editor's Note: Reference to the 1974 kidnapping of publishing heiress Patricia Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army. Hearst participated with the SLA in a bank robbery.] I remember the headlines on the desk, and it was just a very exciting time. So it seems to be a much longer period than just under two years.

ML: How old were you in 1977, or 1975, when you started?

PC: Twenty-two.

ML: Give us some background on where you had come from. You were born where?

PC: Camp Chaffee, just outside Fort Smith, and I grew up in Fort Smith.

ML: That would be Fort Smith public schools?

PC: Yes. Graduated Northside High School and went to Hendrix [College] in Conway. And from there, upon graduation with a degree in English, I went to the phone company here in Little Rock, where I was classified full-time temporary, and I was in the accounting department, which always just mystified me since the last math class I'd taken was in the eleventh grade.

ML: Had you had any thoughts in high school or college of working in journalism or publications?

PC: Well, I think—I'd always been involved in school papers and things like that. I don't think I thought I would end up on a copy desk, especially at that time because many of us wanted to be reporters. I'm not sure I knew what I wanted to be. I knew I didn't want to be an accountant. And my friend David Terrell called. We had gone to Hendrix together, and he was working at the *Democrat* and told me of an opening on the desk. I said, "Well, David, I know nothing about editing a newspaper." And he gave me a book on editing, a book on typing, and said, "Wear the blue dress for your interview." Sure enough, after a very interesting interview process, I was hired. And you learn a lot very quickly on the desk of a newspaper.

ML: What was the interview process?

PC: As best I can remember, Jerry McConnell, who was managing editor and is still a dear friend of mine, called me and said, "Can you be here at 2:00 in the

afternoon?” I showed up, and we spoke for about an hour, mostly about things not related to newspapers. He found out that I was studying Chinese philosophy at UALR [University of Arkansas at Little Rock], so we ended up talking about Chinese philosophy, [philosopher Soren] Kierkegaard, to Decoration Day in small-town cemeteries in Arkansas. [We] found that we both had—he had grown up in Greenwood, and my parents had grown up in that area. So we just visited, and he didn’t ask me very many questions about why I was qualified for or not qualified for the job. We just talked. I don’t remember taking a test, do you?

ML: No.

PC: I don’t think I took any kind of editing test. Although your first day at work with Patsy McKown certainly was an editing test—and he hired me.

ML: What do you think, from the vantage of many years later, was the value, if any of that approach to hiring?

PC: Well, I know what Jerry’s philosophy was because we’ve talked about it. He thought that it was important on the copy desk, and probably everywhere in the newspaper, that you hire smart people. Now it’s hard for me to say that, since I was one of those people, but if you think about the people we worked with, we were certainly apt and interested in everything that was going on around us. I suspect that’s why he had these wide-ranging conversations—to find out if we were aware of the sense of time, and events of the day, and if we cared about how we got to that point. And if we could think quickly. That’s a guess, but . . .

ML: I remember feeling that that group on the copy desk was very compatible—for as different as everyone was . . .

PC: We were very different people.

ML: . . . but there was a sense of fit for me about it that I enjoyed.

PC: And I think that may still be true at newspapers. I don't know, but for us, we pretty much had to be compatible because deadlines were short, and we were always pushed to the limit to get everything done. Part of the beauty of working on the copy desk [was] you were never bored.

ML: Was Patsy McKown the copy editor?

PC: She was copy editor. She and Si Dunn.

ML: Oh, and Si was actually over her.

PC: Yes, but Patsy was—that's who I remember most. And that's because she was pretty demanding. I remember we spiked our headlines, and we still had glue pots to glue copy together. We'd rewrite their drafts and glue them in.

ML: Do you want to say what spiking headlines is? I don't think it happens anymore.

PC: I don't think so either. And that's probably a good thing. There were these very wicked-looking metal spikes on the top edge of the rim, and the copy editor was inside the rim, and you were kind of down lower—and that's certainly how I felt when I first began. I felt like I was the newbie on the desk. You would type out your headlines and rip off that piece of paper and reach out and spike it on that spike. And that is where the news editor would pick it up and look at it. You spiked the copy there, too.

ML: So every page [of] paper we got had holes in it . . .

PC: Yes.

ML: . . . because it had been ripped down the spike.

