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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Omar Greene
Little Rock, Arkansas
28 July 2007

Interviewer: Garry Hoffmann

Gary Hoffmann: This is Gary Hoffmann and it's Saturday, July 28 and I'm interviewing

Omar Greene for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History project on the *Arkansas Democrat*, now the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. And I'm interviewing Omar at his home in Little Rock and—now you have the opportunity, Omar, to say that—you can back out of this, or do you agree that what you say on this tape will be transcribed, returned to you for your approval and then eventually with your approval for use by the Pryor Center.

Omar Greene: That's fine.

GH: Okay. We'll go. Well, let's talk a little bit about where you're from, where you were born, a little bit about your—where you grew up.

OG: Oh, Okay. I was born in North Carolina. How much detail do you want?

GH: Just whatever you want to talk about

OG: How I ended up being born?

GH: [Laughs] No, you can leave that out, okay [laughs]. Tell me about—you were born in North Carolina and . . .

OG: Oh, okay. And my parents—we—my dad had graduated from law school in Washington, DC. And he worked—he was an aide to Senator John McClellan, and he could have stayed in Washington and been a lobbyist, but he really wanted to come back to Arkansas and practice law, and he was from Keiser, near Osceola in Mississippi County.

GH: K-E-I-S-E-R?

OG: Yeah. And his dad had been the mayor of Keiser, and his grandfather had been a pretty prominent lawyer in Blytheville who ran for governor at one time. He ran for governor as a Republican. And he was six feet six [inches] and weighed 300 pounds.

GH: What was his name?

OG: Virgil. Virgil Greene.

GH: Okay.

OG: There was a pretty positive article about him in the *Gazette* when he ran for governor as—you know—anyway, so he—and he was kind of a character. He was real flamboyant, and he would go into town and he would tell people he was the *biggest* lawyer in Arkansas. And, let's see, he had read for the law. Back then you could read for the law, and he did that. But then he always felt, you know, that he should have gone to law school. And when he was in his early forties, he was also in a really unhappy marriage, and he basically split up with his wife, and he went to Washington, DC, you know, to law school there, and I

think he went to Georgetown. But he was real—I've read his diary and things, and he was a real intellectually curious guy. And going back to school was really good for him. He went to all these museums in Washington, DC, and, you know.

..

GH: Virgil Greene is V-I-R-G-I-L. . .

OG: Uh, huh.

GH: . . .and G-R-E-E-N-E.

OG: Yeah.

GH: Okay.

OG: So he was kind of my dad's hero. That's why my dad went to law school and so we came to Arkansas from Washington, DC. I was born in North Carolina because my mother had an argument with my dad and separated for a while from him.

GH: Okay, yeah [laughs].

OG: And then we came to Osceola so that's when I started, like, first grade was in Osceola. But my parents got divorced, and my mother went back to Washington, DC, and then eventually she remarried, and we lived in Florida and several different places—Florida—Washington, DC, and Florida. Then my mother got real ill, and my dad, who I hadn't seen in a long, long time—he got wind of this, and he was trying to be a responsible person and everything, and so he kind of appeared, and he thought it would be real good for me to go to Subiaco Academy—go to a boarding school—while my mother was so ill. And so he sent me to Subiaco. He paid for that and everything.

GH: Subiaco is in Logan County in west Arkansas.

OG: Yeah. It's about six miles from Paris, Arkansas. And it's a Benedictine boarding school—Subiaco Academy—and it was started in 1878, and it, you know—Benedictine monks—now they have more lay people teaching in the school, a lot more than they used to, but when I was there, all the teachers were monks except for a couple of coaches. But anyway, so he sent me there, which was really a great place. And they were—anyway—how much should I go into this?

GH: Whatever you're comfortable with.

OG: Oh, okay, well, I really feel that I owe Subiaco a lot. And I think those monks there—they really care about you. They really want you—you know, they don't have any biological children, and they form a bond with you. I mean, they still send me birthday cards.

GH: Really?

OG: Yeah, and I'm fifty-five years old.

GH: [Laughs]

OG: And now—so I've tried to be—especially in about the last fifteen years—I've tried to kind of pay them back. I was on the alumni board, and Jay Bradford, a prominent legis. . .

GH: Legislator?

OG: Legislator, yeah. He graduated from there, and we came out of an alumni board meeting one time, and he said—he was raised by a single parent and everything, and he was saying, “Man, Omar, I wonder what would've happened to us if it wasn't for Subiaco and Father Nicholas.” And he was referring to Father

Nicholas Fuhrman, who's an English teacher, journalism, you know, sponsor—
faculty sponsor of the school paper and the boxing coach.

GH: How do you spell his last name?

OG: F-U-H-R-M-A-N—with one N, I think, but I'm not positive.

GH: Nicholas—N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S?

OG: Yes. So that was a really good experience for me. And I was on the—I was the
editor of the school newspaper my senior year. I graduated in 1969 from Subiaco,
and I was editor of the school paper, which is still called the *Periscope*.

GH: The *Periscope*?

OG: Yes.

GH: How's that spelled?

OG: Just like the apparatus on a submarine.

GH: Okay.

OG: And Father Nicholas came up with that name. Father Nicholas was kind of a
colorful character. He had a master's in English from, I think, Washington
University, and—anyway—oh, and this was good for me, too: the guy—I was
always one of the youngest people in my class because I started school when I
was five, and so I physically matured a little slower than everybody else. And,
like, in junior high, I was kind of picked on some and was kind of labeled a sissy
or something. So then when I went there [to Subiaco] I got on the boxing team,
and Father Nicholas was really a good boxing coach. He got written up in *Sports
Illustrated* one time. And that was real big for my confidence. And, in fact, a lot
of people were scared of me in high school [laughs]. And I had a real good record

and I got “Outstanding Boxer in Arkansas”—Arkansas Golden Gloves—my senior year. And—do I need to talk about . . . ?

GH: How many years at Subiaco? Four?

OG: Four, yeah. And I played football, and I was a pretty good football player, but I don’t think I ever really knew—I never really had the big picture on football. I knew that I had this assignment, you know, as a defensive end, I was supposed to do such-and-such. On offense, I was a guard, and I was supposed to block this guy and that guy, but I really—a lot of times when it’s just a [] [laughs] []. I never really had the big picture on football and mostly was terrified. The coach was a real strong personality and a great big man, and—I went to a funeral at Subiaco, and the coach—Coach Holton Primm—he was there, and there were some of the other guys that I went to school with—they were teasing me because I didn’t realize I was standing by Coach Prim in church, and I saw him I kind of jumped back [laughs], so I was still kind of intimidated by him, but . . .

GH: That’s H-O-L-T-O-N. P-R-I-M.

OG: M. I think two Ms.

GH: Holton Primm.

OG: Yeah. He was a good coach. They were very competitive in football then, like—there was one year they were undefeated, and they won the district. The class above us was better. The class that graduated the year before us—they were better than we were in football, but we were six and three [won six, lost three]. We played big schools. Like, we played Springdale and McClellan, and we

played Russellville—we beat Russellville, and they were number one in the state, and we beat them thirty-four to seven. That was after Catholic High had already beaten them and demoralized them, so they had trouble with Catholic teams.

[Laughs] And, so anyway, but, I did like the camaraderie of being on the football team and everything, and then I ran track every year. And I was a pretty mediocre track runner, so I guess the best thing I ever did athletically was boxing. And I had—Father Nicholas was a great coach. How much do you want to hear about this?

GH: Did you take an interest while at Subiaco—you said you worked for the school paper?

OG: Yes. You know, I think I was on the *Periscope* all four years I was there, and. . .

GH: Was writing—writing and reading—were those activities that you enjoyed doing?

OG: Oh, I'd always—I'd always liked to read, and I'd always been a real avid reader. At Subiaco, Father Nicholas was the senior English teacher, and he had a list of books he thought you should read before you got out—before you graduated. And all the English teachers I had in high school were good, but there was one in the tenth grade that made us work crossword puzzles, which I didn't enjoy. Then my junior year was—I had a really good English teacher named Father Dennis Soerries. I remember reading *Our Town* and being real moved by that play when the girl dies and comes back and she's trying to get people to realize how—what a gift life is.

OG: Yeah, yeah, but, anyway, so it was a good experience for me. Oh, I had a great biology teacher, too, who is now dead—Father [Brendon? Maguire?]. Anyway,

so it was a real positive experience for me and a real nurturing experience. Then I went to Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, which is a small liberal arts college. And it was a much similar atmosphere, but then it was peace, love and rock ‘n’ roll, and, like, Larry Jegley, who went to Hendrix—he’s a prosecutor in Little Rock now—he made the statement that “Love, peace and rock ‘n’ roll, and there wasn’t anything you could catch that a shot wouldn’t kill.” [laughs]

GH: This was in, what, the early 1970s?

OG: Yeah. Because I started there in 1969—yeah, that’s right. And then when I graduated from Hen—oh, and I was on the school newspaper at Hendrix, too, *the Profile* [Editor’s note: Hendrix College’s newspaper is *the Profile*—with a lower case *t* in *the*.]—the college *Profile*—Jegley was the editor. There’s a woman that was on *the Profile* and on *The Troubador*, the yearbook, named Mary Ann Gwinn—she was in the “High Profile” thing recently. She won the Pulitzer Prize.

GH: Can you spell her last name?

OG: G-W-I-N-N. And she was, like, several weeks ago the “High Profile” person, and. . .

GH: Pulitzer Prize for. . .?

OG: Reporting. Newspaper reporting, and was at the *Seattle Times*, and it was kind of a fluke that she even got—it was for her work on the *Exxon Valdez* story. And she—you know, a lot of times, there’s, like, favored people in a newsroom, and it just—they needed to send four reporters to Alaska, and one of the favored reporters wasn’t there and couldn’t make it, so Mary Ann got to go, which is kind of a fluke [laughs]. But now she’s the book editor there. Anyway, so, I worked

on *the Profile* and—oh, David Terrell, who was a reporter at the [*Arkansas*]
Gazette for a long time . . .

GH: He worked at the *Democrat* before he worked at the *Gazette*.

