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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Marguerite Gamble
Little Rock, Arkansas
3 September 2005

Interviewer: Phyllis Brandon

[00:00:00.00] Phyllis Brandon: I'm sitting here on September 3, 2005, talking with Marguerite Gamble. That's M-A-R-G-U-E-R-I-T-E. Last name is Gamble. G-A-M-B-L-E.

Marguerite Gamble: Yes, right.

PB: [This is an interview for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's project on the *Arkansas Democrat*] And Marguerite has agreed to this interview. Is that correct?

MG: Yes, I do. Yes, that's correct.

PB: Okay. So we're going to start with—when were you born?

MG: October 24, 1928.

PB: Where?

MG: In Little Rock [Arkansas], at the old St. Vincent's Infirmary.

PB: Down on High Street.

MG: On High Street.

PB: Right. And you went through Little Rock schools?

MG: Yes, I went from first through senior year of high school, and graduated from what was then Little Rock High School. I had accelerated and graduated a year early because I'd gone to summer school and taken an extra class here and there. So I'm really a year ahead of myself.

PB: And then what did you do after that?

MG: Then I went to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, for four years, graduated from there, and came home.

PB: With a degree in what?

MG: Well, my major was Spanish, but I had the equivalent of a history major, also, but I didn't take the final history comprehensive.

PB: After you came home what did you do?

MG: Well, I made my debut, which I had *not* intended to do. I had majored in Spanish thinking that I would go to work for the United States Foreign Service. And then I found out that you have to speak pretty fluently, but you don't need to know all about the places and the things that you learn out of academics. Senorita Beltz, who was in high school, taught me more Spanish speaking . . .

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

MG: Yes.

PB: Senorita Beltz.

MG: Senorita. Yes. But the rest of the time it was mostly literature and grammar, which is all right, but it did not make me a very desirable employee for the State Department. And there weren't very many jobs, particularly for women, in Latin America. I was invited to a meeting with some girls who were going to make

their debut. I went to the meeting out of courtesy to the hostess, and came away having promised to make my—to come out with them, which stunned my parents, who had not thought I would ever, ever want to do that. There were only four of us that year, and we had a wonderful time. From about the middle of November through April, we had parties almost every day. And two and three some days. It was really good for me because it was the first time as an adult that I had to try to put names and faces and family connections together. I really enjoyed it. And that was a great asset when I went to work at both papers.

PB: Your first job was?

MG: My first job was during the summer after my sophomore year. The society editor of the *Gazette* was a girl named Grace Marjorie Woods. She had gotten approval to go to a training school for foreign service employees in Washington, so she hired an assistant. But she wanted to be sure she had a job, in case she washed out of the school or didn't like the work, so I was hired as a temporary assistant to the assistant. In case Grace Marjorie had not stayed with foreign service, she would come back and her acting editor would have become assistant, and I went back to college. Then I filled in vacations and Christmas and so forth until, I guess, 1951. Yes, 1951. October 1951. And then I worked there for two years—a little over two years as assistant society editor. Wrote up thousands of weddings.

PB: Who was the editor then?

MG: Well, Charlotte McWhirten was the editor. And then she moved and Betty Was-sell Hill became the editor. I had known Betty all my life, so that worked out very well. Then she got pregnant and resigned, and they hired Betty Fulkerson to

come in as society editor. They didn't think I was reliable; they thought I'd get married right away. Ha ha! Shows how smart they were. So anyway, I stayed on. And it was a really dead-end job; there was nothing for me there. So after a couple years I quit, and horsed around for a few months. And then Dorothy Carroll, who was then the society editor of the *Democrat* . . .

PB: That's C-A-R-R-O-L-L.

MG: Yes. "Miss Dorothy." Dorothy Dungan Carroll. She called and asked me to come down and talk to Mr. Liske—Ed [Edwin] Liske. L-I-S-K-E. Yes. Who was at that time managing editor. And he hired me. There was a vacancy because Betty Funk who had been the women's editor, was pregnant and her husband had been transferred to Memphis. And she decided it would be nice if she went with him. So they moved off to Memphis, and I went in there and worked as women's editor.

PB: And what did Dorothy Carroll—what was she doing?

MG: She was society editor. That was weddings. And the famous weekly column was "Among Ourselves" or "Around Town" . . .

PB: "Among Ourselves" was the *Gazette* column. Nell Cotnam's column.

MG: Well, when I went to work at the *Gazette*, Nell was working as women's editor. She had to have an eye operation and she was out for a month. And Milly Woods was food editor. Somehow she became head of all the women's activities. And she and Nell did not like each other very well, so when Nell came back from surgery, she was the second assistant.