PC: That is true. That's true. And Patsy—I'll never forget—it was one of the first headlines I spiked for her. She took it off the spike and looked at it and then crumpled it up and flipped it back down on me. I learned very quickly to have two headlines, so that I could spike another one. She didn't say a lot, but what she did do was inspire me to be better.

ML: What did you mean you had to have two headlines?

PC: I would write two headlines for a story, in case she didn't like the first one.

[Laughter] Because I did not like that feeling. I got over that. In the first days I was at the desk, I was pretty nervous because I was untrained, and I think most of the people that Jerry hired for the desk at that time had little or no newspaper experience.

ML: Right. I think that's exactly right. And yet, somehow it was all supposed to come within twenty-four hours.

PC: It's kind of amazing, if you think back, how quickly we became what I believe to be pretty good editors. We took what we did very seriously. Probably too seriously. And we learned a lot very quickly.

ML: Can you describe Patsy? And Si Dunn?

PC: Si looks like—well—and this is funny too, let me preface it. At that time, the people who were in management positions at the *Democrat* seemed old to me, and they were probably—Patsy was probably thirty, but at the time she seemed older to me. Si Dunn, in my memory, looked like everyone's grandfather, but he may have been fifty-five, or my age now, fifty. I can't tell how old people really were, but Si was very thoughtful, very quiet, and sort of grandfatherly in my memory.

Very good. Patsy was more volatile and very bright. And I never doubted that she knew exactly what she was doing. We became friends, also. We all were very close back then because of shared responsibility. And deadlines. And you just—you became a family of sorts.

ML: And there weren't a lot of other people that you could talk [to] about that particular kind of work.

PC: No. I think my husband got very tired of it. Especially when we all would get together outside of work. We'd talk shop.

ML: Because it was interesting or . . .

PC: Well, it seemed to consume my life at the time. I don't think that's a bad thing, but that was also true when I moved to another paper. You get a sense—I don't know anyone who worked at newspapers at that time who didn't think [that] what they did was very important. Nor do I know anyone who didn't think that they were very good at what they did. Maybe that's the arrogance of youth; then again, maybe it's not. I don't know. I think we put out a fine paper.

ML: Did you have a sense of how that moment in the *Democrat's* history fit into its past and where it was heading? Did you have a sense of the larger picture and future of the paper?

PC: I came to have a sense of that. I'm not sure I had it when I began, but I think by the time I left I knew that it was an important moment, that there were fewer and fewer competing newspapers in the same town in the United States. I very much hoped that both papers would survive, that there would be a place for both of them. I think I have a memory, and I don't think I made it up, that we had heard

within the newsroom that Walter Hussman [Jr.], was committed to win out over the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*, even if it cost him a loss of so many thousand dollars a day. The figure that's in my mind is \$5,000 a day is what he was losing at that time, but I may have made that up. I don't think I did. Anyway, that was my belief, that he was committed to making sure that the *Arkansas Democrat* didn't go away.

ML: Did you have a sense of him, personally, around the newsroom? Did you see him? Was he a presence at all for the paper?

PC: Not in my mind. I don't remember seeing him. I do remember seeing him walk past the apartment that I lived in, so I knew what he looked like, but I certainly never had a conversation with him.

ML: You don't remember ever seeing him in the newsroom?

PC: It's been a long time. But I don't, really.

ML: Okay. Who from the copy desk at the time [do] you remember?

PC: Well, Connie Hoxie was and Leslie Newell, now Peacock, and you were. And Gerald Koontz—he was great fun. And I believe there was a woman named Catherine who was there for a time, but I may have that wrong. But it seemed that the people I worked with the most on the desk, and the people that I felt closest to, were you and Leslie, Connie, and Gerald. And Dody Palmer. She was great.

ML: Do you have any particular memories of that time?

PC: Well, you tend to remember the mistakes you made more vividly than the good things that you did every day. Two things. I remember the enormous sense of