OG: Oh, okay, okay, that's right. He might have been working at the *Democrat*—I'm pretty sure he's the one who got me to go interview for a job. And then there was this guy that worked there who went to the Southern Poverty Law Center. He was a copy editor at the *Democrat*. But, when I graduated, it was—oil embargo and stagflation—it really was hard to get a job. I mean, there was a hiring freeze on at the *Democrat*. Also, I knew Wally Hall because he was the roommate of—Wally Hall was the roommate of one of my best friends from Subiaco Academy, Jim Linbird.

GH: L-I-N-B-I-R-D?

OG: Yes. And he's the only guy that knocked me out in the boxing ring.

GH: Jim Linbird?

OG: Yeah. I was winning, too. I was winning—because I was a pretty good boxer. Linbird was one of those punchers. I mean, he could hit you one time; he was like a small Joe Louis. He was like a 160-pound Joe Louis. He could—he had fights that all they did was go out there and touch gloves and throw a few punches and he would hit them and that would be—the fight would be over. But I was winning; I was a much better boxer. Middleweight champion. I was the middleweight champion and then—and I was winning and then I got overconfident, kind of like when Billy Conn fought Joe Louis, he was winning, and got overconfident and got too close to him, and that's what I did. All of a sudden,

I saw this big white flash, and it collapsed into blackness and then I heard Father Nicholas saying my name over and over and [laughs] so, but I only lost four out of thirty-two bouts, and—do you want to hear about any of them?

GH: [Laughs] Let's go back to Hendrix. You graduated . . .

OG: Yeah, Hendrix.

GH: With a degree in?

OG: Philosophy and English. And I had—then I went to law school for one semester at Fayetteville—University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. And I really didn't want to go; I just went there to kind of please my father. You know, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. Then I inherited what was a pretty decent amount of money back then—inherited, like, \$15,000 from my maternal grandmother, so I went back to Hendrix, and I took all these classes I'd always wanted to take, and I did this thing where you go to school abroad for the summer—summer school abroad in England, and part of it was at Oxford, and part of it was at Cambridge, and anyway, so I had those experiences. Then I came back here and graduated again from Hendrix and left—you know, got out of there. So then I had enough—actually—formally graduated with a philosophy degree, but when I came back I got enough hours in English, and part of the idea was that I could be an English teacher. And I took a lot of those English courses I'd always wanted to take. When I started out at Hendrix I intended to be a biology major. I had really good science training at Subiaco. Then I changed to philosophy as my major and [laughs] and to find out what reality was. Okay, so then I graduated, and there just weren't any jobs, you know. Jimmy Carter was president and, like—that was

the 1973 oil embargo and stagflation [Editor's note: Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976]. . .

GH: Jobs you were looking for—were you looking for a newspaper job?

OG: Yeah. Yeah. I talked to David Terrell, and I talked to this other guy who was at the *Democrat*. I wouldn't remember his name. I think his name was Bill Stanton. He ended up going to work for that Southern Law Poverty Center with Morris Dees, and anyway, he was a copy editor, and Terrell was a political reporter.

GH: I believe he was.

OG: And he said, "Well, you know, you've got the background; you should try the newspaper business, and you worked on *the Profile*"—because David Terrell went to Hendrix, and he worked on *the Profile*, too. So I went there, and I interviewed with Jerry McConnell, and he was a really nice gentlemanly person. They told me that, too: that he was a great boss and they liked working for him. And he was almost apologetic. He said, "You have the background that we'd be looking for, for somebody to be a reporter here, but there's a hiring freeze on [.]" So, you know—just out of a sense of adventure—this friend of mine talked me into—we went to work in the oil fields of New Mexico. [20:18] I worked there in the oil fields about three or four months and there was an accident where I was—on the oil rig where I was working—and I got knocked off the floor by some hose—high pressure hose—and I thought, "I should be doing something less dangerous" [laughs]. Plus, there were a lot of people in the oil fields that were missing fingers and stuff, and I didn't want to lose any fingers. And so I went to the newspaper there, and I went in and—this is a good story. First, I went

in to be a typesetter. I don't know why I wanted to be a typesetter. I thought I could start out—I had no idea, like, how you start out at a newspaper. I thought you must start out, you know, being a typesetter [laughs], and they told me, “No. You've been to college. You need to go interview to be a reporter.” So there was this guy named Gil Henshaw. He was the editor—the paper was the *Hobbs Daily News-Sun*—and he was the editor. He'd gone to Suwanee, Tennessee, and then he asked me—he said, “Who wrote this? ‘[Let us] go then, you and I, when the evening is spread out across the sky like a patient etherized on a table?’” I said, “Well, that was the first line from [*The Love Song of*] *J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T. S. Eliot.” And he said, “I'm gonna hire ya.” [Laughter] Then we went and had a bit—then we went—and he liked to drink—and we went and had a—but he wasn't an alcoholic or anything. But he did like to drink, and we went and had a whole—like a pitcher of beer at the bowling alley or something. Then I had a job. I started working there. They had me cover—oh, I got to do everything. It was kind of like in that book *The Shipping News*—I can't remember who wrote that; she was the same one who wrote *Brokeback Mountain*—Proulx—but it was a lot like that. And also, what was real good for me—they let me do all kinds of things, and I did a good job. I got a lot of feedback, you know, and I even took pictures. Sometimes on the weekends I would be the sports editor. I did get in trouble one time because nobody in New Mexico cared about hockey, and there was a gap in the page on the sports page and I [laughs] ran a bunch of hockey statistics. The sports editor got real mad at me. Our big competitor was the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, so if you got beat on a story by the *Lubbock*

Avalanche-Journal, it was frowned upon. Do you want to hear much more about the *Hobbs*. . . ?

GH: How long were you there?

OG: I was there probably a year or a year-and-a-half. And when I'd been in school in England, I had met this real cute little Irish Catholic girl from New Jersey that was going to Bryn Mawr [College, Pennsylvania], and I wrote—you know, we corresponded heavily. She came to visit me in New Mexico, and she asked me to come to Massachusetts and—that's where she was working for a college in Massachusetts as, like, a recruiter. So I quit my job, gave away my German shepherd—and I had a house. I sold my house and ran off to Massachusetts, you know. When I was there I went into the *Berkshire Eagle* in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which is—you know, it's about like the *Pine Bluff Commercial* or something. I don't know what it's like now, but at that time it was considered a really good newspaper. It had an editorial writer that, I think, had won a Pulitzer Prize and had been a friend of the Kennedys. And it was supposed to be a real good place to work. Jeff Waggoner, who later worked at the *Democrat*—he moved to New York and stayed at one time, and he ended up working at the *Berkshire Eagle* for a while.

GH: Waggoner is W-A-G-G-O-N-E-R?

OG: Yes. And he—but anyway, it was in—I think Herman Melville might have worked there at one time. I worked in the Great Barrington Bureau [laughs] of the *Berkshire Eagle* as an obituary writer. That was kind of interesting because I've apparently got a strong southern accent, and those people in Massachusetts

have their own accent—very strong accent, I think. Sometimes I didn't understand what these funeral directors were saying, and I'd have to make them repeat it. I also had some people—there were a lot of these towns that were like North Adams, South Adams. And I had a few people being buried in the wrong town.

GH: The wrong direction?

OG: Yes. I'd have them being buried [laughs] in North Adams when they were really buried in South Adams, and some of those funeral directors got really mad. I had an immediate supervisor that was this woman named Carol Ciou. And I think it was spelled C-I-O-U. She was a real petite Italian woman. She was from Rhode Island, and she was very assertive. A couple of guys came in there to complain about me, and she really stuck up for me. She pretty much chased them out of the Great Barrington Bureau. Also, I really wasn't—I wasn't a full-time employee, so I didn't have benefits or anything, and I also worked as a waiter. Then I got a job as a dishwasher at night at Alice's Restaurant—the one that was in the movie with Arlo Guthrie. She had sold the original Alice's Restaurant and had this real fancy restaurant called Alice's at Avalock. It was right across from the Tanglewood, where they had the Tanglewood Music Festival, and they have famous conductors come there and conduct classical music. A lot of prominent people came in that—Arlo Guthrie came in one night—and just different people.

GH: Avalock. Is that a location?

OG: Yes, I think it was—or it was maybe a name she made up.

GH: A-V-A-L-O-C?

OG: [With a] “K.” I worked my way up from dishwasher. And I was a good dishwasher [laughs]. I worked my way up from dishwasher to table busser and then I got to split tips with the waiters. So I would go in and work—like, there was one stretch there where they hired me at the *Berkshire Eagle* while some guy was on vacation, so I’d work at the *Berkshire Eagle* as much as I could during the day and then I worked at Alice’s at night. I mean, I had all kinds of money. You know, I was single. But then this Peace Corps recruiter came through town and, you know, I didn’t feel like I was on the fast track, I mean, working part-time and freelancing for the *Berkshire Eagle*, and covering the Boy Scout pancake picnic and stuff like that. Because they’d let me do some really interesting things in New Mexico. I got to travel around with one of [President] Jimmy Carter’s kids—Chip Carter—when he came there, and [I] worked for [the] Associated Press in New Mexico. I took a picture that got some kind of, like, fourth place in a contest and just—you know, I got to see so many things at the Hobbs paper. It was really hard to break in [at the *Eagle*]—also, I wasn’t from that whole East Coast culture, and, like I said, I even had trouble understanding [laughs] people. So then I joined the Peace Corps, and I went to Oman—Sultanate of Oman— [29:42] and was an English teacher. I got training in teaching English as a foreign language. And that was good too, because it gave me a different perspective on all these verb tenses in English. And I had to learn Arabic. I did that for two years and then I came back—I was going to go back to Hobbs, but I realized how homesick I was. My sister was here—I had family in Arkansas—so I got a job at the paper in Fort Smith—*Southwest Times*—and. . .

GH: What year is this?

OG: This would be 1979.

GH: All right.

OG: And then Leroy Fry was the was the managing editor.

GH: F-R-Y?

OG: Yes. And he was a real nice guy. He was kind of like McConnell, a very gentlemanly guy and—do you want to hear the story [of] how I got this job?

GH: Sure.