PB: Nell Cotnam?

MG: Cotnam. She was made like a second assistant in the women's section, the socie-

ty section. So she primarily worked on her column. She knew everybody in Little Rock, and had for years and years. Then when I left—I can't even—Kay Kohler, I think, came in. In the meantime, Frances Tucker Kemp had come in as another assistant. She and I did the “scut” work, and Betty Fulkerson took the trips and went to the interesting meetings and so forth. I wasn't going anywhere at all. I wasn't making all that much money, and I wasn't getting any reporting done. You can only write up so many weddings, you know. So I moved over to the *Democrat* and worked there for about two-and-a-half years. I'd have to look up the exact dates. I went to work in the summer of 1954 and right away I got sent to New York to cover the fashion openings for the New York Dress Institute, which made it a whole lot more palatable. You just cannot imagine what the paper was like in those days. 1954 and 1955 were two of the hottest summers we ever had, and, of course, there was no air-conditioning anywhere in the paper. We couldn't air-condition the city room because then the press men would be agitating for “equal air conditioning rights.” Of course, it was all hot type in those days. And I don't—I guess you could have, but it would have been very inefficient to try to air-condition.

PB: And the presses were . . .

MG: The press room a long time ago was in the basement. The composing room was on the third floor. And the second floor was news . . .

PB: That's where the Linotype machines were, on the third floor.

MG: Yes. And then the press room was in the basement, and, of course, the printing presses were too.

PB: Yes.

MG: And the first floor, main floor, was advertising and . . .

PB: Business.

MG: Business, yes. And it was all hot and uncomfortable. They did have ceiling fans here and there, which in the newspaper office with all the paper around was just really wonderfully inefficient. You had to weight everything down. There weren't that many air-conditioned offices. The *Gazette* office had been air-conditioned. Harry Ashmore had come in and done a tremendous amount of remodeling and redecorating—updating—the *Gazette* news department. And what we had among—I think—I know the composing room had exhaust fans. They didn't have air conditioning, but they did have exhaust fans. The *Democrat* did not. It was not only hot and everything blew around, but it was unbelievably dirty. Printers are so different now. I think it is a difference in the ink, and it's not that terribly smelly, sticky, smeary stuff now. So I'd come home in the afternoon, and my hands would look as though I'd just been playing in the coal can all day. And, of course, your clothes all got filthy. And we'd get hot. I don't remember being as uncomfortable in winter. They did have a furnace. You were warm enough. But it was dirty all year round. And bugs. Oh, gosh, bugs!

PB: How about people working in the newsroom?

MG: Oh, of course, that was a different world. They had the same problems that we did. I had some good friends over there, and some of them are good friends still, although there are not many of us left.

PB: Yes. Who—like names?

MG: Well, like Bob McCord was over there, and Rosemary Martin. Anyway, those were in the magazine section. Jon Kennedy was the cartoonist. Gene Herrington

was city editor. Rod Powers was on the desk. Carl Childress—I think Carl was state editor, maybe, I'm real hazy. Charlie Rixse was there, and his wife Pat manned—personed—the telephone, the call-ins. George Douthit was a reporter. R.B. Mayfield was a reporter, but he was on the state capitol beat, so he came in late in the afternoon when we were getting ready to go home. O.D. Gunter was the chief photographer and Glenn Moon was his assistant. And Rodney Worthington worked over there. Rodney's the only survivor out of that group, I believe. I don't remember very many. Oh, Rod Powers, I mentioned Rod Powers. And then there were folks who came and went. In the sports department there was Jack Keady, Fred Petrucelli, Martin Holmes, who became one of my very closest friends and married also one of my closest friends. And there was a young fellow named, I think, Larry Williams who worked, also. It seems to me that Larry came in after school—was maybe going to either high school or junior college or maybe both. And then there was a fellow who sold ads, who would come up in the afternoon and shoot the breeze with the sports department while he waited for the second editions to come off. His name was Bill Valentine, and he was an umpire down in the old Texas League and in the off season he was selling ads.

PB: And during all this time the paper was still an afternoon paper.

MG: Oh, yes.

PB: And you all went to work at what time in the morning?

MG: Well, the newsroom had been going to work at 7:30 [a.m.], and I did not like that, so I went to work at 8:00. And generally got off at 3:00 or 3:30 p.m. When Miss Dorothy Carroll went on vacation and left me in charge of both the wedding-society and club stuff, we came in early and typed up what was going to go in that

afternoon's paper. Of course, in the summer, you know what June is like with all the weddings. I mean, we used to write up—everybody got a wedding story, whatever day we could get it in. I managed to get the society and club stuff done on schedule.

