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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Arlin Fields
Little Rock, AR
14 July 2005

Interviewer: Dan Farley

Dan Farley: I'm Dan Farley. This interview is part of the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. We will transcribe the interview and make it available to those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is to tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others.

Arlin Fields: My name is Arlin Fields, and I'm most happy to comply with that request.

DF: Very good. I guess we'll start at the beginning. You were there when I got there. Tell me when you came to the *Democrat*.

AF: I started at the *Democrat* when I was a junior at Central High [School, Little Rock, Arkansas]. I started in the sports department, working in the mornings and on weekends, through a friend of mine, Dave Baer, who was working at the *Democrat*. He and I were working together on the *Central High Tiger*. By association with that, I got this little sports writing job working for Jack Keady in the sports department. I know that I probably knew less about sports than any sportswriter in history.

DF: [Laughs] But you obviously did it well.

AF: I succeeded in learning to write about things that I barely understood, which served me well for a modest career down the line in journalism.

DF: What year was that? Do you remember?

AF: That would be about 1966, because I graduated from Central in 1967.

DF: Okay. We're the same age, then. Did you work for the *Democrat* from that time on?

AF: I worked for the *Democrat* for a total of about five years from that period. I started out, as I said, in sports. Then I got a chance to move over to city side shortly and work there. I worked as entertainment editor and general-assignment reporter. That's basically what I did.

DF: Were you not assistant city editor for a period of time, or Saturday assistant editor?

AF: I sort of had that function sometimes, but never the title, I don't think.

DF: Well, I remember when I was first there and reporting and working Saturday nights, you were always at the city desk. And Deborah Mathis was usually singing a hymn somewhere around the office.

AF: Right.

DF: Who was the editor at the *Democrat* at the time? Was [Bob] McCord there then?

AF: I think he may have come shortly after that. Gene Herrington was the managing editor when I first went to work there.

DF: Okay.

AF: It was rather exciting for me to be a part of the transition when Gene Foreman

came in because there was a great, sweeping change at the *Democrat* when Gene Foreman came in. When I started to work at the *Democrat*, standard policy in the morning was that Mabel Berry would have multiple copies of the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette* and would clip articles from the *Gazette*, divide them into batches, and hand them out to reporters when they came in. The reporters would rewrite those articles out of the *Gazette* and then retire to Walgreens for breakfast. Then they'd sometimes write features in the afternoon. By that point, some of them were engaging in various other recreational activities.

DF: [Laughs] Oh!

AF: So any mistake that happened to appear in the *Gazette* was automatically repeated in the *Democrat*. Some of the politicians jokingly referred to the *Gazette* as “the morning mistake,” and the *Democrat* as “the afternoon reprint.”

DF: [Laughs] I'd never heard that before.

AF: Well, when Gene Foreman came in, that all changed very rapidly. I would say that when I actually started, the *Democrat* was something of a little backwater of journalism. Gene Foreman came in with very high standards. Suddenly, there were a lot of shiny new faces, a very high proportion of which seemed to come from Hendrix College [Conway, Arkansas] background. Gene Foreman was one of the brightest men I've ever known in my life. He was very dedicated. He brought in Ralph Patrick and a lot of other people, and very soon was turning out what, in most people's minds, was a quality journalistic product.

DF: Was [James] Scudder there at the time, or was he one of the people Gene brought in?

AF: He was one of the people Gene hired.

DF: I hadn't thought about him in a long time until I was thinking about some of this stuff. When you left sports and went to the city desk, what did you do on the city side?

AF: Basically, just general-assignment reporting. I was sort of stuck in sports. Just as a lark one day, I wrote a review. Ray White was the entertainment editor, editing a little tabloid called *Enjoy* that came out on the weekend. There was a new unheard-of duo named Simon and Garfunkel. They did a little special on television. They did a song called "Bridge Over Troubled Water."

DF: [Laughs] Oh!

AF: I wrote a little three- or four-hundred-word review of it and just gave it to Ray the next morning. He came over and told me that he thought it was very well written, and I began to attract a little attention and cultivate friends on the city side. Ralph Patrick offered me an opportunity to come over and work for him, which I seized upon.

DF: I had lost all track of him until I talked to Jerry [McConnell]. He was telling me that he was at the *Atlanta Constitution*, and had recently retired, I think he said.

AF: Oh, that's probably about right.

DF: And I got an e-mail last year out of the clear-blue sky from Bill Husted. I hadn't heard or known where he was forever.

AF: I have recently re-established contact with him, and I've checked out his website, which is quite impressive.

DF: Yes, it is. Yes, I did the same thing. Then I was somewhere—I don't remember

now—some city at a meeting. I picked up a newspaper and was flipping through it, and I saw one of his columns. Apparently, he's syndicated.

AF: Yes, I understand he's syndicated fairly widely.

DF: Yes. It was quite a treat to see that, because I had lost all track. The last time I had heard from him, he was living in Washington [state] or Oregon.

AF: Yes. Oregon. Medford, Oregon.

DF: Oregon. Yes, Medford, Oregon. That's right. When you came to city side, you were [doing] general-assignment stuff?

AF: Yes. Mostly writing features or whatever needed to be covered that day. I also evolved into some political coverage. I covered some major political elections. I covered Dale Bumpers' successful race against [Winthrop] Rockefeller.

DF: In 1970.

AF: Right. As a very young man, I was getting to fly around the state with these comparative big-league politicians. I was having a big time.

DF: I guess so. That's the year we were twenty-one, I take it.

AF: Yes.

DF: I remember that was my first election to vote in.

AF: Dale Bumpers told me that the first time I came out and got on the airplane with him, he thought, "My God, what do they think of me down there at the *Democrat*, sending this kid out here to cover this campaign?" But, later, he was a bit more complimentary of the coverage he thought he was receiving.

DF: That's good. [Laughs] That set you in a good stead with him.

AF: Well, I don't know if reporters should be complimented by politicians or not, but

it happened.

DF: Well, it helps every now and then. [Laughs]

AF: Yes.

DF: That way, you're not quite as hesitant to ask them questions, anyway. What was the most memorable thing you can remember that you covered during that period of time?

AF: There was a time, also, when there was quite a bit of political civil rights-associated activities in Arkansas. There were what were termed "riots" in Forrest City, and a lot of other activities like that. That was when there were some segregationist politicians still surviving and waving the banner—John Norman [Warnock?] and some fellows like that. To see that conflict and to be firsthand witness to it was very interesting.

DF: And memorable, I'm sure.

AF: Right.

DF: Yes. It probably gives you a different appreciation for where we are today than you might have had otherwise.

AF: Right. Standing on the steps of the state capitol with striking garbage men, with them signing "We Shall Overcome." Also, there was some campus unrest. I covered a couple of demonstrations on campuses, and that kind of thing. Nothing of any real importance, but it was the time when that sort of thing was in the news a lot.

DF: Yes, 1970 was [the year of the demonstration at] Kent State [University].

[Editor's note: On May 4, 1970, four Kent State students were killed and nine

others wounded by the National Guard during a protest over the U.S. invasion of Cambodia.]

AF: Right.

DF: Yes. So I have a feeling there was a little unrest there. There was at Hendrix, I remember—not very loud, but it was . . .

AF: One morning I got a call. There was something going on at A-State [Arkansas State University] in Jonesboro. We chartered a plane, which was a big deal for the *Democrat* at that time.

DF: Really?

AF: I went up there in the morning. There were some various antiwar-related things going on. No violence or anything. It was going on all across the country, and it was going on in Arkansas at that time. It was very interesting to watch and observe.

DF: It was an amazing time to be alive, I think. I often say, particularly to the younger people on staff, that I was shaped by the time I grew up in. The 1960s and early 1970s were pretty amazing times to be alive, but to be a reporter was particularly interesting.

AF: Right. You know, like any decent reporter, I strove to maintain whatever degree of objectivity one [could]. But, at the same time, I can't deny that I felt, to some degree, a part of that movement. My friends were [a] part of things. There was just that feeling in the 1960s and early 1970s that something was going on. There was change taking place, and we were part of it. I don't think that has come to fruition in society to the degree that we envisioned it at that time, but it's nice to

look back on and remember. There was a spirit of cohesion and unity among a certain faction of people at that time that I've never felt since.