OG: Well, I got back, and I didn't even have a car. I really wanted to get a job. And I did try the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, and there were no openings at that time. Then I found out about this job at the *Southwest Times Record*, and I called Leroy Fry and he said, "Get a way to get here. We'll talk to you next Tuesday or something." I said, "No, I'll be there. I'll catch the"—and I caught the bus and rode to Fort Smith—really—I definitely was eager. So I got the job and then I had some money, then I bought a car. It was a used Toyota station wagon [laughs] and—a Corolla station wagon—and moved up to Fort Smith and worked there. I was a general assignments reporter. Then I ended up covering county government and the courts. I also covered the federal courts there. I got a lot of good experience there on covering the courts. I also was the police beat reporter. I just never was a good police beat reporter. I had trouble relating to the cops—I hope it's not a pejorative word to call them cops—but I had a—I just never could relate to the cops. They kind of had their own culture, you know, kind of macho, and I think I was a little bit too much of an egg-head to cops. I had trouble getting

them to trust me with information. They did play a joke on me one time. They knew that I eavesdropped on them. Luckily, it didn't go as far as the thing that happened with Bob Sallee when—you know, have you heard that. . .?

GH: I've heard that story.

OG: But they told me that they had a body in a dumpster behind Sparks Medical Center, and the guy—turned out it was a fellow named [U.S. Representative from Arkansas] Oren Harris, who was a congressman. [laughs]

GH: Right.

OG: So then I ran back and told Leroy Fry—or whoever my editor was—Richard Break—and he ended up going to the *Daily Oklahoman*. “Oh, man, they found Oren Harris in the dumpster.” [Laughter] Then they called and told me it was a joke. I *did* get along with the sheriff real well—who Bill Clinton later put in a high position in state government—Cauthron, Bill. . .

GH: Bill Cauthron?

OG: Yes.

GH: C-A-U-T-H-R-O-N, I believe.

OG: Yes. And he and I kind of hit it off, and it was—and he was a real good source for me. I covered the prosecutor's office, and I got along well with them, too. There was some guy named Saxon—S-A-X-O-N—that ended up being the prosecutor years later. I got along real well with him. Then there was a guy who had gone to Hendrix with me named Lamar Porter. I just did better covering the courts because, you know, my grandfather had been a lawyer, my dad had been a lawyer—I'd been around that, and I was more interested in it than the police. . .

GH: How long were you at the Fort Smith paper?

OG: Gosh, I can't remember. Not more than a year.

GH: Now, did you hear of an opening at the *Democrat*?

OG: At the *Democrat*, yes.

GH: How did you hear about it?

OG: I think through David Terrell. I think it was through David Terrell or Bill Stanton. You know, I think it was through some people that I'd gone to Hendrix with. So I came down here, and I was interviewed by Bill Husted.

GH: H-U-S-T-E-D.

OG: Yes. He was kind of a character. He wore, like, motorcycle boots, and he was bald. What hair he had was red, and he had a red beard. He was kind of a character, and he decided that he was going to hire me and . . .

GH: And Bill was the city editor, I believe.

OG: Yes, he was the city editor. And he was married to this really nice woman, Amanda Husted, who was real pretty, I thought. She had real thick blond hair, and she was extremely nice. So I came down here, and I forget—it was a big raise in salary. It was, like, from \$160 a week to [laughs] \$190 a week. So I came down here. At first I did police beat, and my big competition was with Mark Oswald. I knew him because of, you know, from the Catholic influence. He had brothers that were priests and all that, and he had just gotten married. Anyway, he was my big competition in the police beat. He had kind of bonded with the Little Rock Police, and, like I said, I was never really totally at ease around cops. I really—there are some really good police officers, but I really

don't like cops' culture. Anyway, I guess I don't fit in with that.

GH: Were you working a day shift covering police?

OG: Night, 3:00 [p.m.] to 11:00 [p.m.]. [36:54] It was David Terrell's wife this time—by now, David Terrell's wife was working at the *Gazette*—Pam Murphy. I don't know if they were just dating or living together, but they ended up getting married later. She covered the Pulaski County Courthouse, and I think Terrell got a job with a U.S. senator as a public relations person, so they moved to Washington, DC, and I got moved over to the Pulaski County Courthouse.

GH: Pam was covering the courthouse for the *Democrat*.

OG: Yes. I got about—she was really in a hurry to get out of town, and I got about two days [of] training. Oh, and I was the police beat person, too. You were my boss, my supervisor. You must have been an assistant city editor?

GH: Yes.

OG: And there was a—we had a police beat reporter. He was kind of a heavyset guy. I can't remember his name, but he got along real well. . .

GH: Clay Bailey.

OG: Yes. He got along real well with the police, and they told him all kinds of things. I mean, this wasn't even that big of a story, but there was something about some police officers who shot a rabbit. They were goofing around on duty, and they shot this rabbit, and something was going to happen in that, and you told me to really be watching out for that. And the *Gazette* beat me on it. At that time, the newspaper war was going on full-fledged, so it was really bad to get beat on *anything*.

GH: Even on a rabbit shooting story. [Laughter]

OG: A rabbit shooting story! [Laughter] And I was real embarrassed and everything. I came in there, and I reported in to you, and you were kind of stern with me. You said, “Well, how does it feel, Omar, to get beaten?” And I said, “Not good.” [Laughter] I think we were too serious because I think you were a pretty competitive person academically at Catholic High. I’ve always heard those stories. Didn’t you get a scholarship to go to Notre Dame [University, Notre Dame, Indiana]?

GH: Yes.

OG: Yes. And I know—so you were very competitive, you know, and so you were pretty stern, probably the way you would learn to be from Father Tribou. And I did feel like I was kind of being called into the principal’s office [laughs]. In fact, I was so freaked out about missing that story—I was so panic-stricken about missing that story that I actually packed up my Toyota station wagon and was thinking about leaving town. I thought I was disgraced—you know, having missed—it was like, whatever was going to happen next to these police officers for shooting the rabbit on duty. But when I went to the courthouse, I really took to that. I knew how to relate to the people in the courthouse, and I covered a lot of big trials—capital murder trials. I really tried to develop an interesting style of writing and write in the—Ray Hobbs, too—I worked with him a lot. He liked the way I wrote up these courthouse stories. And I got people there where they’d tell me all kinds of stuff. My competitor was George Bentley from the *Gazette*, and he had been there a long time. The competition was so tight that he got to where

he couldn't interview anybody, and he *loved* that sort of—he kind of considered himself the dean of the courthouse and everything. And a lot of people knew him, but he had a—can I go into stuff like this?

GH: Sure.

OG: I thought he had a slightly self-righteous attitude about him. I was a lot friendlier. And a lot of people would come, and he would interview them in the coffee shop. Well, he got to where he couldn't interview people because I'd come up and say, "Now, when you get through talking to George—I'm a reporter, too, and I want to talk to you about whatever you were talking about to him." [Laughs] And that just incensed him, you know. But then he started [laughs] interviewing people out in his car. And there was [laughs] one time he was interviewing—he always had a little economy car of some kind, but he was kind of a big guy. I went out there and I tapped on the window of the car, and I said, "When you get through talking to him, I want to talk to you." [Laughter] That just made him go ballistic, you know, he didn't think that was—he said I was unethical. But the competition was so bad. It was just—and I didn't, you know, after that—I mean, you had shamed me pretty good about missing the shot rabbit story—the police killing the rabbit—police kill rabbit story. The pressure was on you to not get beaten by the *Gazette*. Also, Chuck Heinbockel [41:58] covered for the *Gazette*. He covered the courthouse. It was me and Bob Sallee. And I never saw Bob Sallee. He covered county government. He had a lot of people that told him things, too. We were pretty competitive with the *Gazette*. If we weren't better, we were—we were *very* competitive with the *Gazette* covering county government in the court.

So I covered the court. I did get beat on one story by Chuck Heinbockel, and it was some guy that had been secretary of state or something. I can't remember his name now, but I just remember looking on the docket, and his first name was Sam. I can't remember what his last name was, but it just said, "Theft of property." And I didn't—you know, we didn't cover theft cases, but I think Heinbockel had been—he really chummed up to Chris Piazza, who was a deputy prosecutor. They got along real well. They both liked jazz. Also, Piazza didn't like the *Democrat*. He didn't like the editorial policies of the *Democrat*. I think he was more liberal in his outlook and everything, and he—so he would tell Heinbockel things he wouldn't tell me, and it was his case of the state official. They ushered the guy in there at 8:00 in the—real early in the morning. He pled guilty, left out the back door, and he didn't go to prison; he got probation or something and had to pay restitution. And Heinbockel had that story, and I didn't.

GH: Did you run into a problem with news sources that considered the *Gazette* to be more serious newspaper and would go to them first?

OG: Yes. They would. But the thing is is that I just wasn't going to let that be done to me. I made a *big* effort at relating to the people on the beat. And I'm interested in people, anyway. Where George Bentley and Heinbockel would kind of sit around in the coffee shop, I'd run around to all these offices. I got to know these people. I got to know if they liked cats, if they liked dogs—you know, if they were proud of their child. Dale Evans, the case coordinator for Judge Langston, was a big health enthusiast and worked out and ran. I even got people that at first

always favored the *Gazette*. I got them to where if George was onto something, they'd tell me, and that really made him mad because I had people in the court's office that—they'd say, "Here, Omar, you need to see this. George Bentley was looking at it." You know. Heinbockel and I got along pretty well. Can I say what I really feel?

GH: Yes.

OG: I thought he was a little lazy. You know, he just kind of—he kind of coasted on that—that people would read the *Gazette*, whereas we had to work for it. So he kind of coasted on that. I thought I put more color in things like that. A lot of his stories were, I thought, boring.

GH: Did you write your stories—was there still a pressroom at that time? Or did you have to go back to the office to write?

OG: Yes. There was a pressroom, but the problem was—I think the *Gazette* people—we shared it with them. I didn't want them knowing what I was doing, so I'd come back to the *Democrat*. And *they* [the *Gazette*] had computers. They had computers at their desks, and we had IBM Selectric [laughs] typewriters. We fed our stories—because it was on old cheap newsprint paper—some kind of old brown paper. You fed it into this scanner. Sometimes the scanner would just eat your story. It wouldn't scan it into the computer, it would just, like, destroy [laughs] your story—destroy the paper that your story was written on. You'd be on deadline and everything, but luckily, by remembering, you could pretty much rewrite it.