PB: You had—at the time a women's page every day.

MG: Every day. And most days it was two pages—minus ads, of course—but two pages. And all of it—except occasionally there'd be one that had taken place the night before, but mostly it was an accumulation of what had come in since we'd had the last Sunday edition. Saturday and Friday was just minute. We had maybe the equivalent of two full columns, but it was all chopped up.

PB: You didn't work on Saturday did you?

MG: Oh. What do you mean we didn't work—we didn't often work on Sundays. But we did work Saturdays until about noon. Mostly reading copy for Sunday's paper.

PB: Reading copy.

MG: Proofreading copy, yes. But anyway, I got us far enough ahead that on Monday we spent all day writing up what was going in the paper Tuesday. And before we left on Monday afternoon, the composing room had all of Tuesday's copy, which they liked a whole lot better because the deadline had been 11:00. That meant from 11:00 until, say, 12:30, they had to get the whole thing set and pictures made.

PB: Scanned. Well, we call them scanned now, but type—we had type made then.

MG: Type. Yes. And they had to get all that done before the first edition went to press. The deadline came about 11:30 or 11:45 or 12:00 or something. And it

would change with every edition. I thought that was dumb. There wasn't any of it that was really hot news. So I got us all one day ahead. And it was much easier on the composing room. The foreman of the composing room was a fellow named Fred Rice. His wife worked down there also; she was a proofreader. Both of them hated me with a vengeance, but they did like the fact that I moved them ahead a bit. And the printers and the typesetters would come by and whisper in my ear, "We sure do appreciate the way you've gotten it set up." Then when Miss Dorothy came back from vacation, they met her with this news that she was to get this stuff up a day ahead of time. I thought she was going to have a stroke. I really thought she was going to strike me. Then when she got into it, she said, "Oh, yes, this does work pretty well." I had come over there—I had worked at the *Gazette*, which at that time there was a really bitter competition between the two, and I was going to straighten them out over at the *Democrat*, you know. I was absolutely unbearable. I don't know why they didn't throw me out. I was so smart-alecky, know it all. But anyway, that was the one change I did make. And then as soon as we got the daily copy polished off, we'd start working on Sundays. Of course, I had thousands of club notes to write up, and all this women's page filler and so forth. It was sort of like having a bunch of rather elderly maiden aunts. Most of the club ladies were older, and they had known my grandmother and my mother. They would come up to me after club meetings and say, "I remember when you did-so-and-so in the fourth grade," which was very flattering and made it nice to cover their meetings. Then they would ask me all these questions about, "Are skirts going to be longer or shorter?" and other fashion bits. As though I would know! I really did like most of them; they were dear, sweet

friends, but living in a different world from mine. I remember coming out of a Federation of Women's Clubs meeting with a contemporary—and good friend—Bobbie Bradley Graham, who represented the Jaycettes—the women's auxiliary to the Jaycees—we ran the gauntlet of questions and when we got to the drugstore for a cup of coffee, Bobbie said, "I hope they pay you well for putting up with this third degree all the time." I got used to having club ladies call me at home to ask [questions like], "I'm going to have my picture taken with such-and-such club tomorrow. What should I wear?" And you know, what do you tell them? It doesn't matter what you wear, it's not going to show up very well anyway. They were so earnest about this. And they were so [unintelligible] to work with them [unintelligible]. It was an interesting experience, but it was not a very healthy working condition. I don't think in the whole time I was there I ever got a word of praise from the city desk or anybody over me.

PB: Dorothy Carroll?

MG: Well, Dorothy Carroll was really not over me. We were co-equals. Although I had no doubts as to who outranked whom. But after all, Dorothy had been there for years and years. She took time off during World War II to go work for the Red Cross full-time, but she had been there, I guess, since the early 1930s and maybe before. And this was in the 1950s. And she was quite a character. I was very fond of her. And I think in her own way she was of me. But at times our spheres of influence overlapped or conflicted a little bit. We had that long office row, and I don't know if it's even still there in the same configuration on the northwest corner of the building. A long or skinny room. And Lelia Maude Funston, who was the religious editor, was at one end, and Dorothy Carroll and

her assistant and I were at the other end. And Miss Dorothy and Miss Lelia Maude did not speak. So Miz Dorothy, would say, “Marguerite, go and ask Miss Funston so and so and so forth.” And I would get up—and, of course, Miss Funston could hear this. So I would go down and I would say, “Miss Funston, Mrs. Carroll wants to know so and so forth.” And she’d say, “Marguerite, you tell Mrs. Carroll so and so and so forth.” So I’d go back and I’d say, “Miz Dorothy, Miss Funston says so and so forth.” It was the most absurd situation I’ve ever been in.

