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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Eric Harrison
Little Rock, Arkansas
28 July 2005

Interviewer: Celia Storey

Celia Storey: This is an interview with Eric Harrison. Today is July 28, 2005. Would you like a pen?

Eric Harrison: Sure.

CS: I'm always smarter when I have a pen.

EH: Do we have a witness?

CS: If you're agreeable to let us record this oral history [for the Arkansas Democrat] oral history project at the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] and store it in the archives of the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville], then you will sign this piece of paper. Is that okay with you?

EH: It's okay with me.

CS: Have you seen any of the archives?

EH: No, I haven't had a chance to look. I figured I'd do this cold and then I'd go back and see.

CS: You're kind of a brave person. Well, they want me to ask you wide-ranging ques-

tions, which they sent.

EH: Right. I have a copy of the letter he sent around.

CS: Because you're going to be doing interviews, too.

EH: Right.

CS: And you understand that we'll get the transcripts back and you can strike things that you don't want in there.

EH: Right.

CS: So, Eric Harrison, tell me a little bit about your family background.

EH: Okay. I actually have a family journalism background, although I had not planned to follow in my father's footsteps. He was a respected Philadelphia journalist who had worked for several suburban newspapers. He worked about twenty years for the Philadelphia Bulletin before it folded. He was an assistant city editor for a while. He was the op-ed [opinion/editorials] editor for a while and arts and entertainment editor. When the Bulletin folded, he went to the Philadelphia Daily News, which he worked as the assistant op-ed—assistant editorial editor for their op-ed page. I had gone through three-and-a-half years of college and actually was planning to go to law school when I got out. I had worked for the school paper as a reporter and editor and as a critic. And to make some money while I was in school, I had worked at the now defunct Philadelphia Bulletin as a copy boy.

CS: Where were you going to school?

EH: Haverford College, which is outside Philadelphia. They used to refer to themselves in their press releases as "a small, prestigious liberal arts college on Phila-

delphia's suburban main line." And one year in an April Fool's [Day] edition of the school paper, we took that line and put it in every story. Four pages, sixty-four stories, two editorials, and a photo credit—"Photographed by a photographer at a small, prestigious liberal arts college on Philadelphia's suburban main line." [Laughs] We either just dropped it into the story as a reference, or we quoted people saying it. "'Haverford is a small, prestigious liberal arts college on Philadelphia's suburban main line,' President Coleman said." And the week after that they dropped the line from the press releases. [Laughter] Haverford has an interesting history. It was founded by Quakers in 1833, and it's the oldest higher institution of learning to be run by Quakers.

CS: Well, how on earth did you end up at a Quaker college?

EH: It was three miles from my house. It was one of the best educations you could get anywhere. It's very exclusive. It continues to rank in the top ten or top twenty of all those college guides. I knew people who taught there. It just looked like the right thing for me. At the time, it was very small. It only had about 850 students. We didn't have fraternities because the place was so small, we were a fraternity.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Also, it's affiliated with Bryn Mawr, which is much more the famous half of that partnership. At the time I was going to Haverford—it's since gone co-ed, but it was all male—at the time Bryn Mawr was and remains all female. In fact, Bryn Mawr was founded by folks from that Haverford Quaker meeting who decided that what they really wanted to do was found a college that would provide a quality education for women in 1888. The two campuses are about a mile and a half

apart. They were actually within walking distance, although shuttle buses ran between them all the time. You could take classes on either campus. There was a dorm exchange of about 180 students, so you could live in co-educational housing.

CS: Did you do that?

EH: Yes, I did. . . . single-sex campuses with co-educational housing.

CS: When you lived in Haverford did you take classes at Bryn Mawr, too?

EH: I took classes at Bryn Mawr. I lived there for two years. It's an interesting social experiment. You could eat at any dining hall. And they referred to it at the time as the "bi-college community." All of the extracurricular activities were done in common—newspaper, the yearbook, the orchestra, the choir, the theater departments all were—and a lot of the academic departments were either in sync the same or in some cases even interwoven. Where they weren't, they taught sort of opposite disciplines. For example, the psychology department at one school was behavioral and the other was clinical. I forget which school was which, but they used to refer to them as "rats and cats" and "nuts and sluts."

CS: [Laughs]

EH: So that you could get a full range out of both programs without ever having to—I think history departments were pretty much integrated.

CS: What was your major?

EH: I majored in political science.

CS: And you went in intending to be a lawyer.

EH: I intended, when I got out, to go to law school. That was my intention. And,

eventually, I suppose, by some fugitive dream, maybe going into politics, by which political science would have been completely unsuitable because in academic settings it's—the higher up you get into the discipline, the less it actually has to do with politics and the more it has to do with heaven only knows what.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I found that out my last two years that it got more and more abstract and theoretical and had less and less to do with real-world events, which became disenchanting. Anyway, January 31 of my senior year in college had rolled around, and not only had I not applied to any law schools, but I had not written away to any law schools for applications. I basically procrastinated myself out of that as a career option. I went ahead and took the LSAT [Law Scholastic Aptitude Test]. I was all set, but I just never actually took that final step to make a commitment. And when sponging off my parents became a non-option, I had to go out and find some sort of legitimate employment for myself.

CS: Why did it become a non-option?

EH: Well, they basically said, "You're welcome to move home for a limited period of time, but eventually you're going to have to go out and get a job." [Laughs]

CS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

EH: I have two sisters, one on each coast, as it turns out now.

CS: Are they younger than you are?

EH: They're both younger than I am. We're exactly two years, one month and either seven or eight days apart. My birthday is December 21, my middle sister is January 29, and my youngest sister is March 5.

CS: What year were you born?

EH: 1955.

CS: Oh. We were born that same year. That's right.

EH: I guess I don't think [my] parents actually planned it quite to that degree, but I know that my mother had this horror of pushing two strollers at once.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: So they waited until each one of us was walking, talking, and potty trained before they had another. So my middle sister now—let's see, my middle sister went to Penn [University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia], and my youngest sister went to Oberlin [College, Oberlin, Ohio]. My middle sister is now the prop master for the San Francisco Opera. She went to a career in technical theater. And my younger sister is a part-time librarian at Princeton [University, Princeton, New Jersey]. She's married and has a seventeen-year-old son, who is my only nephew.

CS: So you aren't the only member of your family with some theater interest.

EH: No. Actually, all three of us—Ellen has never really gone into theater, but she sang. She was into things like Morris dancing.

CS: Morris dancing?

EH: Yes, it's old English style.

CS: And is it spelled M-O-R . . . ?

EH: M-O-R-R-I-S. I think.

CS: Okay.

EH: That's how she met her husband. He was into that sort of thing, too. My sister actually sang in a professional church choir for a number of years, so we're all ta-

lented in one form or another.

CS: Did you do drama at Haverford?

EH: No, actually, I didn't. What I did—we had an institution called "class night," where each year each class—freshman, sophomore, junior and senior—did a spoof show. It was usually about forty-five minutes in length, the object of which was to insult as many people as possible without becoming offensive. I wrote for the show pretty much all four years I was there and acted in them, I think, for three. Then [in] my senior year I was asked to join in a production at Bryn Mawr for which they needed male actors. It was sort of a detective story take-off called "Henry Doesn't Live Here Anymore." Henry's part exists basically so that there's a body at the beginning of the show, and the detective thinks he's Sam Spade. All the characters were stock derivatives from various murder mysteries. I think mine was kind of an Agatha Christie colonel.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Having done that, when I moved here, at first I was lonely and homesick and had no place to go in the evenings. I saw that they were holding auditions for the Community Theater up the street at the [Arkansas] Arts Center. I was living two blocks from the paper at the time. I didn't have a car, and I didn't—my options were limited. This was within walking distance. I auditioned for one acting job and got a part. Basically, I think once you have that, you sort of have it for life. I tend to compare people who have been out of the theater for years—it's sort of like riding a bike. You can always kind of get back on and get back into it. So I've been fairly lucky in that I've been doing this—basically, a couple of shows at

least a year ever since. Sometimes more, sometimes less. Having made the decision that law school was not going to be an option, I decided that I would attempt to pursue a career in journalism because I did have some clips: that work I did for the school paper—the work I had done as a copy boy—and I had parlayed that into an internship at the Baltimore Evening Sun between my junior and senior years. That would have been the summer of 1976. I had applied to an operation called The Newspaper Fund, which is a division of Dow Jones, which offered two kinds of summer internships. They had a copy-editing track for college journalism majors and a reporting track for college students who had never taken a college journalism course—which I had not done. The English Department wouldn't offer it. It was considered pre-professional, and they sneered at it. So I got accepted. They had 250 applicants, and they picked 20 finalists. And the idea was that they would help you find an internship. They would provide you with coaching, or at least mentoring. There was a professor at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern [University] who was supposedly keeping track of us. And there was a small pittance in scholarship money, which was enough to buy my books in my senior year. It was really kind of funny. I guess we started finals week, and I hadn't heard anything. I got a call—I guess it was late on a Friday afternoon—from the Fort Worth Star Telegram. His name was Jim Vachule, and, no, I don't know how to spell it. And I can't talk as slowly as he did, but the voice at the end of the phone said, "Hi, my name is Jim Vachule from the Fort Worth Star Telegram. I got your name from the Newspaper Fund." And, at that point, I sort of thought, "Well, I don't know if I made it or if they like giving out names of

likely failures." But the guy asked me if I'd be interested in doing an internship in Fort Worth, and I said, "Sure." He said, "Well, I'll call you back at the top of the week or at some point in the indefinite future." And we sort of left it at that. That next Monday I found out I had been accepted for the Newspaper Fund. I never did hear back from Jim Vachule. And it later turned out that they hired at that paper a man named Eric Harrison, who was a gentleman of color.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I remember people at some point sending me clippings with his byline on it. And, to this day, I don't know if they hired him because they thought he was me or offered me a job because they thought I was him. [Laughter] But I never did hear back from them. Meanwhile, the Newspaper Fund had set me up with the Baltimore Evening Sun, where I worked for fourteen weeks that summer. I worked general assignment—I did a cop beat in the morning, where I would call in—it was an afternoon paper, so I called in to get a—Baltimore has nine police districts. They ranged in sort of a square around the central district. I would call in at 6:00 each morning to our top guy at headquarters, who had spent some time culling through the evening's crime reports. And he would say, "Okay, go out to the eastern district and get such-and-such a report" and [he would give] me the number. Most of them were \$100 muggings, which, in Baltimore, they call yokings, for some reason.

CS: Yokings?

EH: Yes, with the forearm around the neck—the odd burglary or rape. About once a week there would be some major crime development that would come out of this.

I hit the front page of the paper the first time with a—this is kind of bizarre—the biggest story of the day in Baltimore got a double-banner headline on the front page, even if it was a nothing story. I remember picking up a crime report where somebody had hit the head of the manager of a Safeway [supermarket] with a brick and stole \$12,000 worth of receipts. And the story couldn't have been six inches long, but it was the big story of the day. So it had this screamer, double-banner headline at the top of the paper. [Laughs] The headline was bigger than the story.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: But occasionally I would cover a major house fire where several children were burned to death—the usual kind of sob stuff. I did a nice little heartbreaker story on the front page about an old blind man in west Baltimore who was consistently being mugged for his Social Security checks.

CS: More than once?