GH: Did you have—when you came back to the newsroom, did you actually have a

desk, or did you have to . . . ?

OG: Yes. I had a desk. I'm pretty sure that I had a desk. I worked real hard, and I really enjoyed it. It was one of the most fun times in my life, working there. The big thing then, though—because of Starr emphasizing state politics . . .

GH: John Robert Starr.

OG: Yes. John Robert Starr emphasizing state politics to the elite—sort of the elite crew—this was the impression I had—got to cover the state capitol. So something happened where I could go to the state capitol. Should I put in there about getting married to Jan in the newsroom?

GH: Sure.

OG: Well, there was this woman working there on the copydesk, Jan Cottingham. I had seen her at Hendrix, but I didn't really know who she was, and so she and I went out for a beer, then we—God, we didn't date long at all; we only dated, like, about six weeks or something—the end of November—then we got married—so we dated from about the end of November to February of 1980, when we got married. We got married in John Robert Starr's office. Judge John Purtle, who was a character—Supreme Court judge—Arkansas Justice John Purtle, who later had all kinds of controversy. He was charged with the crime of insurance fraud. I think Bill Wilson represented him, who's now a federal judge. Beth Deere is now a federal magistrate. She was an intern at Wilson's law firm, and I know Purtle was acquitted. But . . .

GH: What possessed you and Jan Cottingham to get married in Starr's office? Did you have a close relationship with Starr? Or did you just think it would be something

unique or. . . ?

OG: [48:36] Yes. I thought it would be kind of unique, and also, it was kind of a rushed thing. Getting married was a pretty impulsive kind of thing. In fact, it was—we were at some party. We partied a lot, too, because we were all young. I think we were living what we thought was the two-fisted drinking [Ernest] Hemingway lifestyle of journalists. I went to parties sometimes that lasted until 4:00 in the morning. We were sitting in my used Toyota Corolla station wagon and just decided to get married. A lot of my friends from Subiaco were very happily married, and they were the same age I was. They were starting to have kids and things like that, so, to me, it seemed like a good thing to do. We got married in John Robert Starr's office, and it was on television. Starr would do anything to get publicity for the newspaper, so he called people at the TV stations—and he got John Purtle to do it. He's the one that got John Purtle to be the official that married us. I remember I drank a whole lot of—somebody—maybe you said, or Wally Hall—somebody in the newsroom had some Chivas—anyway, I don't know how you say it.

GH: Scotch.

OG: Scotch. [Laughs]

GH: I remember the scotch.

OG: Yes. So I drank a big glass of scotch because I was pretty nervous about getting married. We got married in John Robert Starr's office, and he gave us one day off to go on our honeymoon. So we went to [laughs] Eureka Springs. And he thought he was really doing us a favor. He gave us a free day off that we hadn't

earned—you know, that we weren't entitled to in terms of our employment contracts. He thought he was really being generous about doing that. Then I was at the state capitol, and our big competitor was John Brummett. Man, he was like a pig in shit over there; he really was. He fit in. That was his milieu: to be a capitol reporter. He would go out and socialize and drink with the legislators. He was very hard to beat, or not get beaten by, on a story. So I came out there, and it was me, Alyson—she was then Alyson LaGrossa. She was young. I mean, she was a kid, but she had really good judgment and was clued into how everything worked out there. Meredith Oakley, I think, had been there before me. She was—she was an editor by now and writing a column. I was trying to think—oh, the third person out there—but I mostly—oh, Ed Phillips. He was kind of a character. At one point, he didn't own a car, but he lived near the capitol, so he'd walk to the capitol. At one point he hurt his knee, but he couldn't afford to get medical treatment. [Laughs] He was in his twenties, and he was walking with a cane. Now he and Brummett—I think they got to be too good of friends. We'd be out covering the governor's race, and Brummett and Ed Phillips would ride in the same car together—things like that. Ed was sure he'd get fired for that if he got caught. But they were kind of buddies. Oh, and then Bob Sallee was my editor at this point—who I'd worked with at the county courthouse. He would send me off on some pretty wild tangents. There was one time—is this okay to?

GH: Sure.

OG: Yes. Because I really liked him, and he was—now he was really big on, like,

there was some kind of conspiracy going on all the time. He did believe that there was a group called the Illuminati. They were kind of controlling the entire world behind the scenes, and there was a [laughs]—at one time, there was a book about the Illuminati. I think they were controlling banking and politics. Anyway, I remember one time we were having lunch—it wasn't in the capitol, but it was in some place over near where the *Democrat* where a lot of people would go. I said, “Sallee, there's no such thing as the Illuminati.” And I said it pretty loud, and he'd go, “Shhh!” You know, he didn't want anybody hearing him. So he actually believed in the Illuminati, and he was always believing that there were some conspiracies going on in county government all the time. There was one time he kind of got in trouble for something he did over there. I can't even remember now. But he was kind of a character. He was always telling me to “Get to the bottom of this!” Because he [laughs] always thought there was some kind of [laughs] conspiracy underlying whatever was happening. But the good thing is he was real disorganized. He'd get off on some other tangent with another reporter, and you could ignore his commands. . .

GH: Assignments.

OG: Yes, his assignments to “get to the bottom of these things.” And there was one time—and he had all these quirky sources. He had some source that was on the State Cosmetology Board. Back then, we would cover almost anything so that we—the *Gazette* was doing the same thing; we'd cover all these meetings and stuff that wouldn't be covered now. And he [Sallee] said, “There's gonna be a big shakeup, Omar, on the State Cosmetology Board, and I want you over there

covering it.” I didn’t think that was very important, but I was told to do it. I tried to get out of it several times. Anyway, I ended up staying the whole day at the State Cosmetology Board, and there was, indeed, some kind of shakeup. There was some kind of internecine warfare going on at the State Cosmetology Board, and I wrote that up. Oh, I didn’t—and I’m sorry to go back, but when I was covering the state’s—the Pulaski County Courthouse. One of the cases that happened was Mary Lee Orsini, but then I got transferred to the state capitol before all that worked its way out. I don’t think I got to cover the grand jury. [Editor’s note: In 1983 Mary Lee Orsini was convicted of murdering her husband, Ron Orsini. The conviction was overturned, but Mary Lee was then convicted for murdering her defense attorney’s wife, Alice McArthur. Orsini was given a life sentence, and she died in prison in 2003.]

GH: Actually, I covered the grand jury. [Laughter]

OG: Okay. So I didn’t get to cover the grand jury. [56:08] But anyway, the State Cosmetology Board—so there was, indeed, some kind of, you know, squabble going on there, and we reported it. I think Sallee might have put it on the front page or on the Arkansas page, which is like the front page of the inside of the paper. He gave it prominent play in the paper. Then there was something important that happened. There was always stuff about the highway needing repair in Arkansas, and that they needed to—but the trucking interests were always beating down legislation to make them pay their fair share of the damage they did on the roads, and that was a big deal. So there was some big truck weight story, and Brummett beat me on it. I remember walking in—and he used

to sit at his desk with his feet propped up on the desk, smoking a cigarette. I came in there—and he can be real sarcastic. He said, “Great scoop on the Cosmetology Board, Omar” [laughs]. He had had some big front-page story again. Then we had to explain how he’d beaten us on it, but I know what he’d done: he’d gone out drinking with the people that let him—you know, at that time the big watering hole was Buster’s—Buster’s and Slick Willy’s down at the train station. Anyway, he beat me on it. It wasn’t that big of a deal, now that I look back at it, but at the time it was a genuine controversy in the legislature.

GH: Was this Bill Clinton’s first term, or was Frank White the governor?

OG: Frank White was the governor. Frank White seemed to take to me, and he liked our paper better because it was more conservative editorially, and they liked him, you know. Can I get some more coffee? You want some more?

[Tape Stopped]

GH: We’re back after a short break.

OG: Okay. I had really been more comfortable covering the courthouse. My editor when I was at the courthouse was Ray Hobbs, and he and I got along real well. He was a real hard worker. He stayed there and worked a lot of hours. He liked the way I wrote. Also, he and I would, you know, figure out which word sounded better in a sentence and things like that. We got along real well, and I liked him and respected him. I thought he was a nice person. He was a real dedicated father, too. I liked that about him. He was very dedicated. His kids were toddlers or something. His oldest, I think, was Ray, Jr. He was a devoted father to his kids, and I liked that about him. He also liked to party a little bit, and he

was—you know, we were all pretty young. Sometimes he'd come to these parties and bring his kids, and that's how I got to know who they were. But anyway—well, I can't remember anybody else. Oh! My editor, Meredith Oakley, when I was. . .

GH: I believe she was the political editor.

OG: Yes. And I was pretty scared of her. She was so intense, and also she was kind of Starr's favorite in the newsroom. She could be real mercurial. One day she could be in a great mood; the next day she could be real negative. She had authority, really, that was even beyond her position. So I was never at ease with her, but she seemed to like me. One time she wrote a column about [how] I was a nice guy, but that I didn't have any problem asking the hard questions. And Alyson helped me a lot because she really understood how all the legislative committees worked, and she showed me how to put the stuff together. We got the daily record at that time there were some thing that [I didn't understand?], and she showed me how to. . .

GH: The *Legislative Digest*.

OG: That's what it was. That's what it was. She showed me how to do that. She just really had a handle on how everything worked and the practicalities of it and, you know, what was important and what wasn't. She and I worked together real well. We got in, like, one argument the whole time. I felt bad because I made her cry. She bought me a book about controlling anger [laughs]. It was called *The Dance of Anger*, and it really was a good book. It was a real popular book at that time, and I passed it on—passed on the good karma to other people. But I did like her,

and liked working with her. Frank White was governor, and he would say—he would stick his foot in his mouth, like when he signed some creation science bill without even reading it—without even knowing what it was about, actually. Then he would want to alter what he'd said later in the day, so we got to where we—I think Alyson covered him more than I did. She got to where she pretty much tape recorded what he said. He was a very likeable guy, and he was real outgoing, but he never could—and I have a relatively unusual name—but he never could—he called me Doug. He called me Doug the whole time he was. . .