PB: And in those days, everybody was Miss.

MG: Well, I was brought up not to call grown-ups by their first names. Now, when I was at the *Gazette*, I did call Nell Cotnam “Nell.” My father called her “Miss Cotnam.” My mother called her “Miss Nell,” because she had known her as a grown-up lady when mother was not so grown up. And I called her “Nell,” which I thought was such an interesting commentary. But I never did call Miss Funston anything but “Miss Funston.” Dorothy Carroll was “Miz Dorothy” to me until the day she died. It was a different world—well, now I really do not like to be called by my first name by people I’ve never even met.

PB: Well, that’s what you’re used to.

MG: Yes. There are a lot of young people who live in these apartments, and most of them call me “Miss Marguerite” because they have grown up in households where they don’t call grown-ups by their first names. But I called the people out on the city desk by their first names. That was a strange dichotomy. I called Mr. and Mrs. Rice, “Mr. Rice” and “Mrs. Rice.” But the guys up in the composing room and the few printers that I knew I called by their first names, and they called me

by mine. So it was just a difference. I don't know, it's hard to explain. I did not like going into a department store and having a little sales girl I'd never met before call me "Marguerite." Until I tell her to, you know. And then I've had people who will not call me by my first name because I'm so much older than they are that they just can't bring themselves to do it. But it was "Miss Funston" and "Mrs. Carroll." They were both such good Christian women—Christian, quote, unquote—yet they were so ugly to each other. And Angie Rice did everything she could to pick to pieces the copy I sent up. "I don't think you spelled this right." So I'd get out the telephone book, and I'd say, "Well, this is this child's mother and father, and they spell it this way, so I think maybe she spells it the same way." I did not have enough sense to give in and say, "You're right and I'm wrong." So they were as disagreeable to me as they could possibly be.

PB: Did you ever see K. August Engel, the publisher?

MG: I saw him—he was going out for breakfast when I came in every morning. He came in and sort of checked to see if the desk was still there, and then he'd go over to Franke's and have breakfast. And he knew that he knew me, but I don't think he knew my name. After I left, I would still go in occasionally and do the rounds and he would say, "Good morning, miss," or something. He never called me by name. You never got a kind word from him. Or any kind of word from him. Ed Liske, who was managing editor, was the biggest waste of time and space who ever sat in a newspaper office. He would go wash his hands in the drinking fountain and dry his hands on a paper towel and crumple the towel and throw it on the floor. He had no idea of what was going on. The city desk got out the paper. Marcus George, Mr. Engel's nephew, was at that time a reporter also,

and, of course, he was the heir apparent. Some of the employees were sort of making up to Marcus and to Stanley Berry, another nephew, who was in charge of the business office. And I will say they handled it very nicely. They were absolutely scrupulous about not taking sides in any squabbles or whatever. They did everything that they were assigned to do, and did it very well. The business office was not very businesslike, I don't think. Looking back, I can see that it really wasn't.

PB: Were those the days you got paid with cash?

MG: Oh, yes, cash.

PB: Every Friday.

MG: Every Friday. And it was usually at noon, so that you had it before you went out to lunch. We'd all be lined up outside of Fanny Eatman's office. Fanny was Stanley Berry's assistant. And a lovely person she was. She was really nice. I don't think she knew too much about the business of newspaper publishing, but she was really nice to the employees. One year they came out and said that nobody could send any mail through that was sealed, because some of the employees had been getting their Christmas cards and taking them down and running them through the postage machine. It would not have occurred to me to do something like that. And postage was, like, three cents in those days. Apparently one or two employees maybe had done this. And we couldn't have that. You know, we couldn't run the personal mail through the office machine. The librarian on the second floor, who was in charge of the morgue, was Gladys Fearnside. She would come in and get the early mail. I don't know if they still do, but I used to get a lot of samples—well, gifts, from various cosmetics manufacturers and