DF: I agree. I came right after the election in 1972, about the time the Watergate stuff was really beginning to run through the mill. I have fond memories, particularly, [of] my first stint was as copy editor. So I was reading all the wire copy from the *Washington Post* every day, and it all culminated in 1974. I had just left the *Democrat* about six weeks before it ended. It was an amazing time. I think it had a huge impact on journalism from that point on.

AF: Yes.

DF: What do you think about journalists today in comparison to journalists from the early 1970s? Is that a fair question?

AF: Yes, it is. At danger of seeming like an old fogey, I guess—to me, somehow, the quality of the work has declined. The spirit of the work has drifted, in my opinion. There are still some very good journalists out there doing very good things, but I felt a little [unease?], too, with some aspects of the—I never felt that journalists should become crusaders, *per se*. After Watergate, it seemed to me that there was something of an attitude that drifted into journalism—there was a great emphasis on investigative reporting. There was a bit of a spirit of carrying a cause behind it sometimes, I thought, which bothered me just a little bit at the time. And I think, then, that attracted some people to journalism who were of that mind-set who have probably since marched off following different drummers. [Carl] Bernstein and [Bob] Woodward became heroes in a way that changed the image of journalism significantly for a while, I think. Before that, it seemed that

journalism *per se* had a much lower profile. No one was really conscious of it—conscious of investigative journalism, and in my generation, of journalism as a force for social change. I guess there's an up-side and a down-side to that.

DF: It's an issue I think about a lot. I worry about it sometimes because it seems so different now than it was then. Dealing with reporters is different now than it was then. I've had good experiences and bad experiences. I just remember back when we were all working together, there was a lot of pride, number one, in what we did. And, number two, we damn well wanted to be sure what we said was right—to check the facts.

AF: Right.

DF: I find that a little loose sometimes now.

AF: The unbridled editorializing that I see in print never ceases to shock me. I was taught journalism by Charles Lance at Central High School, who was a great teacher, and then various other editors. I learned early on what editorializing in print was, and how not to do it to the best of my capabilities.

DF: Yes.

AF: I was told that nobody cared about my opinion; they wanted the facts. When I see such, as I say, unbridled editorializing and drum-beating in the papers, I just can't help anymore but raise an eyebrow.

DF: Yes, me, too. I kind of recoil at it. It just seems so wrong to me.

AF: Yes.

DF: I'm a huge fan of Bill Moyers, and always have been.

AF: Yes.

DF: I've just started his most recent book about journalism in America. I'm anxious to be able to settle in with that and read it.

AF: He's a great journalist.

DF: Oh, he truly is. He's my hero and has been for a long time.

AF: To drift off that just for a moment, but to fill in—I also did a pretty significant stint when I made the transition over as police reporter, working the police beat with a crusty old reporter called Bob Sallee, who broke me in over there. I was a long-haired hippie, tie-wearing fellow who the police looked quite askance at when I came in [laughter], but they tolerated me. I stood out in the police department over there sometimes.

DF: I got to do that three or four times, and it was never my favorite assignment. [Laughs] I always felt a little uncomfortable when I had to go over there. Bob Sallee—that's interesting that you brought him up. I hadn't thought about Bob in a long time. Share some thoughts about Bob, and what he might have brought to your teaching.

AF: Well, he had an amazing rapport with the police and detectives down there. In some ways, I think he carried himself something like a police detective, or at least like some of them. They spoke the same language and knew each other and would look out for each other. They and I did not establish that same rapport [laughter].

DF: I was trying to remember some of the other people who were there when we were there. Of course, Bill Husted was one who came to mind. When I was speaking with Jerry McConnell about this, I was asking about various people, and one of

them was Roger Armbrust. He said Roger was one of the people they can't seem to locate.

AF: Oh, really?

DF: Yes. Do you know anything about . . . ?

AF: No, I lost track of Roger, but I really enjoyed—I think he filled in some in the sports department when I was there. Maybe not.

DF: He was covering city hall when I was there.

AF: Right.

DF: There was Lynda Zimmer [Straw].

AF: Oh, yes.

DF: Brenda Tirey.

AF: Yes.

DF: Who else? Oh, Richard Quiggle.

AF: Oh, yes, Richard Quiggle.

DF: I was trying to think of different people that I worked with at that time.

AF: Let's see. Martin Kirby—did you cross paths with him?

DF: No.

AF: He was a younger—well, not younger, but he was a contemporary with James Scudder. From my young eyes, they were the titans of the newsroom—Scudder and Kirby. Quiggle—he was covering—there was a lot going on in education at that time. He would write these huge stories that—back then, cut and paste was literally *cut* and *paste*. [Laughter] We all had huge jars of rubber cement and scissors on our desks.

DF: I remember that.

AF: And stacks of carbon paper. Just to touch on that, the whole ambiance of the sports department and the newsroom was amazing to me. I was a young kid coming in. The building had been an old YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] at one time, and had concrete floors. It had drains in the floor where they could literally be hosed down, if necessary. The smell in the building and the rubber cement, and the way the old building would literally shudder in the late morning when they fired up the [printing] presses downstairs—you could feel it all through the building. It was just an amazing experience that I'll never forget.

DF: Always a lot of coffee and cigarettes being consumed. I remember that.

AF: Oh, yes. And smoking in the newsroom was just . . .

DF: I mean, if you didn't smoke, you were *doomed!* [Laughs]

AF: Right. Bob Lancaster and I would even sit and smoke cigars. I remember turning green as a tobacco leaf one time. I got to inhaling too much tobacco smoke. Early on, there were a great number of old characters who worked in there. Fred Petrucelli was city editor under Gene Herrington, and he would sit over there and smoke big, huge cigars.

DF: I guess that was before I got there.

AF: Probably so. Yes. And George Douthit was an old-timer who covered the capitol, and was very cantankerous. The management of the paper was always trying to conserve newsprint and cut back on the size of the paper, and the editorial [department] was always wanting to expand it. Douthit would rant and rave. They were talking about paper costs going up—that they had to save on

paper. So, one day, he said, “Well, damn it, why don’t we just not print a paper? Think how much paper we’d save then!”

DF: [Laughs] He made his point, didn’t he? Oh, Mabel was another character that I recall.

AF: Mabel. Wasn’t it Mabel Berry?

DF: Right. Mabel Berry.

AF: I dictated many a story over the telephone to Mabel. I would go out and cover various board meetings and things. When the *Democrat* was still an afternoon paper at that time, that was what little edge we could ever muster over the *Gazette*—covering some morning activities of political things. But they would have to be called in and dictated pretty much on the spot. You wouldn’t have time to sit down and actually write a story at a typewriter.

DF: Right.

AF: Mabel was very good. Sometimes when you’re doing that, you’re standing in a phone booth, and sometimes you’ll talk yourself into a sentence you can’t get out of. [Laughter] And you’d have to tell Mabel just to strike that last one and start over. And if you did that too many times in the course of a story, she would start letting you know that she didn’t appreciate it.

DF: Yes, she didn’t have all day to spend with it.

AF: Right. Right. [Laughter]

DF: That’s great. I guess the last time I saw her was probably twenty or twenty-five years ago. I don’t know whatever happened to her.

AF: I don’t either.

DF: No account of what happened to her at all. I hadn't heard from Jerry, I guess, since I left there, until I got the phone call from him a few weeks ago. It turns out that his sister-in-law is on my board of directors.

AF: Oh, really?

DF: Yes. And I didn't even know that. I called him one day after he had initially contacted me, and I had to get back with him about something. I called him at home. His wife answered the phone and said, "He's got some folks with him right now." Well, it turned out that it was my board member and another school board member from the area, and they were having coffee with Jerry at that time.

AF: Again, a small world.

DF: Yes, I thought it was pretty strange that I called Jerry and the two people I work with all the time were sitting there with him. How long were you at the *Democrat* altogether?

AF: About five years.

DF: Five years.

AF: And I left to go to the *Gazette*.

DF: I had forgotten that. How long were you at the *Gazette*?