GH: Doug?

OG: Yes. And I don't know where he got Doug Greene. I think there was a writer for the Chicago paper or something named Doug Green. I don't know, but he called me Doug Greene the whole time I was covering him and then Clinton—that's when he had his comeback. Frank White had beaten him, and I think that was a big setback for Clinton. He was making his comeback race against Frank White. Alyson, Ed Phillips and I got to cover that, and we were on the road—I was on the road for a long time with Jim Guy Tucker, and I knew he'd been a really tough prosecutor. Plus, back then, when he was young, he was kind of scrappy. There was always this story that there was some big All-American tackle [football player] at Fayetteville—have you heard this?

GH: Lloyd Phillips?

OG: Yes. Have you heard the story? They had gotten in a big fight.

GH: Yes.

OG: And he was very intense. Jim Guy Tucker was. Then, he didn't have much of a

sense of humor. You know, he was pretty serious.

GH: This was in 1982.

OG: Yes. Must have been. Yes, that was it. So I was assigned to him for a while, then I was assigned to Frank White. It was kind of funny. I'd be standing out there at, like, 4:00 in the morning because they'd charter these planes—Central Plane Flying Service. I'd be out there—and I'm not a morning person. I'd be drinking black coffee trying to wake up. I remember there was one time old Frank White came up and slapped me on the back, "How's it going, Doug? Good morning!" [Laughs] He slapped me on the back so hard that I spilled my coffee. He never did figure out that my name wasn't Doug. I think it embarrassed Gay White [his wife] a little bit. She's a real Southern lady and everything.

GH: She knew you.

OG: She knew my name was Omar, [laughter] yes. But he thought I was Doug, man. And Joe Purcell—I flew around with him in the plane. Actually, they had him fly in a separate plane because they didn't want anybody to know that he was diabetic—that he had some health problems. He had to have insulin injections, so they had him fly in some separate plane. That was a story that I broke, and I felt bad about it because he was such a nice man, but, you know, that was my job. Oh, and then—we didn't have computers or anything, we had—you had to call your story in. There was this lady named Mabel Berry. She was kind of a character, too. It was kind of like in those movies where you had the rewrite person. I got to where I could do that—scribble and outline—while I was in the plane. I was supposed to call in a story every time they made a speech and stuff.

So the plane would land in Texarkana or something, and then they'd fly to north Arkansas. Each time I would call Mabel, and then she would critique my story for me. She'd say, "You need to move this line up here" [laughs].

GH: Mabel was the head clerk on the city desk and had been there for decades.

OG: Forever, yes. Mabel Berry. She was from Redfield, Arkansas. One of her hobbies was to—she made molasses every year or something. Whatever this was she made . . .

GH: Sorghum.

OG: That's what it was. It was famous. In its own little setting, it was well-known. Anyway, she *would* improve my story. I'd say, "Well, what do you think of that lead?" And she'd say, "No. I'd say it this way, Omar." And she would improve it. And I got along real well with her. I liked her a lot. Can I go into, like, some culture of what it was?

GH: Culture of the newsroom?

OG: Yes.

GH: Sure.

OG: Like I said, we were all pretty young, so there were a lot of parties. And there were all these rumors about who was having an affair with whom or who was dating whom. I think dating [laughs] back then was to go to a bar or something or go to one of these parties with somebody. There were a lot of stories about things that I don't necessarily—there were a lot of stories about people's social lives that I don't—I don't know how much truth there was to them. This was kind of interesting. Jan and I had a party. We lived in this duplex townhouse kind of

place, and it was a good house to have a party in. We had this big party one time, and there was a guy—I don't know if he worked at the *Gazette* or the *Democrat*, but his name was Carl Marks.

GH: Carl Marks works—he worked for the *Democrat*.

OG: Oh. Okay. And he was kind of. . .

GH: I think it was M-A-R-K-S.

OG: Yes. Yes. I don't think it was like. . .

GH: Right. I think it was C-A-R-L, I believe.

OG: Yes. And he—we came downstairs that morning, and he was still asleep on [laughs] our couch. And, like I said, some of those parties would last until 4:00 in the morning.

GH: some of the parties?

OG: Yes. Yes. There was a woman that I liked a whole lot, Karen Taylor, from Clarksville. I liked her a lot. I thought she was a real confident editor. I think she works for the New Orleans paper now, or she did at one time.

GH: [1:08:07] I think she left the *Democrat* for the New Orleans paper. She was an assistant city editor.

OG: Yes. She was beautiful. She had jet black hair and big blue eyes. She was not one bit stuck up or—she was pretty intellectual. She didn't think of herself—I don't think her looks were the biggest thing, you know. She had a lot of intellectual curiosity. She read a lot of different things. She was also Catholic, and she had some connections to Subiaco from growing up in Clarksville.

GH: Right. What was your relationship—did you have a relationship with Starr?

OG: Oh, I was kind of scared of him. He was like Meredith, but with even more authority. Like, there was one week he came up and threw his arms around me and said I was the best political reporter he'd ever had. Then two or three days later, Ray Hobbs told me, "Write your story from out at the capitol, Omar. Don't come to the newsroom 'cause Starr says he's gonna fire you." And it was over some metro brief, you know, and he had taken it, cut it out of the paper, and put it on the bulletin board and said, "Whoever wrote this does not deserve to call himself a professional journalist." And I don't even think it was about anything that important.

GH: A metro brief is a short story that—there were three or four short stories formed a column down the left hand side of the front page of the B section.

OG: Yes. And it might have been two—it might have, at the most, been three paragraphs or something. I might have turned in a fairly lengthy story and then it was boiled down to that, but I don't know why he got so upset about that. There was one time when I was covering the county courthouse [when] he got mad at Leslie Newell and fired her—she's now Leslie Newell Peacock and works at the *Arkansas Times*.

GH: Right.

OG: She was real sassy to him. We'd have these staff meetings—and people were pretty intimidated, generally intimidated by John Robert Starr, but she wasn't intimidated by him. He said something about wetbacks one time, and she called him on that—the political [in]correctness of using that term. There was a woman—her last name was Trujillo—that worked there. She was Gene Nail's

girlfriend, and I think they might have gotten married later. Leslie called him on that in front of everybody about, you know—“You might have hurt Miss Trujillo’s feelings using that word. That’s kind of a derogatory word, to call somebody a wetback and everything.” He was real embarrassed. And she did some other things like that to him. She eventually ended up getting fired. My wife, Jan, liked her a lot and was going to have a party for Leslie. Starr called Jan into his office and chewed her out and made her cry and told her it was a shitty thing that she was going to have this going away party for Leslie. Jan came out there, and she was crying. I got all mad, and I was going to go in there and whip Starr’s ass—I was really furious. This might have been not too long after the metro brief [laughs]. No, no, it couldn’t have been, because you said I was the political reporter.

GH: Yes.

OG: But anyway, I’d kind of had enough of his bullying people. I’ve never really liked bullies—from being bullied in junior high. And when I was a big jock in high school, I never bullied people. Even though there was a hazing tradition at Subiaco at that time—I don’t think they allow it now. My freshman year at Subiaco, these two big guys from Slovak Arkansas, had dangled me out of the fourth floor dormitory and told me if I yelled, they’d let go, and stuff like that. They had me by the legs, so I was facing down. I remember seeing the principal’s station wagon down there four stories. If they did let go of me, I was going to hit that station wagon. Then, I weighed, like, 112 pounds, but then I grew a whole lot. By the next year I weighed 150, and I had done all this off-season football

and gotten pretty strong. And I never did pick on anybody. In fact, there was—I intervened on the behalf of people when there was this—I knocked this guy's teeth out for picking on a kid one time. Everybody was terrified of this guy because he had flunked a couple of grades, and he had hair on his chest and underarm hair at the time. He looked like a man. He was about my size, but he looked so much older. People were scared of him, and he was a big bully. He was bullying this kid when we came out of dinner one night. I tapped him on the shoulder, and when he turned around, I hit him as hard as I could right in the mouth, and I knocked his two front teeth out.

GH: When Starr did this, did you have the same mindset?

OG: Yes. Yes. Starr had punched that same button. I had enough of him bullying everybody, and I was just going to go in there and kick his ass. I was in really good shape then. I ran every day and still shadowboxed and stuff. I have no doubt that I wouldn't have kicked his little, fat ass. He was short and fat and not in good shape, you know. And I was truly going to go in there and kick his ass. At that point, that's the way I was. It was like, I'm really easy going and everything, but there was a point to which you could push me, just like that guy at Subiaco that I knocked his teeth out. I'd seen him bully people—he didn't mess with me because I was a boxer and a football player and was in great shape and everything. He would have liked to, but he knew he couldn't mess with me. It was like something finally just snapped, and it was like that, too, in boxing. As soon as the bell rang, it was like I had this mindset—it was almost like I was an automaton or something, you know. It was, like, all this stuff about being nice

and kind and everything would all go out the window. One thing—boxing was fighting for your very survival. Father Nick would take us to Springfield, Missouri, and we'd fight federal prisoners. We'd fight guys that were in the army. I remember when I was fourteen he put me in there with a nineteen-year-old guy that was in the army. And he had this code—I'm getting very tangential. He would say, "You have an easy fight tonight." That meant you got to fight another kid—a kid your age, a high school kid. Now, "You've got a hard fight tonight" meant that you were having to fight a grown man in the army, in the job corps, or a prisoner. And if it was—if you'd have to use all your skill, you knew you were barely going to survive, that it was some guy that had had, like, 100 fights or something. And Limbird—he put my friend, Jim Limbird in there, and he told him he was going to have to—"Use all your skills, Limbird." And he made him fight this guy that was, like, the champion of a whole division in the U.S. Navy or something. I think Limbird beat him, or if he did lose, it was only by a split decision. But anyway, [1:16:09] that's what had happened. It was like the bell rang, and it was just like this was the final straw. He'd made my young wife cry. Jan was a pretty tough newswoman, you know. She could cuss like a sailor. She was not easily intimidated, but he'd made her cry, and he'd fired Leslie, who I liked, and all this other stuff. So something just rang in my head, and I was going to go in there and kick his ass. I really was. And Bob Sallee and Damon Thompson, who were a lot bigger than me—Bob Sallee was a big, stout dude—they actually had to hold me down. They held me down on a desk until I calmed down and told me, "You'll go to jail if you do this. You'll lose your job.