EH: Yes. They attacked him several times, and I went out and interviewed him and had a little story out front about that. That was a real tear-jerker. The day before I left the paper, they had set me up—they had the regular cop reporter covering the three northwest/northeast/north districts. He had been working for the paper for forty years, and he was literally embedded in the cop shop up there. He ate lunch with the cops. He was on vacation that week, so they sent me up to the northwest district to pick up the usual \$100 muggings. And they called me—each police station had a press room where you could go. I wasn't in the press room up there, and they called the press room but didn't get me. So they called me on the

police station phone. They said, "Drop what you're doing! They found a body in the polar bear pit at the zoo!" I had been working on animal stories in my off hours all summer long, so I had the gall to say to the guy, "Is it a bear or a man? If it's a bear, leave me alone." And they said, "No, there's some nut in the polar bear enclosure at the zoo. Get your ass down there!" So I hopped in the Sun car and drove down the freeway to the zoo. I got there at about 7:15 in the morning. Some guy had—all polar bear enclosures look alike. They're all basically the same—a cliff of rock—you know, kind of a shelf—with a pool of water with a rock in it.

CS: Yes.

EH: This is so the bears can paddle in the water.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Some guy had either apparently climbed or attempted to dive into the polar bear pen at the zoo. He hit his head on the rock in the pool, and one of the bears was dragging him back to his den to eat him when the cops showed up.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: In this enclosure there were five bears. There were three polar bears, a brown bear and a black bear. By the time I got there, they had managed to get one of the bears, I think, back into the den, so he was no longer a factor. But there were three polar bears—one of the polar bears was on the rock in the middle of the pool, and the other two polar bears were on the shelf. And I think the brown bear was in the water. The cops were firing smoke bombs at the bears to keep them away from the body while they were trying to figure out a way to get it out of the

polar bear enclosure without having to go in after it. So they fired—they tranquilized the bears, but the gun wasn't powerful enough, so that didn't work. And, finally, they hit on an idea. They drained the pool, and I think they ended up stranding two bears at the bottom and one bear on the rock. Then they lowered a rope down on the cliffside. They caught the guy, I think, the first time on the foot. Well, I don't remember whether they caught him by the foot first or the neck first, but they got him kind of halfway up the cliff and he fell out. So they got him up and hauled him up the cliff face and put him in the morgue wagon and drove away. And I was watching all this take place through the morning, going periodically back to the phone to call the rewrite man. They had assigned me a rather florid writer named Michael J. Himowitz, who still works for the Sun, by the way.

CS: Himowitz?

EH: Himowitz. H-I-M-O-W-I-T-Z. He's now their technology columnist, I think. But he would ask me these questions, like, "How old are the bears? How long have they been at the zoo? What are their names? How much do they weigh?" And I'd say, "Okay." And I'd go back and ask the zoo people, "How much do the bears weigh?"

CS: [Laughter]

EH: Then he asked me, "Where did they get the bears?" It turned out that some of them were a donation from the American Legion or something. This was really bizarre.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Then he asked me to go back and ask the zoo director, "Do you think that this will increase zoo attendance tomorrow?" [Laughter] And the guy said something like, "Well, I don't want to admit it, but I'm sure a lot of people will be here tomorrow to see the 'killer bears.'"

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I phoned all this in and I got back to the paper, and I discovered that the screamer double-banner headline said, "Mauled Body of Man Pulled from Polar Bear Pit at Zoo." And they had a great photographer, whose name now escapes me—but the picture—it's just a gorgeous shot. In the center of the picture is this snarling polar bear. To the left side of the picture is the right side and shoulder of a cop with a smoke gun. And there's a big patch of smoke behind the bear. And you know—you don't see it, but you know—about three feet behind that bear is where the body is. And I began to read through the story, and the paragraph reads, "The man had been badly mauled about the chest and left leg. One of the bears, a 700-pound bear named Moe, had blood on his forepaws. [Laughter] Now, it turns out when they fished this guy out—see, it was the end of August in Baltimore, which is the closest thing, I think, until I moved here, to hell on earth. It was God-awful hot and horridly humid. And the guy was wearing three pairs of pants, four shirts, a coat, gloves, heavy black shoes which had fallen off his feet while the bear was dragging him back to the den to eat him. In his pocket was a wadded-up bunch of paper with something crazy written all over it about an assassination plot.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: And on the first page was a list of phone numbers. The top number said "FBI"

[Federal Bureau of Investigation]. So our guy at headquarters called up the FBI and said, "Do you know anything about this guy?" They said, "No, he's probably a nut," which turned out to be the case; he was a recently released mental patient. He said, "Do you plan to get involved in the case?" They said, "No. First of all, there's no evidence that the guy crossed state lines to get into the zoo. And, second of all, feeding the bears is not a federal offense." [Laughter]

CS: Did this get into your follow-up story?

EH: Actually, I didn't—I did the original story. The follow-up, I think, turned out several days later when they discovered the identity of the guy. But this was the kind of story that you tell in the newsroom. Of course, the office wag started in with the bad bear puns—"grin and bear it" and "the bear facts." Somebody had suggested that the guy intended to get out of the enclosure, but had forgotten his "escape claws." [Laughter]

CS: Okay. Now, tell us, Eric, have you always been a pun practitioner?

EH: Pretty much.

CS: Or did you pick it up as an adult?

EH: No, it was something I did as a kid. My family enabled it. We used to sit around the dinner table and do circular puns or circular wordplay. We'd have these little rhyming deals where somebody would say something and somebody would have to top it. I forget what the game was, but one of the rhyming games was "lobster mobster." We were always a literate family, and we used to play word games around the dinner table.

CS: What did your mom do?

EH: My mom is now a nursing home administrator.

CS: What are your parents' names?

EH: My father's name is Don. He is a native of Philadelphia. And my mother's name is Grace [Wagner]. She was born in New York and grew up in her very early years in Brooklyn. She went to high school in White Lake, New York, which is where Woodstock [the music festival] was. In fact, my grandfather's property—about a year before Woodstock, they moved around and built a new house on the other side of the lake. But up until that point, their property abutted on the back end of Max Yasgur's farm. You walked through a little stand of trees at the back of the property, and you were in Max Yasgur's fields. And where they were—in the new house, they were still inundated with kids coming through [to go to the concert]. We were supposed to have gone up there that week to visit them, and somebody got sick and we didn't go. We didn't know about the music festival. There were 500,000 people that tore down the fences. The two main industries up there were tourism and dairy cattle. And the kids just went—all the fences were down. The cows wandered everywhere. And you don't brand dairy cattle, so when it was over with, they had all these cows running around and they had no idea whose cows were whose.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: You didn't know whether they were Max Yasgur's cows or Bunny Heller's cows or [laughter] Clarence Townsend's cows. There were just cows. I remember going to see the movie, Woodstock, with my mom. I don't know if you've seen the movie. The initial shot of the movie—a helicopter shot it. It's the field before

festival. And you see this farmer riding a tractor across the field. They bring you back to ground level, and you see the guy with the tractor. My mother stands up in the theater and says, "That's Clarence Townsend! Look! Look! It's Clarence Townsend!" "Yeah, right, Mom. It's Clarence Townsend. Sit down!" [Laughter] Something—I forget what it is—I think it was a cat got caught in the engine of the tractor. And somebody looked up and said, "Well, what do you think of all this?" And he said, "Well, it's a shitty mess." And then the Woodstock logo came up on the screen and the music started. [Laughter] It's just marvelous, but my mother was saying, "It's Clarence Townsend!"

CS: And she has that accent.

EH: Well, the funny thing is she doesn't have that accent—well, she doesn't really have an accent, but when we'd go to visit my grandparents, we'd cross the state line between Pennsylvania and New York, and all of a sudden the accent would come back. [Laughter] It was strange. I don't know what psychic thing went on in her head, but the minute she got into New York State, she had a New York accent. She doesn't have it in normal conversation. It's very strange. [Laughs] Both my grandparents are dead, and nobody lives up that way. My uncle goes up now and then to visit. He used to do an annual grave tour [laughs] or something morbid. He'd go visit all the graves of dead relatives.

CS: I bet that would be beautiful.

EH: It was funny. We were up there on the anniversary of the festival and kind of took a tour around the area. The field where the bandstand had been was nothing but hard-packed red clay. There wasn't a blade of grass growing on it. There

wasn't a dandelion. It had been packed down so solid that seed couldn't get in. It was just this patch of bare, red earth.

CS: Wow!

EH: It was really bizarre.

CS: How old were you then?

EH: Well, let's see—I was just shy of my fourteenth birthday. And we didn't know—we didn't have any idea that that was going on. I never knew at the time. They had come to Max Yasgur and said, "Can we rent your field to put on a music festival?" He said, "Sure, go ahead." Nobody anticipated that they were going to have half a million people up there. And it just got to the point where people drove up there until you couldn't go any further on the roads. They just left their cars and walked in. There wasn't any kind of monitoring. Some people had paid for tickets. Some people hadn't paid for tickets. There wasn't any way to know or control. And at the time, my uncle was running—I guess the best way to put it was an egg factory in Liberty, New York. He represented a farmer's co-op [cooperative] up there. He had three quarters of a million chickens doing nothing all day but eating, laying eggs and making chicken shit. So there were always eggs in my grandparents' house. They had hardboiled eggs and handed them out to kids passing by— [laughs] my grandmother would feed the world if you let her. They put up this hardboiled egg stand on the lawn, and people coming down New York [Highway] 55 had this spot where they handed them hardboiled eggs. The new house that they had built—any way you entered the house, you were in the kitchen. The front door led into the kitchen. The back door led into the kitchen.

If you came up from the garage from the basement, you were in the kitchen. I guess there was a little dining nook in the front of it. But, basically, you entered—any way you entered the house you were in the kitchen. And my grandmother couldn't cook. That was the other thing.

CS: She couldn't cook?

EH: I had the world's only two Jewish grandmothers who couldn't cook. My mother's mother—we knew she wasn't much of a cook. She didn't try to do things—my father's mother used to prepare these elaborate dishes. She would cook vegetable soup, for example, and let the vegetables simmer until they were nothing but sludge.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: And when she cooked a pot roast, she cooked it until it was dry and crumbly. And she had this—the bubbameintze, an old wives' tale. "You're not supposed to drink while you eat, or it will ruin your digestion." So we'd be there trying to get the crumbly roast beef down our throats and gagging on it. And I would say, "Grandma, could we please have some Ginger Ale?" "No, if you drink while you're eating, you'll ruin your digestion." And I would say, "Grandma, if I can't get it down [laughs] I'm not going to digest it anyway!"

CS: So you were kind of a food critic as a . . .

EH: Well, I guess, even so. But, basically, I was a smart ass is what I was.

CS: No! [Laughs] I just don't see that at all!

EH: I was precociously cute. [Laughs]. It has long since started to pale.

CS: So you were this very lucky kid who had a polar bear clipping on his resume.

EH: I had, actually, fourteen solid weeks. I had quite a portfolio. I had also worked a month as a stringer for the Philadelphia Bulletin. In the Christmas break of my senior year, I went down and worked there in Wilmington . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

EH: I did some stock coverage for the Delaware edition. There was a major house fire in Dover at one point that I went down and covered. They had the way—not quite the way we have it. I guess we had bureaus, and they had a bureau in Wilmington. They had kind of a separate Delaware edition that they produced, and it had to have some sections—it had local Delaware news, just, I guess, as we also produce a Northwest [Arkansas] edition. Most of the paper is the same, but there was a local zone Delaware section. We produced the copy for that, by and large. So I had four weeks of that. And I actually had real clippings. At the time I was starting to have to seriously consider this as a career, I went to my dad and said—or maybe he suggested—"I know people all over the country." He had been the Philadelphia chapter president of Sigma Delta Phi the year that the national convention was held in Philadelphia, which was 1976. And, as it happened, Bob McCord, who was the executive editor here, was, I think, the national Sigma Delta Chi president. He had become acquainted with him. So my dad said, "Here is a list of people I know. If you want to start sending out letters, you can say, 'My dad is Don Harrison, and, by the way, here are my clippings.'" This [the Arkansas Democrat] was one of maybe sixty places I sent letters to. We had this little—I guess you can't really call it a pool, but I kept the people in my dorm apprised of

my job search. I had three squares of construction paper outside my room. One was red for the rejection letters. One was an empty green thing for anybody who was returning with job offers, and one was white for "maybes." And I remember getting a letter back. I don't remember whether it was from McCord or if it was from Jerry McConnell, but they sent a letter back, saying, "We don't have any reporting openings"—which was the job I was applying for—"Would you be interested in a copy-editing job?" I wrote them back, saying, "Sure. I am not applying for copy-editing. I have copy-editing experience, but I don't have anything professional to show for that. But sure!"