satisfaction I got when the paper would come off the press; I loved press check because the whole process of the copy desk on the newspaper, for me, was kind of like getting a puzzle together. First, you got the pieces right, and then you figured out where they were going to go, and at the end of the day you saw the completed thing. My favorite thing about being a copy editor was that each day you had in your hand not only the story of that day, and visible examples of what the people around you were able to accomplish—and I think we accomplished a lot—but you could hold your whole day’s work in your hand. That’s a lovely feeling. And I remember that from almost every—every memory that I had at the *Democrat*. I remember how lovely it was to do press check. The other mistake that I remember vividly—we were given huge responsibility very quickly. I remember the first time I laid out the front page of the newspaper—and I’m not sure why I was doing that. I was trying to remember. Perhaps it was a training exercise—I don’t know. But I sent it up to the back shop, and they called me and said, “Do you want to come check the page?” I did, and I had laid it out as if it were an inside page, and they had pasted it up. It was [?] off the edge of the paper, and I said, “Well.” The pressman, the layout man, said, “What do you think?” And I said, “Well, I don’t think that will work.” And he grinned, and said, “I didn’t either.” So I frantically went back down the spiral stairs and fixed it and it was just great. You learned a lot really quickly, and we made some mistakes, but not very many people ever saw them. We fixed them.

ML: So the copy desk was in the southeast corner of the newsroom, just adjacent to the bathroom.

PC: That's true. [Laughs]

ML: And in my memory, the newsroom walls had [a yellow walls] kind of tinge of years upon them.

PC: Years.

ML: And just north of where the copy desk was—sort of almost in the middle of the newsroom, between the copy desk and the city desk—was the spiral staircase, which was painted black . . .

PC: Yes.

ML: And the pressroom was upstairs.

PC: It was.

ML: Can you describe that?

PC: Well, you may have to help me there. The person that actually laid out the paper that day would go up to check pages as they were completed, so you had that much interaction. I remember you did not touch the type.

ML: You mean hot type?

PC: No, we'd gone cold type. Many, many, many veterans [of the hot-type era] had lost their jobs or left before I got there. But the residual resentment, I believe, on the people who were in the back shop was still noticeable. They were pleasant enough, but you didn't touch what they did.

ML: It was a different atmosphere between the two floors.

PC: It was, and not adversarial, but not necessarily warm.

ML: It was definitely a shop.

PC: Yes. It was. And it was a time when newspapers were changing so quickly. When we first got there, there were computers, but they weren't at our station. We would type in the stories that we edited on paper or there was a scanner.

ML: There was a scanner.

PC: But the reporters didn't have computers when we were first there.

ML: No. IBM Selectrics

PC: Yes. Except for one person. Bob—I'll see in a moment. But he had an old manual, because I remember . . .

ML: Sallee? Bob Sallee?

PC: Yes. Maybe.

ML: The police reporter?

PC: He would put his head down on the typewriter when he was trying to think. And it was not an electric typewriter, but most of them were, you're right.

ML: Which is another change issue, because I remember that, as a reporter briefly, I could type a word on the Selectric, decide that I didn't want it, and change it by putting three pound signs [#] after it, or after a line, and strike it out without erasing. But that was another brief moment in the technological process.

PC: It's just hard to imagine. Now, newsrooms are so quiet and they're carpeted, and it's all computers. It's hard to imagine not having been in the completely modern newsroom—I'd moved on by then—how different it would be, because I remember the newsroom at the *Arkansas Democrat* being vast. I mean, I'm sure it's not as big as it is in my memory. But it was a large room. It was noisy because the Teletype machines were right there clicking and clacking away. And

typewriters. And it was a tile floor. And paper everywhere. And people talking and/or yelling. And it was just . . .

ML: And smoke.

PC: We smoked at our desks, and put the cigarettes out on the floor. Can you imagine? [Laughter] I can't imagine, with paper everywhere. It's a wonder we didn't burn the building down. But . . .

ML: It sounds like something out of [a Charles] Dickens [novel]. [Laughter]

PC: Kind of. But it was great fun and very exciting. And the noise contributed to that sense of urgency, I think.

ML: Yes, a lot of that noise was the Teletypes.

PC: Yes.

ML: [?] but you talk about space—that whole side of the newsroom was just across from Christ Episcopal Church on Scott Street, and I remember that we took up as much space as the entire front of that church. So that was a pretty big room.

PC: It was huge.

ML: It wasn't as wide as all that, but then again, it was as wide as the Stephens Building across the street.

PC: That's true. It was a lot of people doing different things at the same time, toward the same end. And that's a very exciting thing for me. I loved it. Still miss it. I can't imagine doing it again, but it was a real important time for me, not just because I love words and I loved the newspaper, but we learned a whole lot about working and about working with other people. Things that have served me well in everything I've done since.

ML: Why is that?