AF: I was there a little over a couple of years before I wound up going to work as the first paid employee of the *Arkansas Times*.

DF: Yes.

AF: Tucker Steinmetz and a couple of other people had left the *Democrat* to go over to the *Gazette*. It was something in the back of my mind that I wanted to do, so I pursued it to some degree. I landed a job over there. I went over there and

covered city hall and general-assignment reporting under Bill Shelton, who recently died.

DF: Right.

AF: It was a very different corporate culture from the *Democrat* to the *Gazette*.

DF: I'm sure it was.

AF: At the *Democrat*, there was a lot of fighting and rambling on the copy desk, and there were various crises. It was not unusual for it to appear that for some reason the paper might not get out that day. There would be great wailing and gnashing of teeth and cursing. Over at the *Gazette*, it was quite different. Voices were hardly ever raised over there. There seemed to be no doubt each day that the paper would somehow get out.

DF: There *would* be a newspaper. [Laughter] Yes. That's a good attitude to take when you're in the business of putting out a daily paper. [Laughs]

AF: Touching on the culture and things, too—a part that I remember was working very closely with the upstairs print shop, which, back in those days, was Linotype machines. You went up this spiral staircase to get upstairs. It was sort of like a scene from *Dante's Inferno* up there. There was smoke billowing from machines, and acrid smells, and people yelling and throwing things around. That was an amazing transition, too, because, there again, those guys regarded me as a crazy, young, hippie kid, and they were crusty old printers. They would not go out of their way to make life easy for you in any respect. At the *Democrat*, we used to have to send up our wire copy and local stories in the morning, and we had to do that before we got the dummies for the pages for the day. So we didn't know how

much space we had when we were sending our copy up in the morning. The great terror was to come up copy short, so there was always the temptation to cover yourself and send up more than you needed, but that was called “overset” by the printers, and they would give you a huge amount of grief if you had excessive overset. You were always walking this fine line between making sure you had enough copy to fill the hole that you hadn’t seen yet and not having too much.

DF: [Laughs] Those were amazing days. I remember those old typewriters that we had. And to think—that was state of the art!

AF: I have still got my old Underwood [typewriter] that I bought from the *Democrat* when I left.

DF: Do you?

AF: I bought it from the business manager who is called Chester Garrett. I told him that I loved my typewriter, and I would really love to take it, and could I buy it. He pulled out a piece of paper and a pencil and set to “ciphering” for several minutes, and somehow came up with a price of \$7.50.

DF: [Laughs] That’s great! You got a good deal. You still have it, huh?

AF: I have it. I keep threatening to have it reconditioned. I used it—took it with me to the *Gazette* and used it [there], and when I evolved into the ad business, I took it with me to two or three advertising agencies. The “e,” being the most commonly used letter in the English language, eventually flew off.

DF: [Laughs] It makes life a little difficult to try to write anything effective without the “e” key.

AF: Right. Yes, there were a great number of vintage, old typewriters. And there was

a great satisfaction [in] pounding on those things. I think it was actually a form of physical exercise.

DF: [Laughs] Yes, I agree.

AF: I never learned to appreciate electric typewriters. Then, of course, the computer keyboard was [yet another] evolution.

DF: Yes, it's amazing how we've evolved in . . .

AF: As I say, the scene of the old Linotype machines—they made a terrible clattering themselves—and all the chaos and commotion. And when the evolution started progressing toward [what] we called cold type at the time—just the sound of it was an amazing part of the transition because it was the sound of computer keyboards—the earliest computer keyboards.

DF: Right.

AF: The old *Democrat* newsroom used to have a big bank of Teletype machines, where the stories from the AP [Associated Press] and UPI [United Press International] and those things would come in. Those things made so much noise that they had this pseudo-soundproof case built that had lift-up doors, kind of like a deep-freeze, and had all these machines in there with some sound baffling, and where you'd open those doors, great waves of heat would come drifting out from the machines. Talking about the smells and the sounds like that—we also had these AP photo machines that would literally burn an image onto the paper. It had a scribing needle, and you could sometimes watch smoke curling from the paper as the image was being burned onto it. It was quite different.

DF: [Laughs] Very different. Yes.

AF: Another big part of the culture was the photographers. Owen Gunter was the head photographer, and there was Glen Moon, and there were some younger guys—Mac McCants and some others.

DF: Robert Ike Thomas.

AF: Robert Ike Thomas. Yes. He had a penchant for buying—back then, the latest and greatest was handheld calculators. Every time a newer and better one would hit the market, he would rush out and buy it. Six months later, it would be available for half of what he had paid for it, but he had a great collection of them, and they were amazing at the time.

DF: Yes.

AF: But the old darkroom was amazing. It generated smells [from the] chemicals. Photographers were always coming in with their film and rushing back there to bang out prints.

DF: There was a young photographer who came during the time I was there, and I cannot think of his name. He graduated from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and came to work at the *Democrat*. He drove a Porsche. I remember that because there weren't many of us who could have even thought about a Porsche [laughs], and he had one.

AF: Right. I'm not placing him.

DF: Short, dark-haired, feisty—he was into everything that he was big enough to get into.

AF: Oh, yes.

DF: I just cannot bring his name back. I've tried and tried. There was a couple who

worked the copy desk, and I think Larry . . .

AF: Larry Gordon.

DF: . . . and Carol . . .

AF: Carol Gordon.

DF: There you go. I couldn't think of their last name.

AF: She later went to work in Chicago and I think he drifted out of the business.

DF: I think the last account I had of him [was that] his health was not really good, but I don't remember specifically what it was. I see Rod occasionally. I haven't seen him in several years, but I used to see him fairly frequently. I knew he was still around. I saw his picture in some publication recently—maybe the *Arkansas Times* or the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. I don't remember.

AF: I remember seeing something.

DF: His daughter had a piece of art at the Delta Show.

AF: Yes.

DF: Of course, when I knew him back in those days, he wasn't even married yet. I just heard that he's got a grown child now, so . . . [Laughs]

AF: He had a hot-rod Ford Shelby Torino with a four hundred-something cubic-foot engine that was just about the hottest thing around, back when muscle cars were everything. This is probably not pertinent to anything, but a funny Rodney story—he was always coming in late for one reason or another, and his mother would frequently call in to make excuses for him. She called in one morning—sometimes in the winter it was because of the weather and various other things. She called in and said that Rodney had had to scrape the ice off his windshield

and was running late, and he would be right in, and the temperature was about forty-five degrees! [Laughter] And it hadn't been cold before that.

DF: I'd like to have seen the reaction at the desk when that news came in. [Laughs] That's funny.

AF: Ryan Seymour worked in the sports department when I was there. He was quite a character himself. He was a "Reddie" [a graduate of Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas] and a fan of the Arkasas Intercollegiate Conference. He would go through reams of paper and huge trash cans everywhere, and he was a heavy smoker. It was a recurring problem for him to set the trash can on fire. This would happen maybe twice a week. Sometimes the flames would get larger than others if he didn't discover the fire until it got going. [Laughs]

DF: I remember Bill Terry doing that one day in the newsroom.

AF: Yes.

DF: There were flames that shot up not too terribly far from where I was sitting at the time. [Laughs] It got my attention.

AF: Bill Terry was also famous for throwing one of those big heavy typewriters [a] pretty good ways.

DF: I heard stories—I never got to witness that, actually, but I did hear about it. That news about him preceded him. You had said—who was managing editor when you went to the *Democrat*?

AF: Gene Herrington.

DF: Gene. Okay. And did Jerry come, then, after him?

AF: No, Gene Foreman came in.

DF: Okay.

AF: He's the one who made huge changes.

DF: He changed everything. Yes.

AF: Then he fell out of favor with management. I never knew exactly what happened, but he left. That's when Jerry came over from the *Gazette*, which sort of amazed everyone at the time that they would hire someone from the *Gazette* to do that. He was eventually embraced. [Laughs]

DF: When I decided that's what I wanted to do, I went to both newspapers and interviewed at both newspapers. The determining factor for me was that instead of being offered—let's see, what was it? I was offered \$85 a week at the *Gazette*, and I was offered, I think, \$90 a week at the *Democrat*. So that \$5 a week did the trick for me. [Laughs]

AF: Yes, breaking that hundred-dollar barrier was significant because I think I was making a dollar and a quarter an hour when I started at the *Democrat* as a kid. There was a cadre of high school kids, five or six of us—Rodney Lorenzen being one—John [Bloom?], AKA [also known as] Joe Bob Briggs from Parkview was another. John Brummett was one.