You might kill him. You might seriously injure him.” And all that kind of stuff.
So they calmed me down and then I didn’t do that.

GH: This wasn’t near the end of your time with the newspaper. Right?

OG: No. I think that might have been when I was covering . . .

GH: That was still when you were at the courthouse.

OG: Yes.

GH: Okay.

OG: And—because Damon and I—later, when Sallee moved up to being an editor,
Damon and I ended up . . .

GH: Damon covered the county government.

OG: Yes, and I covered the courts.

GH: All right.

OG: And I liked him a lot, too. I think he went off to Washington and got some type
of government job. He and I got along well, too. Man, he was skinny. He never
ate out, and he just ate some of the crummiest food. He ate whatever was [laughs]
on sale. And he always had money, you know. He’d buy these old clunker cars
and drive them until they caved in.

GH: The salary scale was still pretty . . .

OG: Oh, I remember there was one year there—I made \$11,000 or \$12,000 one year,
and Jan made about the same. You could live on it. Our rent was \$200 a month,
you know. We had a house over there near—first we rented a house over near
Mount Saint Mary. That was a good party house. We had some good parties
there, you know. Then we rented a duplex. But anyway—do I need to speed up?

GH: I'm just checking the tape.

OG: Oh. Okay.

GH: I was going to ask you, when we were talking about salaries and overtime—when you were there, did the time cards come into existence about that time?

OG: Yes. We had time cards, and I think it was—Emily Sneddon worked there, too. She was pretty—she's a partner in a law firm.

GH: A Little Rock law firm.

OG: Yes, a Little Rock law firm that's pretty—a fairly prominent law firm. They had that old Rimmel Building, and they fixed it up. Anyway, Emily was there, and I think she covered the Conway bureau with Larry Ault. I think Larry Ault had a big crush on her but could never get anywhere with Emily. They covered Conway. She went to college, too. She was going to Hendrix and working at the newspaper at one time, or maybe she quit when she went back to school. But anyway—oh, I don't know how I got off on that.

GH: I was talking about time cards.

OG: Oh, yes, the time cards. She was always incensed that we were paid a certain amount, but they weren't following the federal labor laws. Should I go into all this?

GH: It just marked the change in how the newsroom operates.

OG: Okay. So she was always angry about that. And there were several other people. I don't know who turned the papers in. I suspected it was Emily, but I'm not sure. She was very outspoken about it and—oh, there was this little, feisty, blond woman who worked there. She and Starr had an on-again, off-again—where he'd

be almost like a mentor and a father to her, then he would be down on her. She married a real nice guy, but he . . .

GH: Elizabeth Shores.

OG: Elizabeth Shores, yes. And I liked. . .

GH: Elizabeth F. Shores.

OG: Yes, yes. She was—and I think she'd gone to some East Coast pretty prominent school. She was very feisty. She and Starr—it was sort of a love-hate thing, you know. He would mentor her for a while, then they'd get into it. Then she'd be on the shit list and—oh, I don't know how I got off on that—getting older. What were we talking about?

GH: As I recall, there was—I don't know if you want to call . . .

OG: She was kind of outspoken about that, too, if I remember right.

GH: The overtime pay issue came to a head, and there was a complaint filed with the Labor Department.

OG: Yes, yes. So the paper had to settle with a lot of people because the Labor Department intervened—to have them pay all your—I mean, write down all your hours that you've worked overtime. They basically—if I remember right, they settled for so many cents on the dollar with the lawyer for the paper from the Wright firm. I think the Wright firm represented the *Democrat* in that. I remember talking to some woman lawyer there [] whatever, you know, and I got a pretty good check.

GH: I think the lawyer was Annabelle Clinton . . .

OG: Might have been.

GH: . . . who—was she on the Supreme Court?

OG: Yes. Yes, she was the first woman ever bonafidely elected.

GH: Right.

OG: It's kind of funny, because I ended up being her law clerk later when I graduated from law [laughs] school.

GH: During all this time . . .

OG: I always thought that was stupid. I thought if you were—I felt like you were professional, and—I'm a lawyer now, and I'm on a salary. I probably make in this job, which is a federal job—and I don't have to do any administrative things [] the law firm or anything. I still work fifty-five hours a week often. You know, I'll end up staying up all night every now and then on a brief or something. And I just always felt like, "If you're a professional, you shouldn't be on a time clock." And that was my attitude. I told somebody that—maybe that labor person.

GH: So you—going into the newspaper business, you knew you weren't going to be making much money.

OG: Yes. Yes. I just thought of myself as being a salaried person. And I know, like, [] stuff with time, they really discouraged you—they had time cards, and they really discouraged overtime, but I would work overtime there, you know, and only put in that I'd worked forty hours. And I did the same thing at the *Democrat*, and I know a lot of people did. One thing, the newspaper war was going on, and you didn't want to be beaten on anything. The scuttlebutt always was that the *Gazette* didn't mind paying overtime and that Walter Hussman did

[laughs]. See, I don't know. I think a lot of things were attributed to the business side of the paper that maybe Starr or somebody—I just don't know, but there a lot of things that were—you'd get communication—you know, it was like office gossip. It was like urban legend stuff like alligators in the sewers. I know everybody was terrified of Jean Bradley.

GH: She was the business manager.

OG: Yes, yes, and a woman.

GH: Jean. J-E-A-N.

OG: Is she still there?

GH: Yes.

OG: Yes. And everybody was terrified of her. It was like, if you went to her, you felt like the cowardly lion going into the hall of Oz. That's who you got your expenses reimbursed by and things like that. She was never anything but really sweet to me and nice to me, but there'd be these people, you know—"If you put that overtime in, you're going to have to go talk to Jean Bradley about it" or something. People would just quake, and I don't [laughs] know why, because she was really—I've never experienced anything with her but that she's a nice woman. In fact, there were some times she kind of helped me out on travel expenses. She'd say, "Well, you should be reimbursed for this. You shouldn't have to pay for that." You know, like when I'd go on the road on the governor's race. So I don't know how all that—I'm not exactly sure what the source of that was. [1:25:29] There was one time when I was working there that we got some kind of check for overtime and then when I left—oh, yes, this is interesting.

When I was working at the capitol and I had this promise to [Jan Cottingham] my wife that—because then the thing to do was to work for the *Gazette*. That was the pinnacle of Arkansas journalism because they won the Pulitzer, they were supposed to treat their employees—they got paid better. They were supposed to be more genteel in the way they—more civil in the way they dealt with their employees. I always thought that I was a pretty good reporter and that I would get the first job at the *Gazette*. At that time, they wouldn't let—it was my understanding they wouldn't let one spouse work for one paper [and the other spouse work for the other paper]. But then Jan got the first job at the *Gazette*, so I kept my word, and I quit. I remember Starr and Meredith Oakley were mad at me. I had to go over and talk to them about it, and they said, “Well, they're getting two for one, Omar,” referring to the *Gazette*, you know. And I was out of work.

GH: Had you applied at the *Gazette*?

OG: Yes, I had applied at one time. I went over there. I was really nervous that anybody would—you know, that I would be seen going over there, and maybe I would get fired. I think I didn't do too well on—they made you take some kind of test, and the test was pretty hokey. I went in there, and I think I didn't do well on the test. I was pretty nervous about even being in the *Gazette* newsroom. I felt like—I don't know. I'm trying to think of a metaphor. I was like a cat surrounded by dogs or something. I was really nervous. Then Meredith—Meredith—I can't remember her name. She's a stockbroker now. She was an education writer and got some award for education writing. Do you remember

her?

GH: Was it Marion Fulk?

OG: Marion Fulk. That's right. It was Marion Fulk. She was working there, and she came up and encouraged me and everything.

GH: She was working at the *Gazette*.

OG: Yes. She had. . .

GH: She had formerly been at the *Democrat*.

OG: She'd won some kind of school bell award, or some kind of award.

GH: That's right.

OG: She had won some kind of award. I guess—I wonder then—maybe that's when Cynthia Howell became the education writer.

GH: Probably.

OG: You know—and, of course, that's history—that she's a great education writer and knows all that stuff inside and out. And I always liked her, too. I always got along real well with her and respected her. But anyway, so I was—and Carrick Patterson was the person who hired you [*Gazette* employees] over there at the time. He was very nice to me, very encouraging, and made me feel like I should be trying to get a job there. But anyway, Jan got the job over there as a copy editor, and then I went in and resigned at the *Democrat* because both papers had the policy that spouses couldn't work at the respective papers.

GH: I think I'm going to turn this tape to the other side. I think it's about finished, and rather than chance it—so we're ending side one, and we'll pick up in a second.

OG: Am I being too long-winded?

GH: No.

OG: You sure?

GH: Yes.

[Tape Stopped]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

GH: Okay, we're picking up again on side two of this tape. Omar, you were talking about having applied at the *Gazette* and then your wife, Jan, was hired by the *Gazette*, and you went in to resign.

OG: Yes. And Starr and Meredith Oakley were in there together, in his office. They were pretty close. I think he was kind of like a father figure to her. They were on the same wavelength. She was in his office a lot. She was in there, and I remember she was real caustic and sarcastic to me about—"You're letting them get two"—you're letting *them*, meaning the *Gazette*, the hated [laughs] reviled enemy get two for one. I think they were willing to let me keep working at the *Democrat* because I worked real hard, and I think I did a pretty good job. Bill Simmons once told me that I was a good reporter.

GH: Bill Simmons was at the Associated Press at the time.

OG: And he covered the State Capitol. I remember one of the press secretaries. Governor Bill Clinton had two women press secretaries. One of them was married to . . .

GH: Was it Joan Roberts?

OG: Yes, yes. When I left, she said, "I'm sad to see you go because you're real fair, and you're a good reporter, and you're a really good writer." She said, "You're a

much better writer than most of them.” Anyway, [laughs] . . .

GH: This was 1983.