CS: You had [copy-editing?] experience—where was that?

EH: It was at the school paper. I had been their—I had actually done a good chunk of the line editing the last two years I was on the staff. I sent to Bob a letter saying, "Yes, I would be interested." And what I didn't know and what I was told afterwards—I can't verify this for truth—was that Bill Husted, who was the city editor, and Patsy McKown was the copy desk chief—they practically got into a fistfight over which one of them was going to get to offer me a job [laughs], because I was applying—at the time, the paper was putting out twenty pages a day with no advertising. Circulation, I think, had dipped to 54,000, and I represented a real prize because I had five months of professional experience and clippings to show for it. And at the time, they were literally hiring people of the street with BAs. The turnover, too, at the time, was so fast. I think within the month after I came here, we had two people leave the copy desk. I think Michael was one of the two people they hired in that wake.

CS: Michael Storey?

EH: Yes. But they started—you got here, and they started to train you for as many jobs as possible as quickly as possible because you literally never knew from one week to the next who would leave because the pay was lousy.

CS: What were you hired for?

EH: I was hired for \$140 a week.

CS: And what month and year did you get there?

EH: I showed up June 6, 1977. That was my first day of work. It's funny. I guess it was the week before I graduated. I got a call from Jerry McConnell saying, "We have a copy-editing opening. Are you interested?" And I said, "Sure." I had been hunting for a job, I guess, for about two months at that point. And this was the first bona fide, genuine offer. I think at that particular point I didn't much care where I went as long as it wasn't—I guess if the Philadelphia Inquirer had offered me a job, I would've taken it, but that wasn't an option. And I don't really—I think at the time I didn't really care where I went. And I had never been here. I had never been west of Tower City, Pennsylvania, or south of Arlington, Virginia, in my life. I had never flown in an airplane, so this was an adventure. I really had not—I don't think I had any kind of preconceived notions about Arkansas. I had heard of the [1957 Little Rock] Central High [School integration] crisis, but that was twenty years in the past. That was sort of ancient history. And it was really kind of funny. You'd pick up whatever information you could, and I remember having one of these Mobil Travel Guides in the house. My mother, picking it up, and running across Dogpatch [now-defunct amusement park] and thinking it was

for real. She had all kinds of hysterics—the vision of people running barefoot, smoking corn-cob pipes and making whisky. [Laughs] They came down and visited me, I think, the first Thanksgiving I was here. They stayed three days, and they were pleased and surprised at how cosmopolitan it was, even at the time.

When they left, they said they were glad they hadn't stayed longer or they would have developed bed sores. Again, if you don't have a car in this town, there's really no way to get anywhere. I lived, actually, I guess, two or three months in this town without a car.

CS: Were you in Fowler Square [an apartment complex on Sixth Street]?

EH: No, it was the red brick building there at Rock and Capitol, where Helaine Williams used to live, and Carla [Kaen]. But it was not as nice then as it is now. The apartments were fairly spacious, but they were kind of seedy. I think the rent was only \$98.50 a month, but it was three blocks from the paper. It was an easy walk. I think it was that first winter—no, the second winter that I was here because I was working as assistant wire editor at the time. I remember walking over here on one snowy morning at 3:00 or 4:00 or whatever time it was. Amanda Husted clattered in here in her old beat-up VW [Volkswagen], and nobody else was here. The two of us pretty much put out the paper together. It was relatively easy to do at the time. The sports section was already there, and the editorial pages were done. The classified section was put together overnight, so basically you had maybe seven or eight pages that had to be done for the state edition. And we just gathered stuff up off the wire and edited through it and put it together. It was about 8:30, I think, when a bunch of people trekked on in and put the finishing

touches on it. I think hardly anybody remembers—perhaps thee and me and a few others—literally, what little advertising we had—there were only twenty pages in the paper. A handful of them got changed between one edition and the other. Really, two people could've put the paper together. It wouldn't have been that tough. Obviously, for the city edition where we wanted some local content, we would've had to have a bigger staff than that. But it would have been possible for two people to have put that together. I remember showing up here in June of 1977—we had a horseshoe-shaped copy desk rim, which was already kind of a thing of the past at most papers. We had a belt that ran from the second-floor newsroom to the third floor where you put your copy on and sent up your dummies and what have you to be put together up in the composing room. We tore stuff off the wire machines and edited on the hard copy and then took it over to one of two primitive computer terminals to be edited.

CS: You had two terminals?

EH: We had two terminals for the copy desk and two terminals for sports. And both of them were tied to a boot the size and shape of a filing cabinet, which was where the memory was. The terminals had no memory of their own. I had been working in Baltimore on a Harris system that even then was considerably more sophisticated than this one. This was Digital's first production-line system for newspaper use. It had some advantages, and it was designed as a word-processing system that they adapted for something else. But the Harris system I worked on at Baltimore even then was ahead of this. The local copy had to be produced on typewriters on paper, double-spaced, and run through a balky scan-

ner. You had to make your corrections with a number one pencil and cross out what you didn't want. The scanner would stop on it and then you'd write the correction in red ink over the top of it, and you read it through a little slot [about one and a half inches wide] reflected in a mirror. You'd have to stand there at the scanner and type in the corrections as you went in order to put it into the computer in the first place. You could produce the cold type from that system, but it was very rudimentary. Basically, getting corrections made was a nightmare. That scanner was just a monster, because even if there was a fly speck on the paper, it would stop for it. And you'd be sitting there [thinking], "Why has this thing stopped? There is no correction to be made." The thing would cramp up at the least suggestion.

CS: I remember you telling me once that—I don't know if you were just teasing me—but that the computer monitors would say, "Fasten your seatbelt before the crash."

EH: Oh, if you knew it was coming—yes. If there was warning that it was about to crash, it would say, "Fasten your seatbelt." But if there weren't, it would just die. If you were—oh, and if the system was going down, you got a "Fasten your seatbelt" message. If the boot was going down, you got nothing. It just stopped dead.

CS: Who was in charge of the computer system then?

EH: Geoff George. He stuck with that system for years—I mean, in the face of all logic. It made absolutely no sense that we stuck with that thing. Digital made a much more advanced system. And there were newspapers either going broke or upgrading their equipment all over the country that were selling these things off for practically nothing. In fact, when we installed the VT 20s throughout the

newsroom—we bought them from a paper that had upgraded to something better. But we stuck with that—oh, I guess it was well into the 1980s. I remember particularly because the Bulletin went under in 1983, and they had the VT 71 system, which was much more flexible and a much better system. And they had about 250 of them that were going begging. It was a dead newspaper. We could've bought them for a song! I went to Geoff and I said, "For crying out loud!" And he said, "No! This is a perfectly good system. This works fine!" I think you may remember the time the system crashed for a week. This would've been 1981. It would come up in fits and starts, but it would never be up for longer than five minutes, and it was down. And in order to produce the Sunday advance sections, we put our stuff on a disk and we flew down to Texarkana . . .

CS: What kind of plane did they fly on?

EH: It was the publisher's private plane. It was a Conair or a—? I don't know.

CS: King Air?

EH: King Air.

CS: Turbo prop[ellor]?

EH: Yes. It took an hour to get to Texarkana from here. And we got a flight out at 7:30 in the morning. We were going to work until about 1:00 p.m., and we were going to put a load of copy actually set in type—Texarkana had the same computer system—so we put our disk on there and we worked on their equipment, and we produced a certain amount of cold type. We were going to fly it back here at 1:00 and then they'd come back and pick us up again at 4:00.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: [The pilot] was going to fly back here, pick up the publisher's father and fly him to Memphis, where he was going to catch a flight to New York, and then fly back to Texarkana and pick us up. And we got to the Texarkana airport at 4:00 p.m., and there was no plane. We waited and we waited, and at 4:30 Lyndon Finney, who was the assistant managing editor, finally called up here and said, "Where's our plane?" And they told him that, in fact, there was no flight from Memphis to New York at the time the publisher's father thought there was, so he had commandeered the plane to fly him to St. Louis, where he was going to catch a flight to New York—stranding us in Texarkana. I had to be back here at—I think my theater call was 7:00, where I was doing a show at the time.

CS: With a Community Theater?

EH: Community Theater. The show was *Light Up the Sky*. And we had to make a decision at that point whether we were going to get back into the rental car that we were driving around in Texarkana and drive back here, which would've been three hours, which would've gotten me in at 7:30. But, eventually, they had to charter a plane. They had Central Flying Service for \$2,500 to fly down to Texarkana to pick us up and bring us back here. It was an hour flight. It was an hour to Texarkana and an hour back, which would have gotten us back here at 7:30. Luckily, the lead actress at the show called [the paper] at some point. I don't remember what she was looking for—if she was looking for me or something. They told her what had happened, so they knew that I was going to be getting in late—tired, cranky. [Laughs] But I remember taking that hour while we were waiting for the plane and pacing back in forth in the pilots' lounge at the Texarka-

na Airport—running my lines. I think I wore a strip in the carpet about eighteen inches long and two feet wide. [Laughter] When we got back here, I remember being dead tired and going on stage and performing on pure adrenaline for about two hours. And in the last act the character I played had this sort of deflation moment. He's set something up; it's falling apart. And I actually got to sit down for the first time in the show and do this pitiful monologue. "For the first time in my life, I've never done anything something from my insides—for me, and I blew it." The actual act of sitting down, and being as tired as I was, gave this particular moment such incredible poignance, and people came up and said, "Oh, that was so wonderful. How did you do that?" [Laughter] "I've been up since six o'clock this morning and working on pure adrenaline." I remember how awful that system was—how it was prone to crash, and we were in constant crisis mode.

CS: Did you ever have to go down stairs and reload it?

EH: Yes. Once or twice. Of course, it was a complicated system to reload the boots, and it had to be done in the right order. If you didn't, you screwed it up from your fixing. I also remember the day we ran two page nines. We reprinted page two and page nine for the final edition—we green-sheeted it, if you remember . . .

CS: Yes, I do.

EH: The front and back page of every section was on green paper.

CS: []

EH: It was supposed to catch people's eye in the boxes as they walked through downtown at 2:30 in the afternoon when nobody was walking through downtown. But they put the new page nine where page nine was supposed to go, and put the old

page nine where page two was supposed to go. And half of a 2,000-copy press run came out with two page nines. But, you know, nobody called up to complain.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: A thousand papers were printed with two page nines, and evidently nobody bought any of them. I remember being trained to do as many jobs as possible because the turnover was so high. When you got in here and you'd trained up to be in the slot. You were trained to be the wire editor. You were trained to be the late man. Oh, I hated that job. I worked that job for two or three months over a summer. George Arnold had been the late man since time immemorial.

CS: What hours did the late man work on a [normal day]?