DF: Yes. He was doing sports when I was there.

AF: Right. We would come in very early in the morning each day of the week and work for a couple of hours before we went to school. Then we'd leave and go to school. Friday nights were usually big high school sports nights, so we covered that. Saturday we'd come in in the morning to get the afternoon paper out and then there was a Sunday a.m.—the only day of the week that the *Democrat* came

out in the morning. So you'd get off in the afternoon at about noon and then plan to come back at 5:00 or so to start getting the Sunday paper out. Saturday nights at the *Democrat* were big social events.

DF: Yes. When I came to work—of course, I think all the newbies got to work on Saturday night for sure, and I did for several months, I remember, but some of my fondest memories come from Saturday nights in the newsroom.

AF: Yes.

DF: I mentioned Deborah Mathis singing. That used to just blow me away—sitting there and all of a sudden just burst into song.

AF: And sometimes at about 10:00 or 10:30, somebody organized an expedition to Minute Man. Alan Leverett and I were discussing that. He was kind of an intern/gofer in the newsroom, and it was sometimes his job to run up to Minute Man and get burgers for everyone.

DF: Feed everyone. Yes.

AF: But he had parlayed that into getting free French fries from the operator at the hamburger place. To bring the order there he would get free French fries.

DF: [Laughs] He was no dummy!

AF: So, Alan was an entrepreneur from early on.

DF: Even then! [Laughs] That's great. I asked about McCord earlier. I don't know how long he had been the editor of the newspaper. He was there when I was hired in 1972, and he was there when I left a couple of years later.

AF: He was writing editorials back when I was there. I'm not sure what title he held.

DF: He was the executive editor.

AF: Was he the executive editor?

DF: Yes. Well, at least that's what I remember when I was there. I always appreciated the fact that he would sit down and talk to you. I was, of course, a little standoffish at first because he was "power," you know, so I was a little reluctant. But once he engaged me a time or two, I realized he was a pretty nice human being and that I could just come visit with him.

AF: Yes.

DF: I had a couple of occasions after I left there that I needed some counsel from someone, and he was the first person I thought of. I called him and he said to come on down. I would sit down and visit with him.

AF: Yes. He always had a great dedication to the profession of journalism in whatever capacity he could serve.

DF: I remember that he and Jerry both had some stories that we had to chase down every little minute detail, and it was one of those things that just kind of happened. We just kind of happened on it on a Friday morning, and I was still there at midnight that night working on it. Jerry and McCord both stayed right there until it was all over. I thought that was pretty cool that they were willing to sit down until the wee hours of the morning to make sure the story got out and got out right.

AF: Yes.

DF: I wonder if that kind of nurturing goes on in newsrooms today.

AF: That would be interesting to know. I really have no idea.

DF: I thought that truly was an act of nurturance. I thought that they—of course, I'm

sure they were looking at it—a completely different thing—making sure we don't get sued or whatever for the story. [Laughs] Well, you were there, then, when Walter Hussman [Jr.] bought the newspaper, weren't you? Or had you already left at that point?

AF: I think I had already gravitated to the *Gazette* when that transition took place.

DF: So you left there before the organizing attempt?

AF: No, I take that back. Yes. I have been through two organizing attempts—one at the *Democrat* and one at the *Gazette*.

DF: They were going on simultaneously, as I recall. They were signed up with one union and we were signed up with another.

AF: If memory serves me, I participated in both elections.

DF: Oh, really?

AF: It may have been right at the time when I was . . .

DF: Yes, in the transition from place to place.

AF: . . . in the transition.

DF: I left about two weeks after that election took place. I had been one of the people who was supposed to be the spokesman for the group, and after I spent a day with Hussman and company sitting at the federal building with the National Labor Relations Board guy, I thought, once that election was lost, “You know, I bet I'm not going to be working here long.” [Laughs] So I left pretty quickly after that.

AF: They herded us all to—it may have been the Lafayette Hotel. I remember the management called a huge staff meeting and herded everyone over to the hotel. Marcus George made a little talk about how they absolutely would not tolerate a

union. I guess he had read somewhere that you should start any discussion with a little humor or something to lighten the mood, so he told a little joke. He asked if anybody in the room knew how to make a dead baby float. There was kind of a silence. He said that it took two scoops of ice cream and a dead baby. There were several jaws that just dropped. [Laughter]

DF: Yes! [Laughs] So that was the precursor for the big announcement?

AF: Yes, yes.

DF: Well, he should've had everyone's attention after *that*!

AF: That was the mood-lightener. Yes. [Laughter]

DF: What I remember was the day that they brought Hussman into the newsroom the first time and called us all together to meet him. He looked younger than most of us did at the time. There were an awful lot of comments being made about it. I remember that. It was a strange time. I remember that. I remember some of the—oh, one time everyone was going to get a raise, and they posted something on the bulletin board that anyone not involved in the organizing attempt would get a raise. That's what ended them up in the National Labor Relations [unintelligible].

AF: Yes, I can understand that.

DF: That was an interesting time, for sure. What do you remember that you want to share for the record here?

AF: Well, I thought about it a little bit on the way over here. Actually, to me, the most significant memories I have are the personal things I've already shared about the atmosphere and the mood and the people. I have a lot of fond memories, but I

was pretty young and pretty naive, and was not really a part of the political wheeling and dealing that was going on. So, I really can't shed a great deal of light on that. The memories I have are largely personal.

DF: Well, my strongest memories are of the people who were there. I felt I learned a great deal from various folks there.

AF: I think back fondly on the people in the newspaper business. I've worked many years in the newspaper business and quite a few years in the advertising business. I think you work with better people in the newspaper business. Not to disparage my colleagues in the [advertising] business, but there were just so many rich, wonderful characters.

DF: That's it. They were characters. Strong characters, too.

AF: Yes.

DF: Bobbie—is it Forster?

AF: Bobbie Forster. Yes.

DF: I just now thought of her for the first time.

AF: Those big, thick glasses.

DF: She's the one who discovered the tip that caused me to be at the *Democrat* that night until midnight. She found something in the *Daily Record*, and they turned me loose on it. It was about the Arkansas School Book Depository. It was right after the textbook law had been passed in Arkansas. A couple of the principals were the assistant superintendent for instruction and the secondary education director for the Little Rock School District. Of course, the law said very clearly that nobody involved in the selection of textbooks—and so on and so on.

AF: Yes.

DF: It was a *long* day. We nailed them on it—I remember that! [Laughs] And it was all because of Bobbie.

AF: She was quite a newshound, as I recall. She had a rather rich history that was only alluded to at the time, but I think she had covered a lot of territory in her day.

DF: Yes, it seems like it. I wondered whatever happened to her because I hadn't thought about her in years. She was an eccentric kind of character.

AF: Yes. Her work was her life, I think.

DF: Yes, it was. For sure. Well, whether we wanted it to be, it was for a lot of us during that period of time. It seems like we spent most of our time at work.

AF: Absolutely. I always felt privileged to be a part of it.

DF: Me, too.

AF: I remember a fellow who was running the sports desk when I started there, Larry Ray, who later went to work in Memphis. He said that he was just glad he was able to be paid for something he enjoyed that much. It think a lot of people in the business felt that way. It wasn't like having a real job, in some respects. Somehow, you were getting away with something by being a newspaper reporter.

DF: And it was something different every day.

AF: Right.

DF: It was not that routine, day-to-day thing that most people fall into. You never knew when you walked in what you'd be doing two hours later.

AF: Right. And something that I've missed, compared to other businesses I've been in—although you, from time to time, would have long-term feature assignments

or investigative assignments, by and large, you could never get more than one day behind.

DF: That's true. [Laughter] That's very true—or you'd *never* catch up.