PC: You know, for instance, an afternoon paper—getting it out begins very early in the morning. I remember that we would arrive at 5:30 a.m., and some days earlier than that if we came in to strip the wires. And we showed up. Every day. That was—for a young person working difficult hours, and hours that changed every day, depending on what you were doing. We were a morning paper on the weekend, so we worked nights on the weekend. You learned a lot about managing your time, and you learned a lot about the importance of being right the first time. All of those things have served me well.

ML: And in other ways what was important to you? Besides the work ethic?

PC: Your confidence comes out very quickly with the responsibility that you're given. If you're able to do these new, challenging things, then you feel like you can do many more new, challenging things. I was pretty quiet when I first came to the *Democrat*, and I found my voice there, I think. I learned to defend my decisions and to back down when [I] needed to back down. Maybe you learn those things at any first job, but I don't think so.

ML: I always presumed that you took newspapers in and of themselves seriously. You considered a newspaper a serious and important thing.

PC: I think we all did. It's the sort of thing we would debate into the wee hours of the night. Over a beer or two, or a glass of wine.

ML: The treatment of a story . . .

PC: Well, we certainly tried . . .

ML: . . . where something ran in the paper, as opposed to where it should have run?
That kind of thing, or what?

PC: Well, there's always that, but also, just the role of the newspaper. What its function should be. We thought what we did was really important. There was the sense—and many of us at the *Democrat*—many of the people working at the *Democrat* wanted to be working at the *Gazette*, or some big paper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, or in Chicago or L. A. [Los Angeles]. And it seemed very possible because there was a long history of people from the *Arkansas Democrat* going to New York and doing well at papers. So it was a training paper in a sense, but it was more than that. I mean, I think everyone at the *Democrat* was concerned about the quality of the news, about the play of the news, about getting the story first, and of having the huge *Gazette* reputation just across the street. We certainly were the underdog at that point in most people's minds, but we did good. We took ourselves very seriously, and the role of the *Democrat* as opposed to the *Gazette* very seriously. I believed at that time there was room for two papers, and that they didn't have to be the same paper, but they both had to be good.

ML: Did you come from a family of newspaper readers and critics? Did your parents kind of pore over the paper and debate the news at the table? Was it that kind of family or . . . ?

PC: We all read the paper. And there was a lot of debate about events in the house. My mom's family tended to be strong yellow-dog Democrats, and my dad's family was really Republican, so we had interesting discussions about politics and

government. But we didn't take the *Gazette* in Fort Smith, we took the *Times Record* and the *Southwest American*. At that time, Fort Smith had two newspapers owned by the same person, Don Reynolds of Donrey Media [Group, now known as Stephens Media Group]. There was an afternoon paper and a morning paper, and when I was working there, the afternoon paper merged with the morning paper after a year or so.

ML: So you actually grew up in a house where people were talking about what they had seen in the paper that day.

PC: There was that, and also I grew up in a house where people read all the time. My mother—my dad said that he started reading for pleasure in the 1960s just out of self-defense, because my mother and my brother and I always had a book in our hands. The written word was always very important to me. My mom taught me to read before I started school, and reading for pleasure was just what we did. So the newspaper, the affection for the newspaper, was more an outgrowth of it being something that was printed. [Laughter] We read anything and everything voraciously.

ML: What about the quality of the news in the paper at that time? Do you remember the reporters? You mentioned some national stories that occurred during that period, but do you remember any local stories in particular? Do you remember reporters? And do you remember having opinions about how the local news was being reported?

PC: I remember the reporters pretty good, but not all of them. David Terrell and Jim Allen were not just co-workers, they were friends.

ML: And they were covering . . . ?

PC: Jim had North Little Rock, I believe, and David was covering the courts. Later, I believe, he covered the capitol for the *Democrat* before he moved to the *Gazette*. I remember James Scudder because he was intimidating and also very nice. But he was a great writer. James is dead, I think, and it's very sad. He was a fabulous writer . . .

ML: One of two Nieman [Foundation] Fellows who were there at that time. James and Bob Lancaster, which was kind of remarkable, really.

PC: Right. And James Scudder pushed—he was very edgy. He wrote things that I don't think most reporters would have said. And Jerry McConnell and Bob McCord . . .

[Tape Stopped]

ML: Okay, you were saying that Jerry McConnell and Bob McCord loved James's writing.