EH: The late man came in at 2:30 in the afternoon. By 4:30 in the afternoon, almost everybody else on the staff had gone, so you were pretty much by yourself up here. Your job was to look after the late financials—the stock market close—make sure the stocks got run through the ticker on the wire machine. You were supposed to lay out certain advance pages. Obviously, you were supposed to keep track if there was some major breaking news development—that there would be at least somebody watching. Usually, you would read proofs for the next day's paper. You put together what were called plug pages, where you put together a whole page of type so you could literally drop it into a hole if one showed up. Usually you'd then take the page apart for the city edition and put in real news. And your job was to sit here and wait for the composing room to paste up the classified ads for the next day and then fill whatever space was left. Usually there were, I think, three classified pages. And sometimes they ran—no, two classified

pages. Sometimes it would run short. You would end up with a hole of some description on the second classified page, which you would then fill up. Sometimes the classifieds ran long and then you didn't have to do any of it. It would back up into the obit[uary] page. And every once in a while, you'd have a whole open page, so you would have designed a plug page to fill. And basically, I guess, from about—really from about 10:00 on [laughs], your sole function was to wait for them, that paste-up. Some nights you got out of here at 11:00 or 11:30, and sometimes they didn't get done until 1:00 in the morning. Oh, I hated that. I hated being up here by myself at whatever hour they turned off the switchboard downstairs and hooked it up to the city desk phone. Then you'd have to start handling circulation complaints of people [who] didn't get their paper. I remember being up here on Labor Day, and instead of just shutting off the system or putting a message on it—everybody didn't get their paper. Every few seconds the phone would ring. I remember there was some guy from the composing room down here helping me answer phones. [Laughs]

CS: Do you remember which compositor it was?

EH: I think Tony [please provide last name]. I can't remember his last name. I can almost see his face. He wasn't here very long. I mean, he'd been here a while. Every compositor had been here since the year one.

CS: Okay.

EH: Cecil, who is now working down at the front desk, was the last of them.

CS: Cecil Atwood.

EH: Yes.

CS: What did you think of the composers?

EH: Well, they were a crusty bunch of guys, but if you learned not to step on their toes, they were perfectly okay to get along with. They told the most amazing stories. Cecil's brother, Junior Atwood, who's now deceased—Johnny [Watts] and Pickle [DeMoss] and—there are others whose names are sort of on the fringes of memory.

CS: Virgil [Please provide last name].

EH: Virgil. Who knows where any of them are now, but I know Junior is dead. Johnny is probably still around somewhere.

CS: Johnny Watts?

EH: Johnny Watts. Yes. And what was Pickle's last name?

CS: Pickle—he had a lawnmower repair business.

EH: Yes. He was always a good mechanic. He ran a shade-tree operation in his back yard.

CS: DeMoss.

EH: Yes.

CS: Who were some of the other characters in the newsroom when you got here?

EH: Well, let's see. Bill Husted was the city editor.

CS: What was he like?

EH: He was kind of a big bear guy. He was very friendly and very cheery. He was—I guess the word bluff comes to mind—not as a verb, but as an adjective. And his wife, Amanda, was the wire editor.

CS: What was she like?

EH: She was pretty perky—the eternal optimist. She would come in—the wire guy maybe came in—normally, the copy desk shifts ran—the first shift came in at 5:00 and then there was a shift that came in, I think, at 6:30. And the wire editor had to be here at 3:00. Three to 11:00 was the wire shift. Patsy McKown was the copy desk chief. Her mentor was Si Dunn. Gosh, I should have written this down [to begin with?]. This will come back to me.

CS: I know she had worked for McCord at the North Little Rock Times.

EH: Right. But the old copy desk chief—he came back, if you remember.

CS: Oh, Si Dunn?

EH: Si Dunn. Yes.

CS: I didn't realize that.

EH: He had been here earlier and had sort of semi-retired, I didn't like it much, and came back. Patsy had been his assistant.

CS: I didn't know that.

EH: Patsy is as country as they come. She has this sort of [property out] east of town [] I think it's up around Scott or England, or somewhere like that. She had just the most amazing Arkansas twang. It was tough adjusting when I moved here to hearing that. Garry Hoffman was the assistant city editor.

CS: Garry Hoffman! Garry Hoffman! [Alluding to TV show “Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman”]

EH: [He has since] come back. I remember Bob Lancaster, who wrote a column three days a week. It was the most painful thing I ever watched anybody do.

CS: Why?

EH: Bob would sit there at his typewriter and just stare at it for about twenty minutes, then he'd type three words. Then he'd go walk around in the newsroom for twenty minutes. Then he'd sit there, and he'd type three more words. Then he'd lay his head down on the typewriter for twenty minutes until he'd worn a groove in his forehead, and he'd sit up and type three more words. And you could sit there and watch him—for Pete's sake, if it's that hard, why do you do it? [Laughs] But I remember coming in—you should have seen me working in the afternoons when I was working the late job. I'd come in here and do that, where he'd come in here very early in the morning putting his column together. That was always strange. We had a young reporting staff, but a lot of people—at the time, this was a place people came as an entry-level job. You worked here for six months or so until you built up enough clippings and enough of a reputation, then you went somewhere else. And most people at the time—their main goal in life was to eventually work for the [Arkansas] Gazette, which is where a lot of people ended up going. But not all of them. Some of them went to more distinguished papers. Some of them even quit the business altogether. I don't know who was here with Karen [please provide last name]. I've forgotten her last name. She left to go teach elementary school for the Pulaski County District because it paid better, and she got three months off in the summer.

CS: I remember somebody went to District, but I'm thinking Barbara [Please provide last name]. How many copy editors were there?

EH: Well, there were seven seats on the rim. I think we had at least a dozen copy editors over different shifts. For the afternoon paper, Monday through Thursday, we

worked the day shift. On Saturdays and Sundays we were a morning paper, so there was a Friday day shift and a Friday night shift and also a Saturday night shift for Sunday's paper. We had to have enough people to cover that. And, of course, there was a night man—a late man. I remember, too, the schedule used to get put together on Fridays. Patsy would post the schedule on Friday, then you would come in Friday night and discover that you had a three-day weekend. You didn't have to work Saturday and Sunday and you were off on Monday. You'd usually work Friday night or Saturday night. You never worked both. So if you worked Friday's day shift, you would end up working Saturday night and have a day off during the week. I remember how perplexing that would be because you couldn't make plans for a three-day weekend which you didn't know was coming up. And all of a sudden, you'd come in on Friday morning or Friday night, and you'd find out that you had the weekend off and no clue that it was going to happen.

CS: I remember you telling me that there were more copy editors than reporters.

EH: I think that was true because it was a small [newsroom]. There were only about six or eight reporters. And, of course, a substantial amount of what we were putting in the paper was wire copy, as a rule anyway.

CS: Yes.

EH: So the wire copy—if you remember, too, the wire copy came in on a punch-tape system. We actually had hard copy, and you would rip the part off from the Teletype and you'd send it up to the composing room and say, "We need the punch tape run through on these numbers." And the punch tape wasn't any more reliable

than the scanner half the time.

CS: Was that yellow?

EH: It was a little yellow strip of computer-punched tape. They would run it through a tape reader, then you could call it up on the computer and edit it. You had to put in the corrections that you had already made on the hard copy. And, again, it was as faulty, I think, as the scanner. The copy would sometimes come up horribly garbled, where you'd get three stories that were all strung together and have to go back and sort that out, so partially because so much of the state edition was wire copy that was processed overnight. And, of course, the slot editor sat in the slot of the horseshoe with dummies pages and distributed copy, so everybody had a spike.

CS: Speaking of tape, let's turn this thing over.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

CS: . . . sitting in the slot position in the . . .

EH: The actual slot of the horseshoe. You would distribute copy—copy was coming—the wire editor would process the—rip and read—so the story would go into a basket. You'd lift stuff out of that and assign it to a copy editor to be edited in the hard copy to have headlines written.

CS: And this was on the kind of paper that comes out of Teletype machines.

EH: Right. It was a heavy . . .

CS: How many Teletype machines did we have?

EH: I think that's right. We had an [Associaed Press] A wire, an [Associated Press

Bureau] B wire, we had a Knight-Ridder wire, we had the Washington Post/Los Angeles Times, and a weather machine. Weather wire. I'm pretty sure that was all [of] them.

CS: And sports had to run on one of those?

EH: Well, sports ran on their own. They had—the AP [Associated Press] sports wire was back in the sports department. This was back in the separate room on the second floor. And I think they had two Teletype machines back there, so we didn't—sports didn't come over to our Teletype because they had their own.

CS: And it was on that heavy paper.

EH: It was on heavy, box-colored—almost like construction paper. It was pretty—there were chunks of wood floating around in it.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: If you remember, when a bulletin would come in, it would ring. The machine would let out a ring, and you'd go run and see what it was.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I think when Elvis [Presley] died, the whole thing went crazy.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Of course, the headline for that was pretty obvious. "The King is Dead."

CS: Yes.

EH: That was in August of 1977.

CS: I didn't come here until 1978.

EH: Oh.

CS: By the time I got here, you were a hardened veteran.

EH: That's true and, as I said, because of the turnover, everybody got promoted quickly. You got assigned to top jobs if you showed the least amount of competence. I worked the copy desk, let's see, until October of 1978. I spent a month as assistant wire editor. Then the TV editor, Debbie . . .

CS: Comstock?

EH: Debbie Comstock—departed. I think she left to have a baby or something. And they decided they were going to put together an honest-to-goodness—we used to have a daily TV page where we had the listings, which were actually put together on a grid by hand. And Debbie had columns on the top of that page. They decided that they were going to double the size of the coverage and have a TV page and have an entertainment page every day because at that point, I think, we had started to trickle in some movie ads—not like we eventually had, but at the time, the Gazette had run maybe ninety-eight percent of the feature-film advertising. And basically what we ran were the ladder, the listing ads. And every once in a rare while we'd get it as a 2 by 5 inches or 2 by 3 inches display ad. But this was happening at the time that Walter Hussman [Jr.] was having to make the decision—he bought the paper in 1974, and eventually, after several years, he had to either decide to make something of the newspaper, or fold it. He did at the time attempt to set up a joint operating agreement with the Gazette, which they rejected. And in the fall and winter of 1978, he made the decision that this paper was going to go morning, [and] he was going to start giving away the classified ads. All of these took place within two or three months of each other. They were increasing the size of the entertainment coverage. They were looking for some-

body to take over that, and I volunteered. Basically, it was a daily TV page and—not really “happenings,” but some entertainment coverage. We had three pages of canned junk mostly on Sunday, where we ran the gossip column, the horoscope, the bridge column, and whatever other wire copy you could cobble together. And the Sunday TV magazine was all part of that one-and-a-half person department.

CS: Did you have a title?

EH: I think we called me entertainment editor at the time, but it was mainly a formality. I had been doing reviews. I did the theater and music reviews.

CS: When did you start doing the reviews?

EH: Actually, the end of the first summer I got here. Robert Ike Thomas, who had been the chief photographer, had been doing the classical musical reviews, but had wanted to get out of it. Gerald Koontz, who was one of the copy editors, was doing theater reviews on a very spot kind of basis. And I remember that I picked up at the end of that summer—I think it was the [Arkansas] Arts Center did a children's show. I started reviewing theater from that, and I started doing classical music [reviews] that fall because Robert Ike had—I had said that I was interested in doing it, and Robert Ike had basically said, "Oh, joy! Oh, bliss! I don't want to do this. Please do this." So I had been doing those for some time. We started doing restaurant reviews early in 1979.

CS: No, you were doing them in 1978 because when I got here, one of the first things that happened to me at the newspaper was that you and I went out to a restaurant that was in the train station.

EH: Oh, yes.

CS: Because you were reviewing it.

EH: Right. It wouldn't have been Slick Willy's. It would have been the—was it the one in the railroad car?

CS: It was the one in the railroad car.

EH: Yes. Tracks Inn.

CS: Tracks Inn. I had forgotten.

EH: That was one of the first ones we did, but it was very late 1978 or very early in 1979 that I had gotten into—and I had also done restaurant reviews for the school paper.