AF: That's right. And there was just such immediate gratification. I remember the first bylines I ever saw with my own name—of course, any high school kid is taken with that, but sometimes on a Saturday night you'd come in and type a story, and forty minutes later be holding an inky, wet newspaper in your hand with your byline and the words you had just written in it forty minutes earlier. It just seemed miraculous, and still does to some degree.

DF: Yes. When I left and went to work for the county schools, the first year I worked there I was miserable every day. I missed it so badly. I never dreamed that I would miss anything as much as I missed working at the *Democrat* that first year after I left. The camaraderie of the people and that not knowing from one day to the next what you'd be doing.

AF: Right.

DF: It was magical. And, boy, when I was deprived of it, I felt deprived.

AF: I guess that's why I always enjoyed general-assignment reporting more than beat reporting. I never really flourished on beat reporting. I covered city hall for a while at the *Gazette*. I did the police beat for a while. But I always relished sort of the human-interest features and, as you say, doing something different every day. One day you'd be covering a flood or a fire, and the next day an important trial, and maybe then a political election. Literally, you never knew from [one] hour to the next, sometimes, what you'd be working on.

DF: And, you know, I think at the time when I was doing it, I didn't realize how momentous that was for me. It was when I had to leave it that I really realized it.

AF: And there's an odd combination of mutual support and respect, and looking out for each other, and internal competition.

DF: Yes.

AF: Because everybody was reading each other's stuff and trying to outshine the other all the time.

DF: Yes.

AF: That was just part of the business, but, at the same time, within it there was a great camaraderie and affection for one another.

DF: Yes, that's true. Very true. In fact, the night I proposed to Harriet was the night of Ralph's annual St. Patrick's Day party over at his house. Harriet said a couple of days later, "Do you want to reconsider this? You'd had an awful lot to drink!" [Laughter] It was a great group of folks. I have nothing but wonderful memories from that period of my life. It was a great period of personal growth for me to have gotten to be there.

AF: Right. Well, it was for me, too. I was raised by a single mother who worked on sewing machines in factories, and came from a very lower-middle class . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

AF: . . . comparatively fascinating circles that I was—you know, journalists are not cultural icons by any means, but compared to the people I was used to associating with, there were some very intelligent, smart, refined people that I was rubbing

elbows with in the newsroom

DF: No shortage of opinions, either. [Laughs]

AF: Yes, yes.

DF: You could always find an opinion.

AF: Martin Kirby was one of the first people I ever knew who was genuinely fond of opera, and would share interest with you in that—and basset hounds. He would expound in the same sentence on the virtues of opera and basset hounds, and make it make sense somehow. [Laughter]

DF: Both of those things came up in my life later, too. I had a basset hound and learned to love opera as an older person than I was then.

AF: And Scudder was amazing to me. He had a ministerial background in some function, as did Tucker Steinmetz. So there's a little of the proselytizer, I guess, that sometimes backslides into journalism.

DF: Scudder was a great teacher for me, too. I was a little intimidated by him at first, until I realized a lot of that was just kind of an exterior that he put on for effect.

AF: He was one of the first unashamed intellectuals that I ever met.

DF: Yes, I agree with that completely. He could talk about almost anything, and would at the slightest provocation.

AF: Right.

DF: I used to love lunches with him and Ralph and whoever else went, just to be able to sit around the table and listen to them talk about whatever the topic *du jour* was.

AF: Right. Sometimes from where I was sitting outside, I would be able to listen in on

the morning budget and planning meetings with Gene Foreman and Ralph and whoever else was in there. I really admired those guys. The conversation was always fun and sparkling. It was about work, but it was about a lot of other things, too. It was always interesting. I guess one of the things I remember most fondly was the conversation and the variety of interests that you would run into in the people there.

DF: Because there was a huge array of that. I just thought of Dorothy Palmer.

AF: Yes.

DF: I haven't seen her in years. Do you know if she's still around?

AF: She is still around. We have a couple of mutual acquaintances. I haven't talked to her in some time, but her name does come up from time to time.

DF: Okay.

AF: I haven't seen her in ages.

DF: Now, she married, I know, years ago, and her name changed.

AF: I didn't even know that.

DF: I think it was Cox.

AF: Yes.

DF: She went to the *Gazette*, too, didn't she?

AF: I think probably so—maybe around the same time I did.

DF: I think she did. Yes. I never met her husband, but I remember she married, and it seems like it was Cox. I'm not sure if that's right. She was intense.

AF: Oh, yes.

DF: She was very intense, and I loved talking with her about music because she had a

view of it that I certainly never had had. Her brother was . . .

AF: He's famous and late.

DF: Yes. She was friends with Mel White. Mel came to the *Democrat*, I think, before I left. I had been in school with him, but I haven't seen him in years either. I don't know if he's still around.

AF: I didn't cross paths with him except to read his stuff, and now I notice he's writing some for, as they call it, *AY*, rather than *Active Years*. I saw a column of his in there.

DF: Okay. I guess I need to start reading *Active Years*. [Laughter] I'm getting closer all the time. I need to get familiar with it.

AF: Well, I have some clients who advertise in it, which is the reason I pick it up.

DF: Where are you working now? [I] didn't ask you that.

AF: I work on a couple of fronts. A partner and I operate a little advertising business out of our homes. We handle a bank in Arkadelphia and some local retailers—Mary Healey's Jewelry and some things like that. And I do some corporate video work and other things like that on my own.

DF: Very good. So you're doing video?

AF: Mostly writing and producing. I'm not a cameraman. By evolving into the ad business, I've learned to do a lot of things that I never would have learned otherwise, but I've never been a very good buttons-and-switches guy. I'm still the word guy.

DF: Yes, I can appreciate that. I have someone around that I can holler at—"Help, please!" It's gotten a lot more technological than I am capable of sometimes. If

somebody will show me the way, I can do it.

AF: Yes.

DF: It's not the most intuitive thing for me.

AF: No. I guess that leap to computerization was one of the great changes. It actually didn't occur until just [as] I was leaving. I was still working on a typewriter when I left the *Gazette*, but the changes came to advertising and to journalism at probably about the same time. In many respects, I guess it was one of the most significant physical developments that I have witnessed in my life, as far as the way words and communication are handled.

DF: It certainly changed the way a newsroom sounds.

AF: Yes.

DF: At the *Democrat*, I can remember—you'd walk in at 11:00 after being somewhere, and [there was] just this din of typewriters and people screaming at each other.

AF: Yes.

DF: And all the noise.

AF: As I say, there was almost this certain physical exercise to pounding on that old Underwood. It took effort to do it.

DF: Oh, it did! [Laughs]

AF: And to sling that big carriage back and forth. There was a satisfaction and a rhythm that you could achieve on that keyboard that you'll never get on a computer keyboard.

DF: What I loved was when you were hanging very close to deadline, and Scudder

would be standing over you like, “Hurry up! Hurry up!” And to see how very fast you could type to get it finished.

AF: And literally rip pages out as you were writing. The editor would come tear them out of the typewriter.

DF: Yes. That was a little disconcerting the first time it happened.

AF: As I said before, carbon paper—back then there were reams and reams of carbon paper used up in the newsroom because I think we made two carbon copies of everything we typed.

DF: Yes. God, it seems so totally alien today.

AF: Yes. And all the pencil mark-ups we did for corrections. And, as I said, the cutting and pasting with rubber cement.

DF: Yes, I remember that. I got good at that working at the copy desk.

AF: Yes.

DF: The smell of newsprint. Just the smell of newsprint permeated everything.

AF: Yes. It was mixed with chemicals from the darkroom and rubber cement and ink and the fumes from upstairs on the Linotype machines. It was very identifiable.

DF: Yes.

AF: I later worked some in various restaurants and things, and that restaurant smell will go home with you in your clothes, but so would the smell of the *Democrat*.

DF: Probably so. Yes. Certainly the smoke would! [Laughter] It permeated everything. I don't know that there were any people down there—probably not but a handful of people who didn't smoke.

AF: No, it was almost obligatory that one smoke.

DF: You had to to survive! [Laughs]

AF: Right. And, thinking back, I can't imagine how someone who was offended or allergic to cigarette smoke could have survived in that environment.

DF: Truly. And, you know, I think, too, about the number of cups of coffee I would drink in any given day. Now it would probably add up to more than I would drink in any given *week*. [Laughs]

AF: Yes.