OG: Yes, yes. Then there was another one that worked there. Lindsey, Bev Lindsey. And her husband, Bruce Lindsey, ended up being the right hand guy in the Clinton Presidency. He’s kind of a mover and shaker behind the scenes in the Democratic Party. He’s a lawyer at Wright, Lindsey and Jennings. I don’t know if he still works there. He might be a lobbyist or something. I just don’t know. And I always got along with them real well. Anyway, I went in there and resigned. I was out of work, and that—you know, I had not been without a job. I mean, I worked in the student union at Hendrix. I had been a dishwasher at one time. I didn’t like not having a job. Then there was a real nice older man at the *Democrat*—Si Young?

GH: Si Dunn. D-U-N-N.

OG: I’m terrible on names.

GH: He was the news editor in charge of the copydesk.

OG: Yes. And he was this real nice white-haired guy. I think he smoked a pipe.

GH: Si was S-I.

OG: Yes. And he knew this guy named Maurice Moore that was editor of this trade journal. I later ended up calling it the *Bedpan Journal*. It was a hospital trade journal for the for-profit hospitals. I can’t remember the name of the journal now. It’s not even published anymore. Mo had been a—Maurice Moore’s nickname was Mo. He and Si Dunn were real good friends. Si had recommended me to Maurice. Maurice had worked for the *Democrat* for a long time. He was the

editor of this magazine. But it was really—that’s an unfair putdown, to call it the *Bedpan Journal*. They did have *ads* for bedpans, and they had ads for different hospital beds and things like that, but it was really pretty substantive on politics and on Medicare policy and things like that. The bad thing was that it was a trade journal. Mo interviewed a lot of real prominent people, like—I don’t know what Morris Udall was at that time. And he interviewed the guy that made the Jarvik Heart, the one that’s now selling blood pressure medicine, [laughs] cholesterol medicine. I think he even got to talk—I don’t know if it was Barney Clark. There was some nice man that had the Jarvik Heart at one time, and Mo got to interview him. He pretty much had me do a lot of the scut work, like “So-and-so got a promotion from third vice president to second vice president in the Hospital Corporation of America” or whatever—you know, stuff like that—and a lot of copyediting kind of things. But, man, I got, like—immediately it added about thirty-three percent to my salary while I was working over there.

GH: Is that right?

OG: Yes. I was making \$12,000 at the *Democrat*, and I think I started over there right at \$18,000, which was a big bump for me. And at that time, that was a big jump.

GH: Were you surprised by that?

OG: Yes, yes. So then I decided I was going to go to law school because [when I was] covering the courthouse I’d always thought, “I could do this. I could”—the first time I’d gone to law school, I was kind of intimidated by the whole process. I guess the theme here is—in my life—a person is always growing in self confidence. So I decided I was going to go to law school. I took the LSAT. And

I was used to living on \$12,000 a year, so I socked away a lot of savings.

Anyway, I worked for that magazine—I might have worked there for two years and saved up a pretty good amount of money—Jan and I saved up a pretty good amount of money. We're divorced now, so I, you know—I've skipped over a lot of our marriage and stuff, but—do I need to get into all this?

GH: No.

OG: Now, she is very intelligent. She went to Hendrix, like I said, and she was a National Merit Scholar. She was valedictorian of her high school class. She made all As, but she made one B her whole four years at Hendrix. She graduated with high honors or something, and she really liked being a newspaper person. I know she really loved the *Gazette*. She was city editor when it went under.

GH: Right.

OG: And I was a deputy prosecutor at that time, but anyway—it's kind of like you can remember what you were doing when [President John F.] Kennedy was shot or something. [OG is referring to when the *Gazette* folded.] Were you working there then?

GH: I had just left the *Gazette* the month before.

OG: Oh, okay. Okay. So I worked at this National Federation of American Hospitals. And I can't even remember what the journal was named, and our big competitor was *Modern Health Care*, or something like that.

GH: Not quite the same as the daily newspaper war.

OG: No, no, it wasn't, because these things came out monthly. There was even once or twice a year that—cover two would be, like, March and April or something.

Another thing was that the people you interviewed—you had to give them a copy of what was going to go into the magazine, so this slowed things—if there were things in there they didn't like, they could have them taken out because we were basically working for them. It was a trade magazine. They had a big trade show every year at some city that was big on conventions, and I don't think I ever got to go to that. Mo was pretty proprietary of—you know, he was very territorial about it because he'd been working there a long time and he pretty much []—that's when I decided I was going back to law school, because he was very, very territorial and would only—you know, he kind of kept me doing all the scut work. But I was getting paid real well and saving money. I worked there two years, saved up money, took the LSAT. But then, because I had gone to law school in Fayetteville and dropped out—I mean, [I was] in my mid-thirties—thirty-three—so it was ten or twelve years ago [when] I had gotten this money from my grandmother. Well, I didn't even take some of the finals. I was miserable in law school. I went up there to please my father. The whole thing was unpleasant. I was going to get out of law school. It was kind of like Edsel Ford or something, like my life was mapped out for me. I was supposed to go to law school, get out [and] go into law practice with him. At that time, he made a lot of money, and it was just like—so I kind of rebelled against his whole plan for me. I dropped out of law school. I went back to Hendrix and took all these classes I had always wanted to take and had all these adventures: the oil fields, Peace Corps. And it was an adventure working at the *Democrat*, too. I tell you, that was one of the more fun times in my life. It really was. I was young, and I

could [laughs] take working that hard. I'm a fairly easygoing person, but it's like—I think you are, too, but we both have a competitive side, and that was fun. It was heady being in competition. . .

GH: You have since—you are now married to Linda Satter, who is a reporter at the *Democrat-Gazette*.

OG: Yes. The *Democrat* and now the *Democrat-Gazette*.

GH: So you still, obviously, read the newspaper.

OG: Oh, yes, yes. I read the newspaper every day.

GH: What is your impression of what the newspaper is now as opposed to what it was before?

OG: Oh, I think it was a lot more slapped together back then. I think it's improved. I think it's a good newspaper. Whenever I go to St. Louis or San Antonio or something like—I do get to go, in my job that I have now, to some pretty neat cities to go and continue my legal education. That's one of the benefits of the job I have now. I'll pick up those papers, and they're bigger circulation than the *Democrat-Gazette*, and I don't think they're as well-written. I don't think they cover the local news as well. I don't think they have as big a news hole. They have a lot more ads, you know—more space devoted to ads. I've heard—I think people at the *Democrat-Gazette* get paid a lot better than when I worked there because people that have been there for a long time—they're very established journalists like Cynthia Howell—like my wife, like Linda. She's been there. Danny Shameer has been there forever—a long time, you know. I think most of their careers have been there. They've won awards. Linda wrote some story

about the juvenile justice system. She got a Robert Kennedy award. After getting that award—a couple of years ago, she got to go to Boston to be on this panel where all these federal judges from all over the country came. It was about the media and the federal judiciary—how the federal courts are covered. And there were people from much bigger newspapers, maybe even, like, the *New York Times*. I can't remember exactly. It was a pretty big deal. She's real humble, so it wasn't that big of a deal for her. She just went up there and answered the questions they asked her. I remember one of the speakers at this thing was a Spanish judge that had been—he presided over all the terrorist train bombings in Spain. He had presided over the trials because there judges can lead investigations. In Spain, they can be inquisitors instead of referees. He was a real interesting guy. And we had dinner—I ended up sitting by a judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, one that had written a pretty controversial opinion about the Pledge of Allegiance. I can't remember the guy's name, but my wife, Linda, is a big animal lover. In recent years, I've taken up hunting, and this liberal Ninth Circuit judge was a deer hunter, so we really got into that. I was trying to let Linda know that you can be pretty open-minded and still go hunting. [Laughs]

GH: Did you convince her?

OG: No. [Laughter] I haven't convinced her yet, but she did get me a—she did buy me—this is really—she's a very nice person, a really sweet person, and she's real active in this group called FURR, where they catch feral cats and get them neutered and find them homes. She also got an award from the Pulaski County Humane Society—“Humane Person of the Year” or something [laughs]. So I do

read the paper every day, and I do think—I remember reading the paper in Boston and thinking, “This isn’t any better than my paper.” And I know a lot of people were really bitter right after [the *Gazette* folded]—the readers that were real—they wouldn’t get the other paper. There were *Gazette* people and [there were] *Democrat* people. There were people that said, “I’m not even gonna read that rag! I’m not even gonna read that paper anymore” because the *Gazette* went under. But those Gannett people came down here. They really messed up the *Gazette*, I think. They went from being the sort of staid newspaper of record—I remember one time they had some stupid story about corn—popping it—and they totally—they just made it interesting at the sake of the facts. You know, something like corn popping in the fields or something. All it was was there was some fungus on the corn, and it made it turn white and puff up, but it wasn’t like popcorn. They exaggerated it. They started putting women in tight bathing suits in the paper and things like that, and people were appalled. They did a lot of things that really hacked off the stalwart readership of the *Gazette*. I think the reporters from Arkansas called them “Gannettoids” and things like that. I know Jan didn’t care for them much. So I think the paper is a good newspaper. I think it does—you know, they can be more selective on what to cover. [During] the newspaper war, we covered about everything we could just so we wouldn’t get beaten on it. I was really sad—I went to Ray Hobbs’s funeral because I really liked him. He died of hepatitis. I think he didn’t know he had it. I think he got it when he was in Vietnam or something. I think the paper is a good paper. I really do. I think back then it was—you know, I think the newspaper war had an

influence on it, plus budgeting, where they were hiring all young people that they could pay [laughs] \$11,000 or \$12,000 a year. But a lot of those people have grown as journalists and become award-winning journalists.

GH: There was the—we'll wrap up here in just a minute. Go on back to when you decided to apply at the *Gazette*. Was the reason because of the pay, working conditions, or because of the feeling that the *Democrat* had always been training ground for the *Gazette*?

OG: Yes, that was it. That was the next step up. If you wanted to stay in Arkansas journalism and be at the top, you [worked for] the Associated Press or the *Gazette*. It was like you had graduated. It was like going from high school to college or something—seemed to be the attitude. If you were a serious journalist, that was where you wanted to end up: at the *Gazette*.