CS: Well, I remember being so amazed because we were eating this food, and I am not a very critical person about [], and you were asking me what I thought of the food. And I really didn't know.

EH: [Laughs] You know, the same rules that basically apply now, always did. I never talk about what I'm there for in front of the help, and I get to eat out of everybody's plate. But, yes, I guess you're right. I would have started in late 1978. I think, actually, I did start doing that before I moved over to entertainment, now that you mention it, because I had petitioned them, and they had said, "Yes, we used to do them, but we don't anymore, but if you want to, go ahead." We basically ran canned movie reviews until late 1979 or early 1980. That was another case of them coming down and saying, "We want somebody to do movie reviews." And I said, "Sure. Here I am." We gradually—I want to say it was—I'm not sure exactly what year we went for full-sized—a separate entertainment section every day. It must have been maybe 1983 or 1984, but the [the point, one, ?]

was that the Gazette had been charging the movie theaters the national advertising rate for movie ads, even though the ads were placed locally. The display ads were co-op [cooperative]. They got money from the studios to buy ads in the local papers, and the Gazette used that as an excuse to charge them extra. As long as the Democrat's circulation had been so low, they really didn't have any choice about where they put their advertising. And at this point, the Democrat's circulation had started to climb. Free classified advertising had made a tremendous difference because almost overnight, once they had started putting that in, the size of the classifieds section went up from two-and-a-half pages a day to a dozen pages a day or two dozen pages a day sometimes. People bought the paper to see if we had screwed up their ad, which we did a lot of at the time.

CS: I had forgotten about that. [Laughs]

EH: They hired a bunch of people downstairs who didn't know how to spell [laughs]. That was another problem. I particularly am fond of the ad for the "Chip and Dale" sofa that we ran [reference to Chippendale sofa].

CS: [Laughs]

EH: The furniture ads seemed to be a major—"arm-wire" [reference to armoire].

CS: [Laughs]

EH: The ad was free, so it wasn't like we could give them their money back if we screwed it up. But that really was a tremendous marketing success. The paper's circulation started to pick up. And at some point, I think, the combination of the irksome charging for the ads and something that Ralph Patterson, the movie reviewer for the Gazette, did something. He ticked off somebody at United Artists

[a movie theater chain]. They had said, "We're going to take one hundred percent of our feature movie advertising and were going to put it in the Democrat. Good-bye!" I think it amounted to a quarter of a million dollars a year, which was a fair chunk of change at the time. And in order to have a place to house all of that, we hived off a separate entertainment section. There were usually six or eight pages. It varied. But we had two comics pages and a TV page every day. So, basically, I was responsible for filling the front and back page and one inside page. And we began to process more and more copy to fill that section. It was coming out seven days a week. I also—let's see, the weekend section—I don't know when that first happened—that would have been fairly early on. It might also have been about 1981. We got word that the Gazette was going to start putting out a weekend section. This was, I think, on a Monday. They came to me and said, "This Friday you are going to have a weekend section. We're not quite sure what we want to have in it. It's going to be a tabloid. We're not sure what the type measure is going to be or the width of the columns or what kind of headlines it's going to use or exactly what it's going to look like, but it all has to be done by Wednesday afternoon." That was what sufficed for planning in those days. I remember scrambling around to get the thing put together, and we did it on a shoestring. We had been running a little column at the bottom of the front page of Fridays called—it might have been called "What's Going On," or something like that. That was the core of this thing. We eventually expanded that to cover that section. But I remember that at 4:30 on Thursday afternoon, the thing had to go to press [about] two minutes later, and we were still waiting for the publisher to decide what it

was he wanted to call it. My suggestion had been whatever this column had been called so we'd have some kind of continuity. And what the publisher eventually decided on was "Weekend." So we had a tabloid "Weekend" section, and it took me a little over two years to finally beat that thing into a shape I was proud of—until I finally put out a product that was well-designed, because it had had no advance planning.

CS: What did you put on the front?

EH: Usually, the front was a piece of artwork of some kind with a reference to what was inside. It was like a magazine cover . . .

CS: Was it like a wire feed, or was it something local?

EH: No, it was usually something local. It was whatever the big story would have been going on locally, but it was almost entirely event-oriented.

CS: Yes..

EH: And we ran our restaurant reviews in there. The one cover I particularly remember, because I designed it myself—we did a story on airline food. The cover art was the front end of a plane with "Mr. Yuck Poison Control Center" face where the airline logo would have been.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: But, you know, it was finally in a shape I was pleased with. And that week they came to me, and they said, "Somebody bought a full-page movie ad. From now on it's going to be a broadsheet." And it was like . . . [Laughs]

CS: How long did you do the tabloid?

EH: The tabloid must have been about—it was two years. It was a little over two

years, then they decided to go to a broadsheet because they had a full-page ad to stick in it.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: We ran movie reviews in there. It was an all-purpose section. There wasn't usually that much trouble coming up with copy for it.

CS: When did they add the entertainment columnist?

EH: Let me think. Are we talking about . . . ?

CS: Jan Meins and Debbie Comstock and . . .

EH: Oh, the Debbie Comstock column had been there . . .

CS: From the beginning.

EH: . . . from the beginning, and we kind of got away from it in the early years because we really didn't have a TV writer. I would say in around 1986—I guess Jan Meins was the first of those columnists. Becki Moore did it for a while.

CS: About two years?

EH: About two years. I know you did it for a while. Steve Kuykendall did it for a while.

CS: And you edited all of these.

EH: Yes. Basically, I edited the entire section. I wrote the headlines. I laid out the pages. And I was pretty much left alone because John Robert Starr—unless somebody actually called up to complain about the section—never really paid any attention to it.

CS: He didn't much care about entertainment.

EH: Well, he didn't. If there was something in the section that was squirrely for some

reason . . .

CS: [Laughs]

EH: . . . he would come and say, "What is this?" And I would explain it, and he would say, "Fine." So, basically, as long as I kept my nose clean, I was master of my own domain. I remember that we had writer troubles almost from the very beginning. I know the first person—the thing became big enough so that I had to have staff writers. We hired Sandy Miller Hays, who was this wonderful, prolific, fast, good writer who turned out buckets of copy.

CS: She was little.

EH: We hired Jack Hill in 1981, so this all had to have been in the very early years of that section. Jack came on—I'm trying to think—let's see. I cannot remember the name of the woman who was doing the TV listings when I came aboard, but she left after a while, and we had a young girl named Carolee [please provide last name]. I think she had worked briefly on the copy desk or worked in sports as a clerk.

CS: This was when you first came here?

EH: No, when I first took over the TV magazine, which would have been December of 1978.

CS: Do you remember her last name?

EH: No, but I remember she drove a blue [Datsun] 280Z. She was dating one of the photographers. And I think she had a vanity plate that said Carolee. She left, and we hired Margaret Hanry. Carolee moved off to Dallas, I think. And Margaret brought Jack. They were pals back in their college days at Fayetteville. Jack had

hung around with Margaret's husband. And Margaret's successor was Audree [Brown]. I think it had gotten to the point, once we started running all the TV channels, we had to have two people. And Audree was also compiling the weekend calendar.

CS: Do you remember Audree's last name?

EH: Audree Brown. Audree with two e's. And then when Audree left, we hired Rosemary.

CS: Rosemary Boggs.

EH: Boggs. Yes.

CS: What did Kathy Nail do? When did she come?

EH: Kathy had worked as a reporter. She worked briefly—she did a column—she did a TV column for a very short period of time, but she was mostly a reporter. She worked for me directly for—if she did, it was for a very short period of time.

CS: I think it was sort of TV beat reporting, maybe? Because I remember something about Starr being suspicious of her coverage of Tom Bonner and him getting in a car and following her.

EH: She might have done some [of that], but I think it was outside of my—this was something else—I think there was some coverage that she was doing that was outside of what I did.

CS: Okay.

EH: I don't remember so much that—I do remember the time I scooped the world on Tom Bonner's age.

CS: Tell me about that.

EH: Tom Bonner's age was a big, deep, dark secret. He used to say there were two things he wouldn't discuss—how much money he made and how old he was. And he was quite the prowler after local ladies, so he was very vain about his age. I remember getting a story over the wire about how weathermen get blamed for bad weather. Harry King from the AP [Associated Press] bureau here had interviewed Tom Bonner as one element of this story, and they named several weathercasters across the country. And they listed Tom Bonner as being thirty-eight or forty-five, or whatever the age was. I think he said thirty-five. And Ralph Patrick, who was the assistant managing editor at the time, saw this and said, "That's a crock! Tom and I went to school together" at what had been the Arkansas State Teachers College, which is now UCA. [University of Central Arkansas] And he said, "I'm forty-one, so I know Tom can't be thirty-five!" And I called Bonner, and, as usual, he said, "I refuse to discuss my age. I don't know where they got this figure from." I called Harry King at the AP, and he said he told Bonner, "My editor won't let me go without an age. If you won't tell me how old you are, give me something to type in there." And Tom Bonner said, "Just tell them I'm thirty-five." So I called UCA—called their alumni office. I asked them if they had a date of graduation and a date of admission for Tom Bonner. I said, "By the way, does it list his date of birth?" And they said, "Yes. September 1, 1938."

CS: [Laughs]

EH: So as a sidebar to this story, I put that Tom Bonner refused to talk about his age, but I [laughs] had uncovered that he was forty-one. Oh, was he pissed! He [didn't?] talk to me for years. He and I are fairly good buddies now, I guess.

Since he got married it didn't really make any difference anymore to him, I guess. His prowling days were over. But, oh, was he pissed! It was a little investigative journalism.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I remember the first piece I did here that—I guess it was the first thing I did here that showed up on our front page, when I was actually doing some reporting. It was a front-page headline. It was a story about—this must have been about 1980 or 1981—The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas [National Touring Company] was coming to Robinson [Auditorium]. And the name of the show at the time was very sensitive in this, the Bible Belt. In fact, the ads that they were running said, The Best Little Warehouse in Texas. I got the call from somebody the day the trucks were arriving—the company was coming into town—that somebody who was affiliated with the tour had gotten off the plane in Little Rock and gotten into a cab. And when he told the cabby that he was with The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, the cabby took him out to West Ninth Street and dropped him off at a whorehouse.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: So I looked into it. It certainly wasn't quite that dramatic, but it was a lot of fun. It turns out this guy was an electrician and was coming in as part of the advance team. He had had several drinks at the Dallas airport before getting on the plane, and [he] had a couple of drinks on the plane. He got off the plane in a slightly inebriated condition and got into a cab. And the cabby asked him, as cabbies do, "What are you doing in town?" He explained what he was doing there, that he

was working for The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas. And the cabby said, "Well, I'm a Baptist, and we're opposed to that show coming here." He stopped the cab on East Ninth Street and opened up the trunk and took his luggage out, put it on the sidewalk, and left him there.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Another cab passing by along the way—they were staying at the Camelot [Hotel]—stopped and picked him up and brought him to the hotel. The guy himself didn't talk to me, but his boss told me this story. He said, "The guy is kind of like Joe Bftsplk [from Li'l Abner comic strip], you know, he walks around with a dark cloud over his head." [Laughs]. Apparently this kind of thing happened to him all the time. So I wrote a cute little story that said, "So-and-so has this sad tale to tell about southern hospitality," and they ran the story with the tag line that this time the dark clouds that had been hanging over him had a silver lining, that the cabby didn't make him pay for the ride.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I remember sitting in the story meeting in the afternoon and posting the story up on it. I had everybody go nuts over it. They actually got [artist] Bruce Plante to do an illustration of this cabby pitching this guy out in the street. And Si Dunn got up in the meeting and he said, "What do you mean, we're going to run the word whorehouse on the front page of the Democrat? We can't run the word whorehouse on the front page of the Democrat!" And everybody said, "Oh, Si, for crying out loud!" And he said, "Somebody's going to someday write a show about the [laughter] best little shithouse in Texas, and we'll have to run that on the

front page [of the paper]." My dad called me a couple of days later and said, "We got this story out of Little Rock about the guy who got"—"I wrote that, Dad."