people who wanted a story in the paper. They'd generally release it, and she would go through and pick over what she wanted and keep it. Deane Allen, who I should have mentioned, was news editor when I first went there. He was a good friend of mine who became an even closer friend. I went up one day—I'd gone to the morgue to look for something, and there were a pack of things stuck up with Gladys's purse up on top of them. And they had my name on the mailing label. I went out and Deane happened to be the only person on the desk. It was late in the afternoon. And I was simply furious. It wasn't that I wanted it, but I wanted the refusal of it, if you follow me. So I went to—I just yelled at poor Deane, the only person there. I was really fond of him; he was a really nice person. I later worked for Hall Allen, his brother, in the advertising business, and who had all of the smarts, but none of the personality. Frances Allen, Hall Allen's wife, said, "If you could take the two and shake them up together, you'd get two very able people." But anyway, Deane came in at 6:00 in the morning. And he started picking up the mail and going through and picking out all the packages or mail that looked personal or interesting and hiding it in his desk until I came to work. And then, as soon as he had a moment, he would come over and slip it to me. Now isn't that childish? It was—and I had said something to Mr. Liske at some point about this, and he said, "Well, I don't know what to do about it, Marguerite, you know." He wasn't going to make any waves at all about anything. And I knew not to bother going to Mr. Engel. I was smart enough, even in those days, to know that somebody who doesn't know your name or doesn't ever speak to you by name—you're not going to be able to take a complaint to him. So anyway, Deane took care of my mail after that. And every so often when there was

something really nice, I would slip it out to him and I would say, "Take this to your wife; I think she'd like this product." Or if I found out what she liked, I'd take it to her. Wasn't that gracious of me? [Laughs] But you know it really was. And to all the guys on the desk, who would have liked to have had a finger in the pie too. I'd get a box from Clairol or Toni or somebody which had eight or ten permanents in it. And, of course, I'd deal those out because I did not use home permanents in those days. The management was so cheap. There was no thought of making it easy for the employees. Did you ever know George Douthit? A reporter like none other. One hot, hot summer day there was a plane wreck up in Northeast Arkansas, near Jonesboro that. And it happened on our time. So Gene Herrington said, "Go and see what you can do about this." George goes out to the airport, finds some pilot friend of his, cons the man into flying him up there free. They land on a dirt road in the middle of a cornfield. George gets out with his Speedgraphic camera, which must have weighed about forty pounds, wading through dust and dirt and so forth and gets over to the plane wreck, takes his pictures . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

MG: . . . and calls in his story from somewhere from a pay phone. Gets back to the office, walks in copy in hand, plates in hand, and before he can do anything about it, Gene jumps on him and says, "We have missed the first edition, what have you been doing all morning?" And George's face looked like a lobster. It was so hot. He was tired and dirty and dusty. And he'd done all this on his own; it didn't cost the *Democrat* a penny for covering the plane or anything. They wouldn't have

paid to charter a plane, and Gene chewed him out royally. This was really not Gene's way. "You missed the first edition; everybody will have it; everybody will know about it." I had come out of the ladies' restroom, and—you know that spiral staircase that went up to the composing room, there was a big pillar right by it. And I was hidden from them by it. They didn't see me because I was sort of behind the pillar. And George let loose with a string of cuss words. I've never heard some of them used since. [Laughs] Yelling and screaming. They both were. Gene was yelling back at him. They stopped screaming because I came by and I said, "Well, if you all are going to talk dirty, I'm going to lunch." So I went back to the office and picked up my purse and went to lunch, which I had been intending to do anyway. And when I came back, George was sitting at my desk at my typewriter, tapping out a note of apology. [Laughs]

PB: And this was Gene . . .

MG: Herrington.

PB: Herrington. Really.

MG: Yes. And Gene was not that kind. He was—and is not—that kind. But he'd had a bad day, too. So the two of them collided.

PB: And really went at it.

MG: I was highly amused at the time. George took his apology note and then dragged me out in the hallway by the elevator, or the stairway, and we talked a minute. I said, "George, I really thought you had the right of it." So then he went back to his desk and I went back to mine. And Dorothy Carroll said, "By the way, what is the matter with George?" She said, "He came in here almost in tears when you weren't here. And then he asked if he could use your typewriter, and I said,

“Why, sure.” I remember things like that. They never—they were so ungrateful to everybody. And George had worked there for 1,000 years. Joe Crossley was on the desk, I believe. Joe had also worked there forever. I think he was on the copy desk, I’m not really sure. He had some sort of serious male operation. I don’t know what it was, we didn’t talk about that sort of thing in mixed company in those days. And they paid him his two weeks vacation but no sick leave. After his two weeks vacation was up, they cut off his salary till he could get back. They did take him back. I don’t know if it was the same salary or the same job or whatever. But he was at an age when he could not afford to quit; he would have had no place else to go. Now, you can say, “Take your job and shove it.” There were not the number of trade publications that there are now. There were the two daily newspapers, and that was it. And I really—it occurred to me, even in my early twenties, as I was—flibbertigibbet little thing that I was—it occurred to me that down the road, if I thought that they weren’t going to treat me any better and they were just—and they were ugly to a lot of their employees. [00:35:38.29] They didn’t give them raises. For Christmas, everybody got a \$25 bonus. But they took out \$5 in income tax, so you only got \$20. Of course, \$20 was a whole lot more in those days than it is now, but still. One year I took my twenty-dollar bill and went over to Kempner’s and bought myself a pair of clear, Lucite plastic, sling pumps with a rhinestone bow in the toes. Oh, they were the cutest things I ever saw. And they cost \$19.95.