DF: But that's what you did. You drank coffee and you smoked cigarettes all day long.

AF: Right. And ate those awful snacks out of those vending machines.

DF: And sometimes thankful to have it because that was all there would be.

AF: Yes.

DF: Yes. I used to love lunch when we would take off somewhere and go as a group to lunch.

AF: Yes.

DF: On Fridays we would do that because we usually got paid on Fridays. It was something to look forward to.

AF: Yes, and sometimes make a stop by the bank, which brings me to the payday thing. When I started at the *Democrat*, we got paid on Fridays in cash in a little brown envelope with your deductions and tax hand-figured in pencil on the front of it. There would be cash and some change, usually, in there, so it would add up to the penny. Each Friday this armored car would roll up out front, and they would bring the big bags of cash in to be distributed into the envelopes. But it

was not too long after that that they went to a check payment system.

DF: Well, when I was there it was a check. I would certainly have remembered that.

[Laughs] That's great that you have that recollection. And that hasn't been that terribly long ago.

AF: No. That was back when August K. Engel was publisher of the paper, and, by some reports, ran it pretty much out of his hip pocket.

DF: [Laughs] Literally! Who else who was there have we not talked about?

AF: Let's see, we've covered quite a few names.

DF: I'm trying to close my eyes and see the newsroom, and that's hard to do after all these years. I guess Bill Husted probably had more of an impact on me than any other single person down there. He turned into a good friend, too.

AF: Bill was one of the best friends I ever had in my life. I went out to visit him in Medford, Oregon.

DF: Did you?

AF: I also visited him and took my son and a friend of his down to the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996. He was still with Amanda at that time. We stayed a couple of nights in their home and a couple of nights in other places.

DF: Are they not together anymore?

AF: No, they're not.

DF: Okay. I didn't know that.

AF: Bill has remarried and has a couple of stepchildren, I think.

DF: Oh, really? That's a surprise. I didn't know that.

AF: His photography business on the side enables him to, with the permission of his

wife, have scantily clad women in the basement [laughter], which he enjoys.

DF: [Laughs] I love that! Well, it sounds like he hasn't changed terribly much. Oh, I'd love to see him. It's been a long, long time.

AF: I'd love to see him. He had a great sense of humor.

DF: Oh, he did.

AF: I now live in—I walk my dogs practically every day past the little house on Kenyon that he used to live in up there. We had lots of fun times in that little house. I seldom pass by without thinking about him.

DF: Yes, I was there a couple of times, I think. I remember visiting you in a little house you lived in on Rose.

AF: Yes, and I still frequently go down that street, and you lived . . .

DF: On Lee, at the corner. A little later on I did.

AF: Right. There, again, I guess at this stage of life you drive around town and see things and they hold memories for you.

DF: Yes.

AF: But the house on Rose and the—I had some fun times in the place you had there. You were interesting to me in that you had a real, genuine interest in education, which I found taxing to cover. I didn't have a natural inclination, and I have respected your achievement in it and your association with it, but it also sort of fascinated me that you had a real, genuine, heartfelt interest in it.

DF: Yes, I still do, all these years later. Sometimes I wonder why. [Laughs] I wasn't particularly wild about being the education writer—doing the education beat—but it just kind of fell to me to do it. After Deborah left, Scudder just kept sending

me to—so I ended up being pretty much the education writer. But they still kept me doing some general-assignment stuff, which I always appreciated. It was nice to be able to do something else.

AF: Right.

DF: But you'd sit through just so many school board meetings in a week before you [laughs] began to wear a little thin.

AF: Those late-night bull sessions with reporters gathering together were—again, the conversation and just the association were great.

DF: I remember one night, and you may have been with us. I know Bill was there, and there were several of us. We were at the International House of Pancakes. It was late on a Saturday night, and Max Brantley was in a yellow Impala convertible.

AF: It was a Buick Regal, I believe. White on white.

DF: Oh, okay. With a—he had a gorilla.

AF: Yes. I was with him in the Buick, and that was kind of a notorious night because to the best of my recollection, we got pulled over three times that night by the police, and were let go each time. [Laughter] That was back in the days when we'd sometimes get pulled over. The cops would canvas everyone to see how much they'd had to drink and make the person who'd had the least amount to drink drive.

DF: [Laughs] Times are a little different now.

AF: Yes.

DF: Substantially different now. Oh, that's great. [Laughs] I just had a thought that

was trying to come out. I've lost it. When you left the *Democrat*, you went to the *Gazette*.

AF: Right.

DF: How long were you there before you left journalism altogether?

AF: I was at the *Gazette* actually only a little over a couple of years, I think.

DF: Okay. And you went into advertising after that?

AF: Well, actually, when I left I took a part-time advertising job working with Charles Rixse, who had worked at the *Gazette* at the Advertising and Promotion Commission doing a little bit there. But my main gig was working for Alan Leverett. We were starting out the *Arkansas Times*, which was kind of a pulp rag at the time.

DF: I remember. It was the *Union Station Times*.

AF: Alan was actually driving a cab to make money to pay me, and he'd pay me in sweaty one-dollar bills. Eventually, I thought, "Man, I just can't keep doing this." So I just moved on to other things, but I've always maintained a friendship with Alan and a great respect for what he has done.

DF: Me, too. I had a piece in the first issue of the *Union Station Times*.

AF: Did you?

DF: Yes. And I had one in a subsequent [issue]. I remember doing two pieces the first year. One of them was about the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

AF: I think I remember that.

DF: I had spent three days with H. L. Mitchell that last spring that I worked at the *Democrat*, which was one of the tremendous joys of my life. Not just him—it

was a reunion of all the Southern Tenant Farmers here in Little Rock. So, it was him and a host of people his age who had been through all that together. To sit around and listen to him swap stories was just an amazing thing.

AF: Yes.

DF: And he just told one after another. He was a genius storyteller. I could have written a book after being with him for three days, there was so much material. That's one of those experiences that, had I not been a reporter at that time where I was, I would have never had that experience.

AF: Right. That quality of getting glimpses into other people's lives and situations that you otherwise would never be privileged to share was one of the benefits of being a reporter.

DF: Right.

AF: There's a little bit of voyeuristic interest to it, in a healthy sense of the word. I don't know if it's because of that, as a result of it, or if it contributed to it, but I've always felt a little bit on the outside. As a reporter, I felt that was healthy, that a reporter should be a bit on the outside, and yet having the best of both worlds. To be on the outside, yet be admitted to many places and events that otherwise you would have been excluded.

DF: That's right.

AF: I have always felt better or functioned better if I had a reason to be someplace, rather than just being there socially, because I feel awkward socially, perhaps. But I can walk into any kind of situation as a reporter.

DF: Right.

AF: And I can function and feel pretty much at ease.

DF: Yes, you had a role.

AF: Right. And I was amazed—over the years, I asked hundreds of people—“I’m a reporter with the *Democrat*. Can I talk to you for a minute?” And, to my recollection, not one person ever said no. People would sit down and share things with you and tell you things. Over the years, I think it—it’s very seldom anymore that someone will ask you your impression, your opinion, and then shut up and listen.

DF: Absolutely.

AF: That’s what a reporter does. I think most people relish that experience.

DF: Yes. I ran across some notebooks not terribly long ago in a box that I was going through. I just started picking them up and thumbing through them. It was an amazing thing to do. I need to go someday and sit down and read through all of them.

AF: I was sort of amazed myself at an improvised shorthand I was able to scribble in. I think I was fairly successful at getting most quotes pretty accurate, but it was from key words and phrases.

DF: Boy, it’s a good thing I don’t have to do that today. [Laughter] My short-term memory is not good anymore. [Laughs]

AF: I never had to worry about anyone getting my notebooks, because I could barely read them, and I knew no one else could possibly read them.

DF: Well, they could probably read a few words in mine, but I had a shorthand, too. I guess we had to do that to be able to get it all down. When I was at the *Democrat*,

I don't remember ever tape-recording anything I did.

AF: Some people started using them. Maurice Moore was a huge fellow who came in. He was the first person I remember using tape-recorders in the *Democrat* newsroom. As a consequence, he would write these huge, voluminous stories.