[Laughs] It got picked up on the wires and sent around the world.

CS: [Laughs] I've always wondered—what did your dad think of your staying in Arkansas?

EH: Well, I think my parents have always been a little bemused that I've stayed here this long. I remember the first couple of years I was here I went out on several job interviews, none of which actually panned out. I interviewed in Miami [Florida] and Providence [Rhode Island] and one or two other places. Probably the Providence job was really bizarre because they had some kind of crusty old editor up there who had been there since they were [printing] the paper on stone tablets. First of all, I covered—and I'm sure I embarrassed the hell out of somebody—they explained the job—it was just a design job. I wasn't supposed to edit any copy or write any headlines. I was just supposed to design pages. And the setup was that you designed--I think it was a dozen pages for their first edition and then remade four pages for the city edition. And I made the mistake of asking, "What does he do with the rest of his time?" Apparently, the guy [who had the job] had set it up in such a fashion so that he made them believe he was actually doing all this work. [Laughs] And I was coming from a paper where I was sitting in the slot, and I was designing twenty pages in two hours, and I was writing the headlines and processing the copy and dummied the pages and reading the proofs. And here, I was coming to a job where all I had to do was design a dozen pages in a night. And we're not even talking about bastard type measures or anything in-

ventive. And I made the mistake of actually asking out loud, [Laughter] "What am I supposed to do with the rest of my evening?" I think that pretty well sealed not getting the job up there. They paid for my transport up and back. And in order to get from here to Providence, Rhode Island, and back in—I stayed overnight, so we're talking about two days' time—I flew United [Airlines] to Chicago and American [Airlines] to Providence, and then Eastern [Airlines] from Providence to Atlanta, and Delta [Airlines] from Atlanta back to Little Rock.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: This must have been some poor travel agent's nightmare. It's funny—when I first moved down here, my recollection was—we were talking about that it was my first plane ride—in order to get down here in the daytime—there were no flights from Philadelphia to Little Rock, and there still aren't—well, I guess Southwest [Airlines] flies from Philadelphia now directly or through Chicago, maybe. But I remember to get down here in the daytime, I had to fly a commuter plane from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, to get a [Boeing] 727 to Nashville, to get a flight from Nashville to Little Rock. If I had been willing to come in the middle of the night, I could have made it in about two stops. I remember we got to the end of the terminal, and my mother looked out at this plane—it was a turbo-prop[ellor] plane—my mom, being somewhat given to hyperbole, looked out and says, "Oh, my God! It's the Spirit of St. Louis!" [Reference to Charles Lindbergh's airplane which made the first successful flight across the Atlantic Ocean.] And I remember—I guess the pilot steered by the air pockets. I think that's how he knew where he was going. I remember that whole forty-five minute leg was [like] I had

a tennis racket tied to my luggage, and I was sitting there like—with a joystick—like this. [Laughs]

CS: Did you take a tennis racket with you?

EH: Yes. At the time, I was playing tennis fairly regularly.

CS: And did your mom come with you?

EH: No. I had a carry-on bag with a tennis racket strapped to the side. I remember sitting in that plane holding onto the tennis racket as the plane flew about. It's really funny. Getting in and out of this airport in reasonable time to reasonable places is a fairly modern invention. Twenty-five to twenty-eight years ago you could not get in and out of here smoothly. The direct flights went to Dallas or to Nashville, and that was it. And eventually Delta was in Atlanta []. You couldn't fly direct from here to anyplace.

CS: So did you feel when you got out of the airplane and saw the airport that you had come to a very small . . . ?

EH: I think at the time it was not a jet-way. I remember getting out of the plane and walking down the steps to the tarmac, and it was 102 degrees.

CS: Had you experienced that before?

EH: Well, the end of August in Philadelphia is—the temperature goes up to ninety-eight [degrees], and the humidity goes up to ninety-eight percent. It's pretty grim. I had never experienced it in the first week of June. [There was] the last week in—that summer I spent in Baltimore. Basically, it gets like that in Baltimore at the end of July. It gets that way in Philadelphia at the end of August. Here it gets that way by Memorial Day. This is kind of an interesting story. Charlie Rixse,

who's an old newspaper man in this town, who was, at the time, the head of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, had been in Philadelphia the previous summer. He was an old army buddy of my dad's. They had gone through basic training together. He had been to Philadelphia in the summer of 1976—which was the bicentennial summer—pitching Little Rock. He brought these little tie tacks with a little rock from Little Rock on them, with a little polished stone. When I learned I was going to come here for the job, my dad called Charlie Rixse up and said, "My son is moving to Little Rock."

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

EH: And [my dad] asked him [Rixse] if he could recommend a place for me to stay until I found an apartment, and he said, "Oh, we'll take him in." So they picked me up at the airport. They lived out in Walton Heights, one of the . . .

CS: Far, far . . .

EH: The far edge of civilization. It was just over the border from civilization out there. So he gave me a room for the night. In fact, it was several days. I spent, I guess, a week or a week and a half before I moved into an apartment—lent me a car to get around in. As a matter of fact, for a couple of months afterwards until I bought my first car, I used to borrow their car so I could do my laundry because there are no laundromats downtown. I was hauling my clothes on my back to the Red Ball Laundry at Eleventh and Cumberland once a week and paying them an exorbitant sum of money to lose my pants.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Invariably I would come back from the cleaners and discover that at least one pair of pants was missing. And it got to be—in the long run it was cheaper to buy a car to do my laundry than to keep paying for new pants.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I lived in that apartment a week without an air-conditioner and decided that that was not humanly possible any longer. So, at the time, Brandon House Furniture over here at Seventh and whatever it is—Izard, I guess—it's not there now—but I walked over there and I bought a window air-conditioner, and I told the guy, "Okay, you're going to have to deliver it." And he said, "No, you just take it out and put it in your car." I said, "I don't have a car. I need you to deliver the air-conditioner." Well, it took me twenty minutes of arguing with this guy that I could not take the air-conditioner and put it in my car because I didn't have one. And the concept refused to embed itself in this guy's head. It was strange. After two months, I decided it was cheaper to buy a used car than to keep paying for more pants. We've brought ourselves here up until the mid-1980s.

CS: And you're the entertainment editor.

EH: And I'm now the entertainment editor, which I had been since December of 1978. I remember particularly up to 1986, the year of the lawsuit, which was simply the turn-around point . . .

CS: How did that affect your day-to-day operations at all?

EH: Well, it didn't particularly affect my day-to-day operations, except, of course, there was a heightened sense of awareness. But, essentially, that was also the year that Walter Hussman [Jr.] turned his first small profit on the newspaper. I

think out of the twelve months—I mean, he had a loss for the year, but he turned a profit, I think, for two months out of that year, and distributed it to the staff. Everybody got a few nickels added to their paycheck. And I remember them saying at the time that the cost of defending ourselves against the lawsuit was exactly the difference between making a profit and turning a loss that year—the million dollars or whatever it was we spent on defending ourselves in that lawsuit. I remember particularly—they brought in Roy McDonald, the old coot who ran the Chattanooga Free Press. He was their publisher. He was brought in as an expert witness on what would constitute unfair trade practices, which was what we were being sued for—the Gazette had sued us on four counts of allegedly unfair trade practices. I remember they got this guy on the stand and they said, "The Democrat does this—would you consider this an unfair trade practice?" And he said, "No." And they said, "Well, how about this?" And he said, "No." And the stupid lawyer asked him one question too many, which was, "What would you consider to be an unfair trade practice?" And he said, "Filing nuisance lawsuits against your competition." [Laughter] I remember talking to the lawyer at the time, and he said he thought that really was the turning point. That's the thing that convinced—it must have been a jury trial. I think it was a jury trial. The judge, in any case, declared at the end of the trial that what we were doing was obnoxious and unpleasant, but it wasn't illegal. And that involved throwing [newspaper[s]] free on Wednesdays so we could claim this massive circulation once a week, even though people were calling us up and threatening to sue us because they didn't want the TMC papers rotting in their front yards.

CS: So TMC—the total market coverage.

EH: Yes, total market coverage. Yes. Another thing I remember from my early years was—I don't know if you were here when we started suburban zones.

CS: Yes, I remember those.

EH: We had a north zone and a southwest zone and a . . .

CS: Did you edit those?

EH: I edited those for about two months. I finally got out of it. I think they transferred me to the night job—is what got me out of the suburban.

CS: It was a totally horrible job. I did that job for a while. It was awful.

EH: But we had to put all those zones sections together. We essentially had the same copy for all of them, but because the ad layout was different for each of them, it was shaped differently. I remember dealing with the—it was a good idea that [] where we tried to exploit—and which we still exploit to some degree today—the Friday—every other week—I think the Friday weekend section and the Movie and Style sections are zoned.

CS: I think Thursday is zoned as well.

EH: Yes. It has the north section and the west section. But it's a nightmare to whoever has to handle it because there's always one gigantic ad that only runs in the one edition and makes an unholy mess of whatever it is that you've planned. And it always comes in at the last second.

CS: Meredith Oakley wrote the North Little Rock one, right?

EH: Yes, she did, but she was our North Little Rock beat reporter for a while, then she went to [the] capitol [beat]. Oh, speaking of characters who were here at the

time—Bob Sallee, of course—I didn't mention him. You didn't hardly see Bob much. He was always at the courthouse, but he would always come into the newsroom from time to time and dispense nuggets of wisdom. I miss Bob. He was quite a guy. Anyway, in the mid-1980s the circulation started to turn around. I remember particularly the celebration we had when we drew even with the Gazette—fifty-fifty circulation. Of course, the year that Gannett tried to turn it into Arkansas Today with its lurid stories of Spandex-clad cheerleaders down at UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock].

CS: Do you remember the headline in the promo box?

EH: No.

CS: “Jeez, those knees!”

EH: Oh, yes. [] [Laughter] And it was purely manufactured. Nobody gave the tiniest little damn. The Gazette was stodgy, and it was gray, but it was a newspaper. And [Gannett] had no concept of people—what they were dealing with, what the market was like, what people wanted out of the newspaper. Whatever they were producing, it wasn't it. Finally, when the Gazette went under—I actually got word earlier than almost anybody else—people at the Gazette didn't find out until after noon, and they came to me at 10:30 and said, "There is not going to be a Gazette tomorrow."

CS: Right.

EH: "You are going to have to take your section and"—which had already gone to the press. They hadn't run it on the press yet, but everything had been done. They said, "You're going to have to take that section, and you're going to rip it apart and

start from scratch. You're going to have to get in another page of comics.” Richard Allin and [Charles] Allbright—there were two or three others—of course, all the little puzzles that the Gazette ran that we didn't, that we picked up. "And it all has to be done by 12:30 this afternoon." It would have been a Saturday. Saturday the nineteenth of October. I think that's correct. 1991.

CS: Well, we can verify that.

EH: Yes. But that whole section had to be torn apart and put back together with—and I think they did add two pages to that section so we could get it all in, because we literally picked up almost all the Gazette's comics at the beginning and all of those puzzles and all the little columns. We had "Dear Abby." We were running "Dear Abby," and they had "Ann Landers." That had to be wedged in there somewhere with a shoehorn and a paring knife. That was quite an experience.

CS: And this was in the days when paste-up was done as paste-up.

EH: Right. It was all done as paste-up. Actually, you've paginated and directly to the page now—I guess for what, five or six years?