PB: And they’re back in style now.

MG: Yes. [Laughter] So anyway, I remember those shoes as really being all I had to show for a year’s work. I was able to live at home. I do not know how people

supported themselves, because the reporters didn't make too much more than I did.

PB: Do you remember what you made?

MG: I made \$50 a week, I believe. [00:36:39.03] I think I had started [at] the *Gazette* at \$40. I'm not sure about that. But—it may have been more than that, but not much more. I worked very hard, I was a good employee, and I was a true, faithful employee. I'd show up and look nice at meetings, and be polite to all the people that they had come in the office—oh, and another thing, if people didn't get their afternoon paper, they'd call me about it. At home. And I'd say, "Well, I think if you'll call circulation." "Well, they don't answer." That's all right. When people worked at the *Gazette*, I got called early in the morning when people didn't get their paper. And if I'd go out, everybody I ran into would say, "You know, my paperboy just will not put my copy of the *Democrat* on the porch. I wish you'd talk to him." Well, they might as well have asked me to go talk to Princess Margaret Rose. It would have just about as much effect. I don't know. The gap between reality and what the public conceives as reality. And they all thought it was this glamorous job. I did get to go to New York twice a year, which was glamorous. And I did get occasionally to go to Dallas or Los Angeles or one of the other shows, but usually I had to pay at least part of my own expenses. And I really got treated royally, then I'd come back and write three or four or five weeks of stories, most of which I had written in my head, at least, or made notes for before I ever got on the plane to come home. But that was work, too. We'd have a 7:00 breakfast showing and then we would finish up late at night. It was glorious and glamorous and I saw a side of New York that very few

people got to see, but it was work. Any time you sit and pay attention for fourteen hours at a stretch, it's work. I'm taking a course at UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock] now, and I've discovered that I have lost the ability for prolonged concentration. I can't get through a three-hour class. But New York was really hard. It's hard to believe that a quote "first-class" organization was so sloppy in so many ways.

PB: You're talking about the *Democrat*.

MG: *Democrat*, yes. The *Gazette*, in the olden days, had been awful to their employees, too, but they did have a new regime. After they had the strike. Do you remember the *Democrat*—anyways, I don't know whether the paper is unionized now. I think probably not. At least the news department, the composing room, and the pressmen were. But people who wanted to write, with a capital "W," had no place to go. And they had a lot of freelance people, particularly on the magazine section, who would write these stories and send them in. Occasionally Bob McCord would ask me to do a freelance something, for which I got paid extra. It was usually something I could sit down and rattle off—very little extra work went into it. But there was not much way to moonlight. I was a correspondent for *Mademoiselle* magazine for a while, but that just got to be too much of a thing. They had very detailed instructions—they'd send you a topic and then they'd say, "Cover these points in your story" and it would be four or five single-spaced pages of points you were to cover. They paid \$50 for an interview, but it took—it worked out to about twenty-five cents an hour if you really did it right. So I just gave that up. They asked me one time to interview the head of an academic department in a school. And that was in 1957 or 1958, when the schools were not

granting interviews to freelance correspondents for *Mademoiselle* magazine. But anyway—there was no other way to go for most of these people. I was fortunate because I lived at home. And we moved in here [her apartment] about the time I went to work for the *Democrat*.

PB: Who's "we"?

MG: My mother and I. And I could walk back and forth to work. Reporters got off about the same time I did, so I could usually get a ride home if I really wanted one. I rather enjoyed walking back and fourth—I counted fifteen blocks—it's not that far, a little over half a mile over there. On a nice day, I really did enjoy it. And of course, you could eat downtown in those days. A lot of employees took their own lunches because they couldn't afford to eat out. [00:42:20.19] I made a lot of friends and I enjoyed it. And newspaper people are interesting, I think. I enjoyed it, and I fit right in because I was off a little too. And as I say, some of these folks are still good friends of mine. I enjoyed that part of it. It was a whole lot more interesting than trying to teach first-grade students, easier than being a nurse, which I just had no talent for at all. And it was easier than trying to be a full-time secretary. There were times when I worked very long and very hard. Very long hours. Mostly I worked about a seven-hour day. Five days a week. And then Saturday morning was a busy, busy time. So I worked a little over forty hours a week when it was all put together. [00:43:19.28]

PB: For \$40 a week.