DF: Because he had every word! [Laughs]

AF: Right. And I was intrigued by it and started trying to do it, but I quickly discovered that it took me about twice as long.

DF: Because you have to go back and listen and stop it.

AF: Right. So if I could pretty much get the gist of the quote and feel confident that I had it on the fly, I would prefer to do that. Of course, longer, in-depth type interviews—the type of things we're doing—they're absolutely necessary. But I never found them really necessary.

DF: I don't think I ever used one at all. You trained yourself to do what you had to do. If you had to listen to every word and get it down, then that's what you did.

AF: Right. Like I said, I started trying to do that, and it just took me forever, so I quit.

DF: This is a little awkward, just because I'm not used to using a tape recorder.

AF: Yes. You're a bit conscious of it.

DF: Yes, I'm very conscious of it, and I always have been. That's why I recoiled a little bit at the whole notion of doing this.

AF: Yes. I know what you're saying. But what got us off on this tangent was that I was always very gratified by the way people would open up to me, a total stranger. Sometimes it was hard-core objective news, and sometimes it was much more personal things, but people always seemed to welcome a reporter. I was

there during the civil rights era, and I walked into some, more or less, segregationist enclaves. From my hair and appearance, they were well aware that my innate sympathies were not with them, but I was never threatened. I never felt in danger or anything like that.

DF: It was a different world back then. I don't think that we'd reached a level of cynicism as a people that we've reached in later years.

AF: Absolutely.

DF: Everyone is so cynical now. I think it's a shame.

AF: Right. Anybody who wanted to could wander into the newspaper at that time.

DF: And did! [Laughter]

AF: Yes, sometimes there were early street people who would just come wandering through the newsroom.

DF: I remember my first encounter with Jim Lendall was when he was standing on the corner in front of Walgreens barefoot in February, proselytizing about something, whatever it was at the time.

AF: Yes.

DF: However many years later, I see him over at the capitol.

AF: Yes. Sometimes in the newsroom you'd see weird things. I recall at the *Democrat* once seeing this long-haired fellow in white leather, and, I think, a few conchos and things on his pants. "Who in the heck is *that*?" It was Paul Revere of Paul Revere and the Raiders, who was in town to do something. He was there to be interviewed, I guess. Every once in a while you'd see something kind of strange like that.

DF: Do you remember Linda Nelson?

AF: Yes.

DF: I remember when Witt Stephens came to see Bob McCord one day, and he brought his son in with him. Do you remember this story?

AF: No.

DF: Linda didn't realize that it was his son. She said, "Oh, Mr. Stephens, is this your grandson?" And he was not at all taken with that. It made him very unhappy. [Laughter] She was very worried the rest of the day about that. I've always loved that story.

AF: I ran into her in the grocery store within the last year. She looked great.

DF: I saw her at a funeral a little over a year ago. That was the first time I had seen her in a long time. You know, she worked for me after I went to work for Pulaski County Schools.

AF: No, I didn't know that.

DF: A year later, she came to work for me out there. She was really unhappy at the paper. I said, "I've got a job if you want it." She came. In fact, when I left—she's still out there, as far as I know, because I was there five years and she worked for me for four of those years. But I always knew that Linda was enough of a journalist that she could write some stories and she could take some pictures.

AF: Let's see. Tim Hackler—did you . . . ?

DF: He was not there, but I knew of him because he had a reputation from Hendrix.

AF: Yes, there were quite a few Hendrix people. I think Ray White was one. He turns up here in town once in a while.

DF: Yes. His wife, Judy, worked for me here a couple of years ago.

AF: Oh, really?

DF: Judy was in my class at Hendrix, so I had known her forever. And, of course, I knew Ray from school.

AF: She's with the . . .

DF: Cathedral School.

AF: Yes.

DF: Well, they moved back here from Philadelphia and he went to work at the *Democrat-Gazette* as the chief graphic design person. He stuck with that until three or four years ago, I guess.

AF: He was editing that little weekend tabloid, and left to go somewhere—I can't remember where, but they needed somebody. They were planning on eventually phasing it out, and they needed somebody to ramrod it short term, more or less. I landed him that job. It probably lasted about a year, but that was a big responsibility for a guy my age and [with] my background. I was in way over my head. It had the weekly TV logs in it, which was just an amazing mess to work with.

DF: Yes.

AF: There was an older woman, Roberta Martin, who was my salvation.

DF: Yes.

AF: She proofread my copy and she would handle those TV logs. That sort of thing is just not what I'm good at.

DF: That wouldn't have been a fun job to do, I don't think—taking care of the TV

logs.

AF: No. Back then, they were typed manually—every show.

DF: Oh, man! You couldn't do that in the age of cable, could you?

AF: [Laughter] No. Fortunately, there were just three stations back then, and, I guess, maybe the educational channel. That was a fun job. I got to read all the wire service stuff that came through about plays on Broadway and the Tony Awards. I got to have lunch one time with Ray Milland, who was promoting a movie called *The Frogs*.

DF: Yes—which was a horrible movie, as I recall. [Laughs]

AF: Right. But I had no idea at the time—I knew vaguely who Ray Milland was, but I was not sufficiently impressed at all at the time, which, I guess, was a saving grace for a young reporter that way, as you can just bluster your way into anything. And that's one thing I think back on that assignment—is that I really wasn't prepared to appreciate some of the things that I encountered, like meeting Ray Milland. I just took it with a grain of salt—"This is another declining actor that I've got to have lunch with and write some copy about." But if it were to happen today, comparatively, to meet someone of his stature and background, I would be enormously more impressed.

DF: Yes. *Lost Weekend*.

AF: Yes.

DF: That was his Oscar [award] winner.

AF: Yes.

DF: I sometimes fantasize about being able to do that kind of work again, but I don't

know that I would survive very long anymore. I do love to write still, and I always have. So I always figure out some way to do that, at least somehow. I'm sure you're the same way.

AF: Yes. I noodle at it.

DF: Yes. It's "in ya," I think. It's got to come out, somehow. For a long time, it seems like I've been trapped into writing about one kind of thing all the time.

AF: Right. Somehow, what you said reminded me of a James Scudder thing. I mentioned that he and Martin Kirby were sort of titans of the newsroom. They got into a philosophical argument one time, I remember. Martin Kirby was saying that "This work is the most important thing that I do," defending a certain attitude that he had espoused about it. James Scudder looked indignant, and said, "If this is the most important thing you do, you need to go back in the library and look at those yellow, rotting, old files." [Laughter]

DF: "Yeah, let's get this in perspective!" [Laughter] He was good at that. "Can I pour a bucket of water on your head?" He was acerbic, though. He always had amazing comebacks to things. Sometimes stinging ones.

AF: Yes. Sarcastic and sometimes even an edge of meanness to it. Sometimes you'd feel that.

DF: Yes.

AF: But I still respected him in spite of that.

DF: Yes, me, too.

AF: And I even honored it, coming from him. [Laughs]

DF: Yes. Absolutely. After you got to know him—it was a little frightening for me,

at first. I just didn't know how to take it, and what to think about him.

AF: Right.

DF: "What are his expectations? It's hard to read this." But he was great guy and a great teacher. He taught me a whole lot. He taught me how to take copy and calculate the length of the copy so it would fit in the columns. He taught me how to crop pictures. He did all that. He taught me all that stuff.

AF: Yes.

DF: I had some journalism courses in college, but I had never gotten into the technical aspects of it. In fact, Bill Shelton came and spoke to one of the journalism classes I was in when I was in school. When it was over, I went up to him, because at the time I was thinking of transferring to the University of Missouri. I went up and talked to him about it and asked him what he thought. He said that his advice to me would be to stay where I was and learn as much as I could about as many things as I could, and that I could learn the technical stuff on the job.

AF: Yes.

DF: Well, it was some great advice.

AF: Yes.

DF: It was terrific advice. Fortunately, I had someone like James Scudder teach me that, and I still, to this day, utilize some of those things he taught me years ago.

AF: I loved the learning experience, and I never quite understood the concept of journalism school.

DF: Yes.