CS: Yes.

EH: But, yes, the composing room was still pasting up back there from paper dummies. That also was about the time that they were starting to paginate a little bit. They had brought in large-screen monitors, and they gave us some rudimentary lessons on how to work Quark [software]. And the original idea was that section editors would do their own sections. I think eventually they abandoned that for the idea of having real designers, for the first time, actually designing pages. I also was surprised to learn in the wake of that, that the Entertainment section, which

I had been laboring on in one form or fashion for—let's see, 1978 to 1991—I was there thirteen years—was not really what the publisher had in mind all along.

CS: Oh!

EH: What he really wanted was the Gazette's feature section.

CS: How did you find that out?

EH: Well, basically, they came to me, and they said, "This is how it's going to work from now on. We're going to have an Entertainment section on Sunday. We're going to have a Style section on Tuesday and Thursday. Wednesday is going to be Family." I don't think Health and Fitness had been born. Monday also was an Entertainment section, but it was a small section. If you remember, they put the movie ads of the front cover. But it was only a four-page section or a six-page section—whatever it was. And we still had the TV page and the comics. "But what we really want now is to do more of an Omnibus feature section."

CS: Who was it who was telling you that?

EH: At the time, I guess it would have been Griffin [Smith], or it might still have been Starr. Starr didn't actually leave for some months after that. But I always kind of felt—we talked about putting the Democrat Entertainment section together for so many years, and it was really one of the best-read sections of the paper. The readership surveys always turned that out. From purely empirical evidence of watching people in restaurants and Laundromats on Sundays—the first thing they'd pull out of that paper would be that section. And maybe half of them were just looking for the crossword puzzle and the comics and their horoscope, but that was the section that they pulled out of the paper first. And to suddenly discover after all

these years that it's not what [management] wanted was a big shock to me.

CS: How did you react?

EH: Well, I was perplexed, but basically I said, "It's your paper. I'll do it any way you want to do it. If this is what you'd rather have, we'll set that up." I still had some control over what would go into the sections. I was still the editor of the section. I still had some—basically, it was going to be less entertainment-oriented, but it wasn't a complete—it wasn't the complete change that would come a couple years down the line where we really made that choice that we were going to go with—to get away from entertainment-based coverage, except in a very limited sense.

CS: That was the theater and . . .?

EH: Movies. Essentially, we would run large-scale, lengthy interviews with movie stars. Starr always hated that; every once in a while he'd tell me. But it was stuff people read. It was what the reader was interested in, and you pretty much left it that way. But it did come as a shock to discover the day after the Gazette went under that that's what they wanted to preserve of it--was that project with the feature section that was more general in scope and less entertainment-related. When Jack Schnedler came on board, and they really made that decision that they were going to go for what Griffin had in mind—the Style section of the Washington Post was our model. Griffin came to me and said, "We're going to simply be making a wholesale change in the way this operates. We're going to give you a choice. Do you want to continue to be an editor in some other capacity, or would you rather write?" I guess this would have been 1995. I think I made the right choice at the time, which was that I would rather continue writing. If I couldn't

do both and I had to choose one or the other, writing was something that they would—that's how I got started in the business. That's hopefully what I do best. But it was a tough change because I had been in—I had been the youngest—even at the time I left that section, I was the youngest department head in the operation. I had been doing it for seventeen years. It was a pretty tough transition to convert myself away from that and remake what I did here.

CS: I remember the editing jobs being extremely tough on your—I'm not sure what the word would be—your emotional reserves or something.

EH: Well, it was in that . . .

CS: Aggravating.

EH: It was aggravating only because the way we were doing it was changing dramatically. The demands that were being placed on the editor of that section were increasing.

CS: I remember you being angry so often.

EH: I really felt like I was being micro-managed, essentially, because I had spent all those years with almost no direct supervision—to suddenly being in a situation where there was somebody looking over my shoulder all the time, saying, "This, that, the other."

CS: Who would have been looking? Would it have been Jack [Schnedler] or . . . ?

EH: Jack and also when Ellis [Widner] came on board.

CS: Jack and Ellis.

EH: Also, I think that they had had in mind sometime prior that they were going to put Karen Martin in charge of the—certainly, that Weekend section when it redeve-

loped—that was her project. They weren't going to have an Entertainment section anymore, so they didn't need an entertainment editor. And that made sense in retrospect. At the time, it was hard to get over, but they wanted a change in the context of the way it was put together, and they wanted somebody else in charge of that. And I think even now—it's been ten years. And I have an embarrassing amount of seniority to be a foot soldier. But, God, it's so much easier not being in charge of anything anymore. I can get up in the morning and not feel like I'm Atlas putting the world on my shoulders. Nobody calls me up at 11:00 to look for a missing page. I used to have to do that. I used to have to come down here at 11:00 at night if something had disappeared, or some piece of copy never showed up, or a page proof would be missing. Or a whole page would be missing sometimes.

CS: That can't have been good for your health.

EH: Well, it certainly wasn't good for my blood pressure.

CS: Do you have high blood pressure? [Laughs]

EH: Yes. Luckily, it's under control. It's nice to be able to come in in the morning and do what I have to do and leave it here when I go. I think I got—my original concept of what I was going to be doing here in 1995 was that I would continue to do the writing I was doing at the time—that I would be continuing with the new movies and theater and write about the arts. And, gradually, some of that stuff passed on to other hands. They wanted a different sense of how we review movies. That's fine. That's a conceptual change. I was a little irked at the change in theater policy where basically they took a look and said, "The two people in your

department who have the most knowledge about theater"—which would be Werner [Trieschmann] and me—he as a playwright, I as an actor—there is at least the possible perception of a conflict of interest because we had connections within the community. Not that I don't say anybody over so many years had ever said that "he isn't fair" or that the reviews connected to advantage or disadvantage, but the perception is possible. They took the two people off the staff who had the most knowledge and essentially put it out of bounds for that kind of coverage. And our theater viewing, I think, suffered for it considerably at the time. The decision that they eventually made to stop reviewing amateur theater was based out of that, that we had what I like to call "the any warm body theory of theater reviewing," where if "there's a community theater show open on Thursday. Who wants to go?"

CS: Yes.

EH: That caused some complaints, and the policy changed that we would no longer—rather than make ourselves subject to complaints, we simply wouldn't do it. You know, it's a policy decision, and you live or you don't live with it as best you can. But I think, basically, I miss that. That's something I had rather thought I would still be doing at this juncture that I don't get to do.

CS: [] It's part of the community?

EH: Well, yes. I think gradually we've seen our arts coverage in general pulled back. We certainly have a fairly generous hole for it compared to most newspapers, but I'm not sure we make the best use of it that we can. And I suspect that that will continue to be the case.

CS: And you did adapt.

EH: I did. I think they showed an enormous amount of patience with me.

CS: Really?

EH: Part of which was, no doubt, that I had been here since the Year One. But I took a really long time to make that transition. There were a lot of things that—a lot of areas of news where I was doing or I wasn't doing that—it wasn't an ideal situation, and I think, basically, they let me make that transition at a more extended pace than other employers might have done—other managers. I hope in the long run they've been pleased by that. It seems to have worked out in the end, but that would be something to ask my superiors.

CS: Do you have a sense that you made a wise decision in sort of pitching your lot in with this newspaper?

EH: I think so. In the long run, by and large, this paper has been very good to me. As long as I feel like I'm continuing to provide—help the paper grow and survive and thrive--that I will have a place here. I'm so glad I don't have to cadge paper clips anymore. All those years with Fred Campbell in the composing room where we were scraping paper clips out of the wax because you never knew if you'd see another box. [Laughter]

CS: Yes. Tell me about the pencil stubs and the chairs and the paper clips.

EH: Well, I do remember that you could not order supplies. If you needed something really badly enough—the chairs were absolute wrecks. They had been there since the 1940s, some of them. Some would have a wheel missing. Generally, you never saw—I don't think I ever saw, from the day I walked into that place until

maybe the day the Gazette went under, a new box of paper clips or a new box of staples. You were always cadging something from somewhere. Part of it was to save money during the newspaper war, which was tremendously important. We were always the financial underdog in that situation. And I'm sure part of the computer thing was like that, but I'm sure a lot of it was just pure pig-headedness. I think one of the things that helped the paper survive was that we cut our costs down to the bare minimum. I'm sure that not having new paper clips somewhere along the line . . .

CS: [Laughs] Provided the nail.

EH: Yes. Literally. Who knows? Maybe the month we bought new paper clips—I'm sure somebody in the building must have gotten new paper clips, but they were always second- and third-hand by the time they got up to the second floor or the third floor, back when the composing room was up there.

CS: But it must have given you material for stand-up comedy.

EH: Yes and no. It was a limited world. It makes good stories to tell other people who are in the business, but it's not necessarily something that the public at large would find funny, unless you could somehow concentrate it—"I work for a boss who's so tight that—".

CS: Did you try? I know you did stand-up for a while.

EH: I did stand-up for a while. I still do on rare occasions. As a matter of fact, I've always kept that part of me separate from this one. I've compartmentalized it pretty well. I've never used this so much as—what I find funny here is funny to other people here. But it's not something I try to translate out to the world at

large. Some stories stay funny. The polar bear story is funny in any context, but it's not the kind of thing that you can do on stage. It requires too long a set-up to do that kind of thing in that kind of context. It's something that [comedian] Bill Cosby could turn into good stage material because Bill Cosby is a storyteller.

CS: Yes.

EH: But my brand of comedy has always been observational, and it's always been the set-up, the joke—it's never—very few things can you set up in a long form in that kind of a structure. Also, most of the stand-up I've done has been in fifteen-minute blocks. If you're a headliner out there for forty-five minutes, you do some longer-term things, If you're up there for fifteen minutes before you bring on the next act, you've basically got to get in and out. [Laughs] You don't have the luxury to tell long, funny stories.

CS: Have you ever considered quitting the newspaper and being a comic?

EH: I've thought about it from time to time. Somebody once said to me not too long ago, "You're the only person I know who would plan a mid-life crisis." But I've thought about that, of having a mid-life crisis and taking a year off or so and just going on the road and being an actor or being a comic. Then I think, "What would I do for health insurance in the meanwhile?" Sometimes having a base of operations—I think of Deb Polston, who was the cartoonist here when I came on board—well, the editorial cartoonist was Jon Kennedy, but Deb did an awful lot of the artwork. And Deb had a whole cartoonist career going on outside of the paper. He had cartoons regularly appearing in *Playboy* and *Saturday Evening Post*. But he liked having a place where he could come in the morning and have a

place where he'd get his mail and a cup of coffee and do work and have an address of convenience while he—I'm sure he made more money on one cartoon for *Playboy*—he told me this once—than he made in his week's salary at the *Democrat*. But he liked having a place where he could be and have benefits. I kind of feel like that. I don't think I could make a career—I certainly don't know if I could make a living as a performance artist. But even if I did, I'd have to pay my own health insurance. [Laughs] As expensive as my health insurance is, it's a lot cheaper than paying for it out of my pocket.

CS: Are there people up here that you consider kind of your extended family?

[End of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 1]

CS: So, Eric, we're on tape [three] here. Are there people in the newsroom that you consider extended family?