PC: They had a lot of respect for his ability as a writer, so some things, I think, were accepted at the *Democrat* that might have been edited at another paper. But he was a great writer. I remember the Swindler trial. You may not remember him. It was vivid to me because it happened in Fort Smith, and a police officer was killed. [Editor's Note: John Edward Swindler was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death twice for the 1976 killing of Fort Smith police officer Randy Basnett.]

ML: In what way? How did Scudder's reporting impress you?

PC: Well, his descriptions, for instance, of Swindler. Just physical descriptions. He would describe how someone looked, and their mannerisms, and it was completely accurate. But it read more like a novel would read. It was very passionate writing. You could tell when he was writing it that it took it right out of him, that it was a passion for him, because he would labor over it. I think we had very good reporters. I remember one instance where Jim Allen had broken a story—and I can't for the life of me remember what the story was—but the next day at a press conference of some sort, the person who was speaking said, "And the *Arkansas Gazette* broke the story," and Jim Allen said, "Excuse me, but the *Democrat* broke the story." And the person said, "Oh, I don't read the *Democrat*." So we did kind of have chips on our shoulders, I think. There was the sense that the *Democrat* was not taken to be a serious paper. I don't know if it always had been, but when we were there, I think it was a good newspaper.

ML: Yes. It was a new day in the *Democrat's* history . . .

PC: I think so.

ML: . . . at that point in time. It had been through different periods, and this was definitely a time that saw a lot of new people. There were the old people and the new people. There were people who had been there for a long, long time.

PC: Right.

ML: And there was an influx of new, young people, so there were these two cultures kind of simultaneously, as I recall.

PC: Maybe—I could be wrong, but we had several photographers and a big sports department. We probably—how many people would you say were on the desk at

a given time? The room was full so that would be six or seven copy editors. And Amanda Husted was the wire editor. We kind of counted her in our world.

[Laughter] There was the city desk, with Dody and Larry, and there always seemed to be a whole lot of people there, too.

ML: Yes. And that's . . .

PC: Lyndon Finney was kind of in-between. He was a copy editor, but he also maybe did something at the city desk.

ML: I'm not sure. I remember him at the copy desk. He went on to become information officer for Baptist Hospital [now Baptist Health Medical Center] with a huge jump in salary.

PC: Almost anything would have been a huge jump in salary.

ML: Do you remember your salary?

PC: I don't, but I remember it was small because we didn't have health benefits. Or if we had that option, I didn't avail myself of it.

ML: We did. I believe we did, because when I left the *Democrat* I gave up my health benefits.

PC: Ah. Well, you were very responsible then.

ML: No, I wasn't. Because I quit those benefits and immediately acquired \$8,000 in uninsured medical expenses. [Laughter]

PC: I remember that some of us talked a lot about our salaries and who made what. We didn't share numbers, but we certainly thought that we needed to be making as much as the next person. But, you know, it seemed like there was plenty of money.

ML: It wasn't much, but it seemed like enough?

PC: It did. My husband was in law school at the time. And [I earned] the primary salary in our family [?].

ML: Where were you then? How did you live?

PC: Well. We didn't have any debt, so a small salary went a lot further. Back then, in terms of expendable income, we probably did as well then as now. We didn't save any money. We didn't owe any money. We lived in a very nice apartment upstairs in an old house, and we loved it.

ML: Do you remember how often we were paid?

PC: I think it was every other week.

ML: Do you remember unionization at all?

PC: I do, but I remember it as something that had started and stopped before I got there.

ML: Yes. That's what I remember, too.

PC: The reporters—David Terrell used to talk about it. The *Gazette*—did they unionize? I don't . . .

ML: I don't think so.

PC: Yes, I remember the discussions, but it wasn't in our world. [Laughs]

ML: No, it was an effort that had tried and failed.

PC: Right. Right.

ML: Yes. I went to Jerry McConnell one time—and I mentioned to him that I didn't see any problem with the thought of a union, and he said, “Oh, you don't want a

union.” [Laughs] It was a moment when I realized, “Well, we’re friends, but you are management and I am not.”

PC: Exactly. Exactly.

ML: Getting back to the reporting staff, did you know that Scudder was also a Methodist minister. Did you know that?

PC: Yes, I think I did.

ML: He had a congregation in [?].

PC: Yes?

ML: I think that’s where it was. He had a little church, and did occasional services down there. I’ve always been struck by how many reporters come from seriously religious backgrounds, but not conservatively religious backgrounds. That is my impression.

PC: Which is true.