GH: Do you think that [1:49:18]—looking back over time—that you made the right choice? And where you are now, your position is . . . ?

OG: I'm an Arkansas assistant federal public defender. I'm the appellate counsel, so I'm like the third person in the office on the letterhead.

GH: You did end up going to law school, anyway, and becoming an attorney.

OG: Yes. And I was a clerk for Judge Annabelle Clinton Imber when she was a chancery judge. I was her first law clerk ever, and I think the best one she ever had. I tell her other law clerks that and irritate them.

GH: Did your experience in the newspaper help you?

OG: Oh, man, it helped me a ton. In fact, my senior year in law school—my third year in law school—I was one of two law clerks at the Arkansas Court of Appeals. I

got this job. Larry Jegley helped me get it because he was chief counsel to the Arkansas Court of Appeals at that time. I worked for Beth Gladdan Coulson. She was a court of appeals judge, and she basically needed somebody that was a pretty good writer. Also, I had written an article—I had covered trials where she—Gene Worsham represented some high profile defendant, and they always felt I was more fair to them than George Bentley or Heinbockel. They kind of felt like the *Gazette* favored the prosecution a little bit. And I had written a profile of her, which she liked. Oh, when I was a political reporter, Morris Arnold, who's now an Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals judge—I wrote some profile on him, and I wrote a profile once of Betsey Wright. I think these people felt I portrayed them fairly, so they'd always had a positive attitude toward me. It's only helped me in my job—being a lawyer. Plus, I made a lot of contacts, like I said, with people in the courthouse. So when I became a lawyer, they already knew me. Also, I knew how the system worked, how cases went to the prosecutor's office, how people filed lawsuits and all that. I'd had a lot of practical experience in how the court system worked. But the legislature, for me, is kind of like how high school football was. I knew I had a job, and I was scared of the coach, who was John Robert Starr. And the assistant coach was Meredith Oakley. I knew I was scared of them and did not want to mess up on my assignment. But I never had the big picture on covering the legislature like I did the courthouse. I think I was a much better courthouse reporter than I was—now, I think I did a good job covering the political race between Frank White and Clinton because they pretty much spelled out what the issues were in their speeches. I was good at getting some color—put

some color in the stories about, you know, personalities and things like that. Then I went to law school and I got out and worked with Judge Imber. Oh, and I worked—part of my third year I worked at the court of appeals. It was great that I got that job. I had a 1974 Volkswagen Beetle—and this was in 1988—and it cratered on me. At that point it was getting to be a real financial strain—going to law school. I went to Fayetteville the first year because I was on some kind of academic probation from leaving twelve years earlier. I had to go up there. I had to write letters and stuff to convince them that I was a more mature person and I wouldn't run off this time. Kind of like [laughs] *Cool Hand Luke*—my mind is right now—that there wouldn't be any more “failures to communicate.” And they made me keep my grades up. Because I hadn't taken a couple of exams, I had a one-point-six grade point [average]. So when I went back, I started out on probation. But the first semester I made, like, over a three-point or something like that and then I had a two-point-two grade point. It pulled me out of the fire. I made a good grade point the next semester, and then I transferred to Little Rock. Part of that was through a contact I'd made. I became a really close friend to this lady named Mamie Ruth Williams. She had been involved in the desegregation of Central High [School, Little Rock] and kind of stuck her neck out back then when it was not a popular thing to do. She got death threats and stuff. She had worked for Jim Guy Tucker and had worked in a lot of political campaigns. Now, she definitely favored the *Gazette*, and she was working for Julia Hughes Jones when I covered the capitol. That's how I met Mamie Ruth. She did like me personally, even though she didn't like the *Democrat*. Since her son-in-law

worked for the *Gazette*, she definitely favored the *Gazette*. You could tell from the things she would tell me and stuff. I kind of cultivated a relationship with her. By the time she died—she would kind of adopt people, and I was one of her surrogate children. I was one of her brood, you know. Another one of her brood was a guy that was a dean at the law school when I tried to transfer, so my transfer—maybe I shouldn't be telling you this—was a done deal because of Mamie Ruth Williams. But I had a good grade point—I mean, by then, I'd pulled my grades up from a one-point-six to a two-point-eight or -nine, you know. Without me being on academic probation, it would have been a good grade point in law school. Most people—if they're A students in college, they're B students in law school because the competition keeps getting—U.S. Representative Vic Snyder was in my class in law school, and I think he was fifth in our class. He was working as an emergency room doctor. There were people with PhDs in pharmacy and IRS agents—down here in Little Rock. Fayetteville was different. A lot of them were kids staying in school because they didn't know what to do next. UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock] Law School was a serious place. I really worked hard in law school. It was really interesting this time because I wanted to do it, so I made much better grades and learned a lot of stuff. And it was fun to go back to school. Then I got that job at the court of appeals, and that pulled me out of the fire. I was actually able to buy a car [laughs]. The first summer job I had in law school was with—I had worked in Mark Stodola's campaign. It was something my dad and Mamie Ruth got me into. They had committed to supporting Mark Stodola. They did like Chris Piazza, but this was

before he threw his hat in for that race.

GH: Which race was this?

OG: Pulaski County Prosecutor. But he [Piazza] was waiting to see if his boss, the prosecutor Dub Bentley, was going to run again. So he was being loyal to his boss. When he found out Dub wasn't going to run, he announced. My dad really liked Stodola. He kind of got me involved in this. He thought it would be a good—you know, interesting thing for me to do, especially since now I was going to go to law school. And I liked Stodola right off. He was a real personable guy. But I knew Piazza better, and I knew he was this bad-ass prosecutor. He was really a good trial lawyer. In fact, George Bentley said that he thought Chris Piazza was the best trial lawyer he ever saw. Now, I don't know if I'd agree on that. I've seen some really good trial lawyers, but he is one of the best, for sure, that I ever saw. And he really made a good judge. A lot of people thought he'd be biased toward the prosecution and biased toward civil defendants—toward established interests—and he's not. He's really a fair judge, and everybody perceives him that way in the bar. Jegley was in that campaign, too. There was kind of a wild card character named Greg Stephens. His dad was a football coach, and his mom was a psychiatrist. He ended up—he had a controversial career, and I don't even know if he's practicing law or not. But his dad was a college coach. But anyway, I worked in Stodola's campaign. He became city attorney. Man, he gave Chris Piazza a run for his money. I mean, it was a close race. Piazza kind of had the advantage of having the police behind him and all this other stuff, but Stodola was a really good campaigner, and he had some

connections in North Little Rock. I think he might have been, like, prosecutor in municipal court over there.

GH: He was.

OG: So it was a really close race. It was fun then to be on the inside of things that I had always covered from the outside. It was fun to be an insider and be working in the campaign and drinking bourbon after hours with Jegley and Greg Stephens and all that. That was kind of fun. It was kind of like I was getting to see another side that I hadn't seen as a reporter. As a reporter, you always are—you know, because it can become an antagonistic relationship. You're supposed to be a watchdog.

GH: Keep your distance.

OG: Distance, yes. So that was a lot of fun. Then Stodola was city attorney, so after I finished my first year of law school, he gave me a job—you know, law clerk-type job at the city attorney's office. And that was interesting. Tom Carpenter was his chief assistant. But it really wasn't my cup of tea, because I wanted to be a trial lawyer. I mean, one of the biggest things that happened that summer was some guy had a lion in the city limits, and they had to make him take the lion—Mikey the lion story. That just didn't thrill me. I wanted to deal with some other kind of law than regulatory, city ordinances and things like that. Getting funding from the federal government—I thought that was all pretty boring. Then I went to work for a Legal Aid. I liked that because we were for the underdog, and I learned a lot of good stuff about civil law. I was involved in this lawsuit against Riceland Foods. They bought a lot that had the house of this little old lady. She

thought she owned it, and they just carted her house off and built a silo or something. That was kind of a fun thing to be involved in. There was a real nice guy there that had gone to Harvard Law School. His wife's name was Cherene. Brian Wolfman—he was very dedicated lawyer for poor folks. Then I got that job at the court of appeals. Then I graduated and took the bar and went to work for Bill Simpson in the Pulaski County Public Defender's Office. Then I applied to Mark Stodola, who has since become the prosecutor. I kept bugging him about giving me a job. Jegley was his chief deputy, so I eventually got to be assistant to the prosecutor.

GH: Stodola at this time had become the prosecutor.

OG: Yes. He had become the prosecutor because Piazza had become the judge.

GH: Right.

OG: I think my heart was more on the defense side. And also, being a prosecutor is much easier. I mean, sometimes it's just like shooting fish in a barrel. It's not the challenge that being a defense attorney is. This guy that I really liked a lot—we'd been in the drug task force together—named Lloyd Warford—we ended up in private practice together. He was a great law partner. We got involved in a lot of neat stuff. We ended up representing Judge Joyce Williams Warren, a juvenile judge, against our former boss, Stodola. I think it kind of hurt his feelings. And Lloyd said some pretty nasty things in the newspaper toward Stodola. And we got to cross-examine some people that had been, like, supervisors of ours that we didn't feel like had been real [laughs] nice to us. Basically, we won that case. It was about housing juveniles with adults.

GH: Right.

OG: Then we sued Carmart. So we had a lot of fun, and we did make pretty good money. We had a lot of fun, and we did civil and criminal—I remember a trademark case—this lady—and I won. And that was so—Lloyd had always been really good for my self esteem. I think having such a—my dad was a big flamboyant character and kind of an overbearing personality. I think that having a father like that—because I can kind of empathize with Brent Bumpers. You know, you've got this dad that's like Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or something. They can kind of overwhelm you. So I think, like I said, a theme in my life has been getting more and more confidence. Should I need to go into anything else about this?

GH: Let's—we can wrap it up.

OG: Okay. To get back to the newspaper business, the job that I got to do at the newspaper, and doing a good job there, and having people that were in authority see me as a good newspaper reporter—that was good for me. Like I said, those were some of the most fun jobs I've ever had.

GH: Okay. Anything else?

OG: Oh, I like to talk [laughter].

GH: All right. We're going to end it here.

OG: Okay.

GH: Thank you.

OG: Oh, you're welcome.

[Transcribed by Rebecca Willhite]