MG: Fifty.

PB: Fifty dollars a week.

MG: Yes. I don't think that the reporters made much more than that. And, of course, it

was a lower cost of living—those who had children to support, I really do not see how they lived. At that time I couldn't have cared less, that was their problem. I thought they had no place to go. There were few ad agencies or PR agencies, very few. And they didn't have a real public relations department like most large agencies do now. I liked news reporters, I really did. I knew a lot of them, and I was dear little Marguerite. They were nice to me, "We appreciate what you're doing for us." But the people who were over me at the paper either didn't like what I was doing, or they didn't trouble to let me know I was doing a good job the whole time I was on the staff. Of course, I was only there two-and-a-half years. [00:44:49.11] I left in the spring of 1957—almost three years. And of course, in 1957 was when all hell broke loose with the school business [reference to the Little Rock Central High School integration crisis]. And would have been a very awful place for me to be, because they took an editorial stance that was opposed—diametrically opposed—to what I believed. I did not understand how so many of those nice, conscientious people could, in effect, say, "Go out and riot." And that's what their editorials were in those days. Someday I'm going to go back and look up on microfilm and see if they're as bad as I remember. Oh, another thing that really bothered me was that we took no news of black folks. These nice older black ladies and gentlemen would come in to the paper because they were going to have a golden wedding anniversary. We couldn't take those. They wouldn't write up their weddings and barely wrote up their obituaries. And then it was under what we called "colored news" or "colored deaths." The *Gazette* was not any better, I might add. But I remember this one nice old black man who came in; they'd been married fifty years, he really was about as old as I am

now [laughs], but an older gentleman. And he *was* a gentleman. Kind, tolerant, and so forth. He had this nice picture that he had brought in for us to look at. In those days most papers would place a picture of an anniversary couple in Little Rock. And I felt so conscience-stricken about it, I took him out and introduced him to Gene Herrington. I said, “Mr. So-and-so and his wife have been married for fifty-two years, and they’re going to have a celebration, Gene. And I thought you might like to know about it.” And Gene was a good man, and he got conscience-stricken too. He came over later and said, “Well, don’t you ever do that to me again.” He said, “I knew exactly—when I saw you walking through the room with that fellow, I knew exactly what you were going to do.” It was not fair. But that’s the way it had always been. [00:47:40.19] And to my knowledge, there was not a real black newspaper then. There may have been a tabloid type something, which I would, of course, never have seen. But there was no place they could go for news of their goings-on. These folks worked hard for their money, and they were entitled to public recognition. There used to be a black caterer here in town named Henry Miller, and he had several sons who were waiters or conductors on the railroad, which was a really good job back in the 1930s. My father was really active in Masonic work, and he was in charge of food service for the big reunions they had twice a year. Henry Miller would always come and help him out and bring his crew. For years a black person would come up to me, “Aren’t you Mr. Bill Gamble’s daughter?” And I said, “Yes.” “Well I used to work for him down at the consistory on those reunions.” Anyway, Henry Miller died and the family took the obituary to the paper and they wouldn’t accept it.

When Theodore Roosevelt came to Little Rock, Henry Miller had served him, and

it made my father perfectly furious that they had hurt these people through him. So he said, “Let me have that obituary.” So he went down—and at that time there was a man named Bill Brannon who was a part owner of the paper. I never did know his exact position—he was in the advertising business office in some way. He lived in the block with us, so Dad went down and talked to him—man to man, heart to heart. And they ran a news article, but not on the obituary page, but in the main news section. The next day, the *Gazette* picked it up, and they had somebody call the house and write it up. It proves it’s not what you know, it’s *who* you know.

PB: Always.

MG: Always. But anyway, at the time I thought, who is this wonderful old man who’s had a really important part in the city and they won’t write his death notice? Never say my father was a meddler. He was a do-gooder, and he was not going to let them get by with that kind of shabby treatment.

PB: Then you sort of followed in his footsteps.

MG: Occasionally I meddled in things that were not my business. But that’s one thing—we’ve had a lot of trouble with integration. And they’re trying situations irritating beyond belief—some of the black activists and some of the white liberals. But when I think of the way it used to be, it really scars my heart. I reread *To Kill A Mockingbird* not long ago. That gets down to it too. In lots of ways.

PB: Well, I—even though things are so much better in our town now, they may not be so much better up east. But I think in our town they’re so much better, and as far as the newspaper is concerned, we don’t work in color.

MG: [00:51:26.21] Neither did we—the *Democrat* had a black reporter named Ozell

Sutton.

PB: I remember him.