ML: Can you say anything more about that? Because other than just observing it, I didn’t know what to make of it. I thought there was a strong Methodist influence there. Did you think so?

PC: I think I missed all that. What I didn’t miss was that, I think, we had a grouping, both on the desk and in the newsroom, of a lot of people who thought a lot about a lot of things. I think that Scudder is the perfect example. Perhaps *eccentric* was too strong a word for many of us, but it was an *eclectic* group. Very different people, very bright people. Newspapers at that point in time—maybe today, I don’t know—seemed to embrace that type. So it doesn’t seem strange to me at all that someone who would be a reporter at that time, in that place, would also be a

minister. We were—it was different folk. And that was part of what was so neat about the newsroom at that time. People came from very different backgrounds and found a place there.

ML: Since you've left the paper—can you kind of reflect about your career?

PC: Well, when I left, Patsy McKown and Gerald Koontz made a bet that I would not be working in a newspaper in five years. But I was. I don't know if Patsy ever collected on it, because I was still working on a newspaper within five years. I left the *Democrat* and went to work at the *Times Record* in Fort Smith. And I loved it there, too. It was very different. They actually had a machine that counted headlines. It was a good place to work, and they were in transition to computers. They were further along than the *Democrat*. It was great. I was there for seven years, and then off and on for special projects after that. I edited a magazine in Fort Smith for three years.

ML: You did?

PC: A friend and I. It was called [*Fort Smith*] *Etc. Magazine*. It was a labor of love. Great fun. [We were] very proud of the magazine—just had no idea [how] to market it. But it was—the beginning—some of the people who worked with us on *Etc. Magazine* and now work on *Entertainment Fort Smith*. A four-color spread publication [?].

ML: Are you involved with that?

PC: I've written some pieces for it, but, no, I'm not involved on a daily basis. Mary Jane Hennig who was the publisher at our magazine, is the art director. It was very fun. From there I moved into advertising and public relations mostly, with

two agencies in Fort Smith. I did a little project and served on the Arkansas Higher Ed[ucation] Board, which is, in part, the motivation for the segue from advertising to what I'm doing now, which is development for the [J. William] Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas [at Fayetteville]. It seems kind of a natural progression to me, but I wouldn't want it diagrammed. [Laughter] It's as if I continually was trying to figure out what I was doing. But throughout it all, working with words and editing have been a big part in every job that I've done. So I still think that there may be a plan because I still get to write and edit and talk to people.

ML: Do you think that had you had the marketing and advertising experience before you began at *Etc.* that you would have held out? [Laughter]

PC: Yes! That's a strong yes. Two things. Mary Jane and I knew how to produce a magazine, how to write it, how to edit it, how to get other people involved in it, but neither of us had terrific people skills outside our circle of comfort. And you have to be able to talk to people and convince them to advertise in your magazine, if you're going to succeed. We were more like, "This would be really good for you, but if you choose not to do it, we certainly understand." We were the world's worst at that. A little marketing and public relations experience has been very helpful. But timing was also an issue. This was before everything could be done digitally, so it was a very expensive process.

ML: Does that experience [?] the whole range of publishing now. I guess they have jobs in the business that you haven't been involved with. Would you say?

PC: I think that's fair.

ML: Does that give you any particular perspective on the *Democrat/Gazette* war? The outcome of that? And in what Walter Hussman has done in taking the *Democrat* from the point where we were working for it, again, to this position [of] the state newspaper, and the only one, today?

PC: Well, I don't know that my work and life experience gives me a better perspective, but I'm glad I missed the war years, for the most part. I don't think I would have enjoyed that. At the time I was at the *Arkansas Democrat*, we were there—we felt strongly competitive with the *Gazette*, but I'm not sure the *Gazette* felt that we were strong competitors, and that's okay because it was a feeling that I think grew into the situation, which made them a viable competitor in the war.

ML: We were there before John Robert Starr.

PC: Thank heavens. I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't have said that, but I would not have enjoyed working with John Robert Starr.

ML: And that was when it got crazy.

PC: Indeed. You can debate whether that was also what made the *Arkansas Democrat* the victor in the war. I think it probably played a good part in it. One thing about the *Democrat*—while we were there and certainly during the war years—we had a huge news hole.

ML: Explain what that is, please.