AF: Like I say, some people told me that writing is writing is writing. And, to some

degree, it's true. With writing skills, if you have the innate capability, [you] can be transferred from one category or genre to another if you learn just a few basic principles of each. And I think largely that's true.

DF: Yes, I think so, too. I thought it was terrific advice, and it always served me well.

AF: But you could spend—like cropping pictures and those sorts of things—I think they're much better learned on the job where it's being done than in an academic setting.

DF: Well, instead of taking a semester to learn it, I learned it in a *week!* [Laughs]

AF: Right.

DF: Or a day, as the case might have been. “And today you're going to learn how to do this, Dan.”

AF: I talked to my son and various other young people. He said, “Well, I'm interested in this. What should I do?” And usually I don't say it, but I think, “Go where they do that, and hang out—be there. Keep your eyes open and learn.”

DF: I think working in a newspaper may be the greatest education I had, aside from any formal education—those two years or two and a half years that I was at the *Democrat*.

AF: Yes. Well, there's a certain filter in academia that's not there in the newspaper

DF: Got any other thoughts you want to share while we've got this thing going?

AF: No. I don't think we've said anything too significant, but we've covered some ground.

DF: I'm not sure how to get anything more significant.

AF: I don't know if there's anything more significant there from me.

DF: Well, for me as well. When I thought about doing this, what I started immediately doing was thinking about who populated that place when you were there, because that's probably some of the best information you can pull. "What did we learn from each other when we were there?"

AF: I did have one thought a minute ago. I just wanted to mention the library. I mentioned Scudder mentioning the library. That was kind of an amazing place.

DF: It was.

AF: All these yellowed, old envelopes with names on them, and you just physically dig through. Often, you'd wind up writing a story where maybe ten percent of it was new material and ninety percent of it was rewriting what was there in the file.

DF: Absolutely. Many times. Betty Seeger.

AF: Yes. Yes.

DF: She had the patience of Job.

AF: Yes.

DF: She was the sweetest, dearest, kindest person. "Can I help you, Dan?" [Laughs] She was there a long time after I left. Occasionally, I'd go down to go into the library to look up something, and she was still there several years after I had left.

AF: Sometimes if we just had nothing better to do—if it was a slow time on Saturday night or something, I would just go rifle through the files and find something interesting and dig it out. I'd find all sorts of scary, interesting things.

DF: There was all kinds of stuff. Yes. And what I would find is that one thing would beget another. You'd go looking for one thing, but in the course of reading it you'd find yourself in another file.

AF: Yes. Right.

DF: And it was very entertaining.

AF: Yes. Exactly.

DF: I wonder if they still have all those old pieces of yellowed paper.

AF: I don't know. That's interesting. And those big, bound volumes from previous years that you also could go to as a secondary reference.

DF: And they had microfilm, I think, even then. But I don't know . . .

AF: I don't remember using it very much.

DF: I don't remember ever using it.

AF: No.

DF: It seems to me that there was some available, but I don't remember if I ever used it or not. You could go in and find what you needed if you had the patience to dig through however many pieces of paper there were.

AF: Yes. And there were—I took it fairly seriously that when you used that, you'd have to go [through] all that stuff and get it back in the envelope.

DF: Yes, and hopefully in somewhat the same order that you took it out.

AF: Yes.

DF: I just thought of someone else that I hadn't thought of in years, and his name just popped into my head, and that's Si Dunn.

AF: Oh, yes! Yes, Si Dunn. I haven't thought of him in ages.

DF: He was at the copy desk.

AF: Yes.

DF: I don't remember . . .

AF: Si Dunn. Yes. I have some images of him. He smoked a pipe, didn't he?

DF: Yes. White-haired and a little bit overweight.

AF: Leon Hatch.

AF: Did you cross paths with Mary Lowe Kennedy?

DF: No, I think she had left before I came. I heard lots about her. James used to talk about her a lot, and Ralph, too, as I recall.

AF: Yes. She was interesting. There was Bill Eddins, who, I think, was another Hendrix [graduate]. He was on the copy desk.

DF: Yes, I do remember him vaguely.

AF: And there was some older fellow—not old, but Foreman brought him in. He was a copy editor and sort of an iconoclast. He'd sometimes wear mismatched socks, which would just drive Mabel crazy.

DF: [Laughter] I bet! Mabel drove in from Redfield [approximately twenty-five miles] every day. She was always one of the first ones to get there. It used to amaze me that she commuted the distance she did for that job, and for as many years as she did.

AF: She was always there. Very consistent.

DF: Oh, absolutely. She was the obit[uary] queen.

AF: Yes. She has written about the demise of many, many people.

DF: No kidding. That's something that I've taken an interest in in the last number of years—reading obituaries. Some of the most humorous copy you can find in a newspaper comes from the obituaries.

AF: It amazes me the transition that has occurred.

DF: Oh, truly.

AF: When I was writing obituaries, they were the lowest rung of the journalism ladder.

DF: Absolutely.

AF: But they were definitely a rung on the journalism ladder.

DF: Yes. [Laughs] You had to write them before he could let you write anything else.

AF: Right. And all this stuff now about “escorted by a choir of angels, he departed this earthly coil.”

DF: I read one the other day that was written in the first person.

AF: Oh, I read that, and I knew Dick Lankford.

DF: That just blew me away.

AF: He was an ad man.

DF: That’s who it was. It sure was.

AF: I guess he wrote it himself, and it was not overly maudlin.

DF: No, it was just strange to read an obituary in the first person.

AF: Yes.

DF: Whoa! [Laughs]

AF: But that’s been an amazing transition from the time we worked in the obituaries in the paper. I never would have predicted they’d go that direction.

DF: No. You’re right. Well, I never would have predicted that you’d end up having to pay by the word for getting an obituary in the newspaper.

AF: Right.

DF: But that’s something that has always seemed a little strange to me. No, there was

a very distinct style the way it had to be written. There was no deviation from that.

AF: No.

DF: This is the way you write an obit. [Laughs]

AF: It was great training because, as I said, that was the lowest rung on the journalism ladder, but that structure you learned in that obit was essentially the structure to every article you would write.

DF: Absolutely.

AF: It might be embellished upon and expanded upon, but the structure was there.

DF: I have [had] on occasion—three or four times over the years—to write an obituary for someone. Instinctively, I sat down and wrote it just like I would have written it if I'd been at the *Democrat* thirty years ago. That's the way you write an obituary, to me. Anyway, it was an amazing time. It was an amazing time to be in a newspaper, I think.

AF: Yes.

DF: More than anything, when I look back on it, I think about the time and being there during that time.

AF: One of the first questions you asked me was about then compared to the product now, and I really have—I read the paper still quite regularly. I have no way of knowing what the experience in the newsroom is like, but I can't help but feel it's quite different.

DF: It was just an interesting group of people and a very interesting . . .

AF: Again, leaping back to where we'd started, I sensed a change in all of it with

Watergate and, as I said, I think there was a new—when I started out, nobody really thought much about journalists. I don't think journalists really had much social status or esteem. It was just kind of a mundane job with a little bit of respect, perhaps, in certain circles, but then the Watergate thing happened, and there was always introspection. Suddenly, journalism was taking itself more seriously and, I think, attracting a kind of person that it wouldn't have attracted before. From that, it has just gone on to change like everything else, I guess. It's become an evolving, changing thing that's so much different, probably, from the experience you and I had.

DF: Oh, yes. I think so, too. Bill Moyers made a speech a couple of months ago in St. Louis. I don't know if you heard it or saw it. I'll try to find it and I'll e-mail it to you. He was talking about journalism today, about how the [George W. Bush?] Administration wants to control the media, and what news there is is generally in the form of a news release or press release. You know, I thought back after I'd read that speech, and I thought back to—they would give us press releases, and say, "Find out if there's a story here."

AF: Yes.

DF: Which is so different than the way it's done today. If it's not in a press release, the reporter doesn't bother to do anything anyway. Then if it's the official line, they just follow the official line.

AF: Oh! And back then, there was a huge degree of skepticism toward anything that had that flavor to it.

DF: Yes. And it could be the best organization in town—the noblest and least self-

serving, but, nonetheless, it was a press release, so . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

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