MG: I must admit I was not very nice to him. I was pleasant and civil, but very cool and barely civil. I think of that sometimes when I can't sleep at night. The number of things which we ought to have done. I think of Ozell. And of course, he has done extremely well for himself. But I remember one time there was a black debutante ball, and he brought a picture over to Dorothy Carroll, who was not noted for being tactful to people who were not "in". And she was lovely with him; she said she really didn't think the community was ready for that yet. And she said, "These are very nice girls, and I'm proud of them, and I'll write them a letter and congratulate them. Whatever I can do, I'll do, but I can't run your picture." And she couldn't have. [00:52:38.06]

PB: We run a full page of black debutantes now. Every year.

MG: Well, I notice in *High Profile* the number of black faces.

PB: Yes. And then they call me and say, "You don't have enough black people," and I say, "We don't look at the color."

MG: Well, I expect if you get a breakdown of the population—what is it, about 30% of the population is black. And you count the number of black faces and white faces, I expect about a third of the faces are black.

PB: Yes.

MG: You can't do it that way, but I think . . .

PB: It works out that way.

MG: Yes.

PB: It works out that way.

MG: I had worked with black people and white people, and I like and dislike them about the same proportions. I do think that perhaps in the fields I have been in the blacks I have worked with have been, I believe, more highly qualified than I was. Because they were black and they were test cases. But I don't think that they run up against the glass ceiling, the glass wall as much as they used to.

PB: Right. I don't think so at all.

MG: [00:54:01.00] And at that time there was a great deal of prejudice. Unspoken. Against Orthodox Jews. We didn't cover any of the Orthodox Jews in society news. The famous column of social goings on—they called in, we would print it. But there was a “difference” that kind of struck me as being odd. We called the Kahns or the Blasses. Or the Pfeifers or the Phillips or whatever. You wouldn't call most Jews. And they didn't go on the front page very often. Getting rid of that front page society section was a great leap forward, because it was taken as a sign of social stratification—which it was. But people who wanted to be on the front page who were not . . .

PB: Were heartbroken.

MG: Heartbroken is right. I had people come in with their daughter's picture and say, “When I got married you put me back in the peanut gallery.” And I'd say, “I wasn't here then.” And I did feel sorry for them. I mean, you know, it's important to be first. [00:55:21.27] One time when I was working at the *Gazette*—we had a very tight paper, and we had to cut all the wedding stories we ran. And we cut out the description—the names of the candle-lighters and descriptions of their gowns and the whole schmear. The father of one of the candle-lighters came down with a copy of the clipping in his hand, and he had been subscribing to the

paper all these years, and they had these beautiful dresses and they did so and so forth. And I—I knew what had happened. His wife had just screamed and yelled and said, “You’ve got to do something about it.” Well obviously, we’re not going to reprint the story. So I sent him down to see Frank Duff who was the business manager. And Frank came up and said, “If you ever do that to me again, I’m going to kill you.” And would have cost—he told me how much it would cost to get the reprint. Well, I thought they might just reset the type and just run it off on a sheet of copy paper. He said, “I sent him over to so-and-so’s print shop.” He said, “I’m a married man, too, and I know what he’s up against.” But people would be so upset. And rightly. When I was working—when I was having anything to do with weddings, whether I was at the *Gazette* or filling in for Miz Dorothy, and I did not very often at the *Democrat* go in on the society page, because I knew that if I ever did, in no time flat [I’d] be an untitled assistant. I just was very cautious about that. But everybody called me when the first edition came out. They’d go down to the early edition, and then they’d start to call. I got so I would not answer the phone after about 8:00 on a Saturday night. My mother would say, “No, she’s not here. I don’t know when she’ll be back, she’s out on a date.” But she had several who’d unload on her because we didn’t run their picture big enough. And they upset my mother much more than they did me. You get so you don’t pay as much attention to it after so many bawlings out. Or they’d come in to pick up their pictures, and they would just scream and yell at the person. The *Gazette* used to mail them back, but at the *Democrat* you had to come up and get them. It was very tricky sometimes. I really—I really did think things were much better in lots of ways in coverage of news in the women’s section. I

think there are things that you don't get the publicity on, but then there are fewer women involved. There used to be several hundred garden clubs in the City of Little Rock, in Greater Little Rock. And they all called me at least three or four times a month about one thing or another.

PB: Well, there's not as many now because so many women have gone back to work.

MG: Yes. And then too, women who don't work don't join clubs and such [anymore].

When I worked as a volunteer at the Arkansas Arts Center, we did not have trouble getting people to work on "glamour projects," but we had [trouble] getting people to work in the Vineyard.

[00:59:06.21]

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Interview]

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