PC: I expect, because we didn't have the ads [advertisements] that we needed, we had a lot of room to move. Also, Walter Hussman was willing to run the paper at a loss, or what we believed to be a loss at the time, but I think we had a lot of news and we certainly thought we were competitors. If people had read us like they

read the *Democrat*, you know, at the *Gazette*, perhaps we would have been viewed as a competitor. But for the most part, we were the ones, I think, that thought we were strong competitors. I don't think the people in Little Rock did.

ML: I remember, early on, thinking we were just noble to be running such a ratio of news to ads. Something that could not be economically profitable. But I thought it was just because we were great. [Laughter.] That's how naive we were—and insulated from the economic realities. We had the economic reality of our paycheck, but the realities of the cost of paper, the cost of ink, the cost of printing, the cost of big presses—we had no notion of that.

PC: None. None. I was sad the day—I think we all were very sad the day the *Gazette* was no more. I didn't like the way they didn't get to publish their last issue. But you have to respect the tenacity of Walter Hussman. You may not agree with him on everything, but he waged a long battle, an expensive battle.

ML: And do you feel—how do you feel, speaking of the *Democrat-Gazette* today? Do you feel this is the same paper you worked for? Or does it seem that you worked for one paper, and this is something else?

PC: I'm not sure I know exactly how I feel about that question. I do think, not living in Little Rock, that I am more accepting of the *Democrat-Gazette* than some of the people in Little Rock who still would say that they miss the *Arkansas Gazette*. I think it's a good paper, [but] I wish that there were two papers in Little Rock. I do. And I really hate that the paper we get in northwest Arkansas is not the same paper you get in central Arkansas.

ML: And speak to that, please.

PC: I think it's terrible.

ML: Now this is—you're talking about the northwest [Arkansas] edition . . .

PC: Yes.

ML: . . . of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

PC: And it's not—in my view, it's not a statewide newspaper if I can't pick up the newspaper and see what's happening in Little Rock or in Batesville or in West Memphis. If the focus of the paper I'm picking up is Fayetteville, then I'm not—it's a good paper, and I read it every day, but it's not a statewide paper. And if someone can buy—[if there's news] in Little Rock that I'd like to know about, and it's not in my paper—that's why [it's not] a statewide newspaper, in my view. I understand why they do it, because if you have an edition that's tailored to your area, you can sell more ads in that area.

ML: What is the downside? Obviously, you want to know about the obits [obituaries] of people you might know in the central part of the state. But what else?

PC: I might want to follow a trial here, or I might want to know what the Pulaski County or the Little Rock school district is doing. I might want to know about people in this area.

ML: What about the legislature? What about the—is the coverage . . . ?

PC: It's covered. But it's covered—and it's probably unfair of me to feel quite as strongly as I do, but the stories that you will see played up from the legislative session are the stories that most effect northwest Arkansas, which is fine, but I'd also like to know—I'd like to read stories that impact other areas of the state.

ML: I was just talking to another friend in Fayetteville, who said he thought that the division of news by the *Democrat-Gazette* was actually divisive for the state in that an important connection is being lost.

PC: Well, it's always been true. I remember when I was at the *Democrat*, [I heard] an offhand comment made by a person at a party that Fort Smith is really part of Oklahoma. Northwest Arkansas, you know, is an important part of all of Arkansas, and I don't really understand why there is a tussle between central Arkansas and northwest Arkansas. I understand it. But I think it's unfortunate, and I do think that the different versions of the statewide newspaper don't help things.

ML: But it wasn't that way when we were at the *Democrat*.

PC: No.

ML: It was a statewide newspaper.

PC: Yes.

ML: We did have a sense of it being a paper for Arkansas.

PC: When I went from the *Democrat* to the *Times Record*, there was also this kind of a change. Quite often, people come through there, and they actually—many of them went to the *Democrat* and then to the *Gazette* or to the other papers. But there was kind of a pathway for that in journalism—that you start at smaller papers, then go to the *Democrat* and then move on.

ML: Well, I think that probably does it for my questions. Are there parts of that experience that you've been thinking about, but that we haven't touched on?

PC: Well, yes and no. I don't know how to verbalize it. I wish I could share what a great time that was. A very important time to many of us. Very short, condensed period of time. That stuck with us [now thirty years later]. And I don't know how to convey that. It was a good time. I think it was a good place.

ML: [Laughs] Okay. Thanks, Patti.

PC: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Lu Ann Smith-Lacy]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]

[Edited by Chris Branam]