EH: Oh, yes and no. I have close friends up here. Jack Hill and I have been working together now two dozen years. He and his wife and I go out occasionally. I don't know so much about close family in the way that I talk to my parents once a week. I call my sister less often than that, but I keep in touch. I don't really depend on this place directly as many people do for their social life, although the nature of my job—the fact that I get to go to concerts and [eat out] provides me with a basis for a social life and then I can invite other people to join. But I don't really socialize so much with the people up here outside of work, so I would probably in that respect have to say no. And part of that is conscious, and part of that is sometimes just the way things work out. Once upon a time—and partially because I

have a former girlfriend who worked here—it was complicated to have a relationship and also see that person at work. When we eventually broke up, it became more complicated. Luckily, she and I remained on good terms. One of the things I always say is that I've never parted from a woman in bitterness, not even the two I'm currently stalking.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: But it's true. I've never had a nasty breakup. But I basically resolved that I wasn't going to date where I worked because of that. Things happen and people break up. They go their separate ways, and you still have run into them every day at work.

CS: It's asking a lot.

EH: It is. And I don't know—maybe because I've set it up that I don't have to handle that emotionally, but I don't know how I would handle that emotionally. [Laughs]

CS: Part of your roots that keep you in Arkansas are out in the community.

EH: Yes. This place had provided with me with a very nice niche that I don't know whether I could have found anywhere else. In fact, one of the reasons I suspect I stayed here this long—well, for example, when I was going on job interviews—almost every time, if I stayed, I'd have something to stay for. I remember particularly, for example—I think it was the job in Providence—that if I had stayed here I would have—I had just been named assistant wire editor, so I had a promotion in the offing if I was still here. And I think that has basically happened almost every time that I have had to make that choice, "Will I stay or will I go?" At least in the early years. But I achieved a place of some prominence in the community as a

writer, as an actor, as a bon vivant [someone who lives well], if you want to call it that.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: Basically, I know where my place is in the community, and they've been accepting of that. Elsewhere, I don't know if I would've had that opportunity to be able to do the things I do.

CS: What are all the things that you're involved in? List them all.

EH: Well, let's see. Of course, I have a six-and-a-half-days-a-week job here [doing] in-house feature-writing work and also the outside reviewing work. I do theater, amateur and professional. I sing with a choral group. I do stand-up comedy. That's probably enough for one lifetime. It's kind of funny. I generally do comedy in those times when I'm not doing theater, and vice versa.

CS: And all the theaters that you're involved in. You do . . .

EH: I do shows at Murry's. I do shows at the Rep. I've done community theater, the Weekend Theater. Royal Players in Benton. This is all in the last three years.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I've done theater—not recently—but I've done theater at UALR. I've done the Shakespeare Festival that used to be here in the summers. I do radio commercials.

CS: I did not know that.

EH: Yes. In this town there are three studios that produce about half of the nation's radio commercials because there's a large acting talent pool here. I only work for

one of them, and I only work irregularly.

CS: Which one?

EH: Soundscapes.

CS: Soundscapes. And who have you done ads for?

EH: Mostly they've been regional ads. The only thing I've done locally that anybody would have heard would be for Dixie Café, where I was briefly the announcer voice for some of their commercials.

CS: You were the announcer voice for Dixie Café? Did you do it in your own . . . ?

EH: Pretty much. It was a character voice, but it wasn't—basically, it was an announcement. The punch line was, "The Dixie Café. Serving you the good taste of home." And I did a series of radio ads. They also had a series of three fifteen-second TV commercial spots where they said things like, "Your kitchen crew," and they showed the family all in the kitchen and then "Our kitchen crew," and they showed their kitchen. And the objective was that it was much saner to go to the Dixie Café. And then there would be the punch line, "The Dixie Café. Serving you the good taste of home." Dixie Café actually goes into, I think, eleven or twelve markets, and [in] some markets it's known as the Delta Café because there's a copyright conflict. But you get paid—doing this kind of work, interestingly, what you get paid is not dependent on how much time it takes to make the ad. The pay is dependent on the size of the market and the length of the spot. So a thirty-second spot in large commercial market pays more than a sixty-second spot in a small commercial market, but you get paid that whether it takes you an hour to make the commercial or five minutes. It's not based on the actual labor

expended or even the amount of studio time that it takes. It's based on the size of the market and the length of the spot.

CS: How much money are we talking about?

EH: Let's see. During the actors' strike [was] when we did a lot of commercials that would have normally gone to Chicago or New York or L.A., where they would've had to hire union actors. And I ended up doing two spots for the Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. They were, I think, thirty-second spots, and it was \$160 bucks. It didn't take that long. Maybe it was a half an hour of work apiece. It was kind of funny. The brought me in to do the one commercial. It involved—a guy has a minivan, and he puts the minivan in the garage and is taking the bus to the ball park. And the minivan goes to a plastic surgeon and asks him to make him look more like a bus so his owner will—and they said, "We want this done kind of like Jason Alexander," who, I'm sure, would have gotten the spot if they had done it in New York. "You've gotta help me, Doc. A hose job. A bumper tuck. You gotta help me! I'm a desperate van!" [Laughter] Then they called me back in about a month later, and they wanted me to play a taxi cab because the taxi cab wasn't getting as many trips to the airport because people were riding the bus. And I forget exactly what the script was like, but they said, "We don't want the same character. We want something in the same vein, but we don't want the same voice." And we went through—I must've done twenty different character voices. We tried it with accents. We tried this, that, and the other thing. And they didn't like it. Finally, the producer, who was the guy from the studio, said, "Do the thing you did for the minivan." [Laughter] So I said, "Okay." We did it,

and they said, "That's it! That's what we want!" [Laughter] I did a set of commercials—this was kind of funny—a two-restaurant chain in Nebraska—one is in Kearney, and I can't remember where the other town is—but the name of the restaurant is Famous Fillmore's. They had hired somebody to do the ads, and the folks at Soundscapes called up and said, "It was between you and this guy and somebody else, and they picked him, but we're pretty sure they're not going to like him when he gets into the studio. We want to know if you'd be available to come in and do the spot on short notice if it turns out it doesn't work."

CS: Yes.

EH: I said, "Sure." I just live eight minutes over the hill, and I told them if something came up, give me a call. Sure enough, [at] 4:30 in the afternoon, the call came in. The character is sort of a professor type. He starts talking about whatever their food is, and as he talks about it, he gets more and more excited about whatever food this is. And he says this, that, and the other. And the line was "Oh, baby!" I said, "Ohhhh, baby!" [Laughter] And they went nuts. I did a couple of spots for them, and apparently it was the talk around water coolers all over Nebraska when this thing got on the air. And they came back twice. They had written new ads for this particular character based on that one line reading. I can't even remember what—I think I might have heard some comedian say something like it once, but it was funny because they would call up and say, "We've got seven more ads for you to do." And, of course, as is usual in the ad business, they changed ad agencies or they changed the direction that they wanted for this thing, and they stopped calling.

CS: Oh.

EH: It was kind of nice while it lasted. I'll go over and do whatever—I might go two months without doing a spot and then they'll call me three times in a week.

CS: [Grunts delicately]

EH: I know what it is—they have a stable of regular voices and their clients go through them, and they say, "What else have you got? We want somebody else." And then they'll pull my file. And then they'll say, "Okay." And all of a sudden I'll work.

CS: []

EH: Well, the funny thing about it in a way is that you do these things in—the setup is that—you do the commercial—Soundscapes bills the ad agency, and the ad agency bills the client. The client pays the ad agency, and the ad agency pays Soundscapes, and Soundscapes pays me. And sometimes it's two or three months down the line, and the check just shows up in my mailbox. I don't know when it's coming, so it's like free money. I open up my mailbox, and there's a check in there. And what's really strange is that the other setup is that if you make a commercial and they pay you for it and then the client decides to rebuy the ad—if the project has to run, say, for six weeks, and they decide they want run it for another six weeks, I get paid twice for the same work. They send me another check of the same amount for the re-buy. It happened one time where a check showed up, and a week later another check showed up in exactly same amount with the same client's name on it, and I called them up. I said, "Somebody made a mistake. They paid me twice." They said "No, they rebought the ad." I said, "Okay."

[Laughter] "I'm not gonna arm-wrestle ya for it. I just wanted to be sure when I took it to the bank that it's still my money."

CS: That is so—I remember the radio show you used to do for . . .

EH: For Ray Lincoln. Yes.

CS: You did that on Friday mornings?

EH: Friday afternoons.

CS: Friday afternoons.

EH: Basically, it was round-up of what was going on around town . . .

CS: Did they pay you for that?

EH: No, that was all—and that would come and go. I went through—can't tell you how many hosts on that show. But I'd do it for a while and then they'd say, "We're changing the format. There is not really a place for this in our new format." And I'd say, "Fine." Then about six months later, they'd call up and say, "You know, we really miss that feature. Do you want to come back and do it again?" I said, "Sure." I would call in sometimes if I couldn't go the studio. I'd call in from wherever when I was doing the film junkets. I'd call in from L.A. or wherever—whatever time it was in the afternoon, and we'd do it over the phone.

CS: I'm remember being impressed by you juggling all those details.

EH: Yes. Well, I usually had a copy of the Weekend section in front of me. It wasn't that hard.

CS: [Laughs] But you do have a good memory.

EH: Yes. And it's funny because I still have people who will hear my voice somewhere now, and they'll say, "I remember you from that thing you did on KARN."

Whatever happened?" [Laughter]

CS: Yes.

EH: It changed format so many times.

CS: Do you think about the people who have come and gone from here? Who do you wish you could get back? Who do you wish you could get back in touch with? Anybody?

EH: Oh, Lord! I don't know—we've had some great writers come through here who have gone on to bigger and better things. I don't [know] so much that there's anybody I miss terribly who I'd like to have come back. I don't think I've ever dwelled on it. There are people I've been sorry to see go and also people I'm just as glad aren't here anymore. But I don't know if I could pick somebody or some group of people that I thought—you know, there are some people who just—I miss Bob Sallee. I really wish Bob Sallee were still here. But, you know, that's the natural course of things. People go on, and they aren't here anymore. I don't know if I could pick somebody out of that crowd that I really would say, "Gosh, I really miss that person. I really wish that person were still here."

CS: Are there people that you wonder about—what became of them?

EH: A few. It's funny—I bump into people. Do you remember Beverly [Hood Jones]?

CS: Beverly.

EH: She was a copy editor.

CS: I think she—didn't she []?

EH: No, but she might have.

CS: Did she wear a shawl, and she was an older woman?

EH: No. Beverly was a young black woman.

CS: Oh, there you go.

EH: And she was actually serving barbecue at the company picnic last year. I kept looking at her, and I said, "I know you from somewhere." And she said, "Eric!" And I said, "My God, it's Beverly!" And I have no idea what she's been doing in the last twenty-five years since I've seen her last. The thing I remember most about Beverly—this is a funny story—remember we used to be down on the second floor, and we had those snack machines back beyond the copy desk?

CS: Yes.

EH: We had mice at the time. And I remember Beverly putting in a quarter or whatever in the candy machine for a Butterfinger bar, and it came down the slot with a little mouse riding it—on the Butterfinger bar. [Laughter] And she screamed. The mouse screamed.

CS: You're making that up!

EH: No!

CS: I remember when that machine would give us unlimited numbers of [cans of] Dinty Moore stew.

EH: Oh, yes. The thing didn't latch quite right. Of course, who wanted Dinty Moore stew? [Laughter]

CS: Do you remember the time that Starr called everybody back into that vending machine area and gave us a speech about pedaling your virtue on the street?

EH: That sounds vaguely familiar. Yes.

CS: It can't have been long after he came.

EH: I remember the wedding in Starr's office between Omar Green and Jan Cottingham. And I think some Supreme Court justice came and performed the ceremony. That was bizarre.

CS: [Laughs] How did you get along with Starr?

EH: He and I got along fine. Basically, as long as I kept my nose clean, he left me alone. When there was something that he had to pay attention to, basically, we almost always worked it out. I do particularly remember one restaurant review. And I cannot remember the name of the place, but they had two outlets. It was a buffet place, and it was awful. One was down in the University Shopping Center on University and Asher, and the other one was up in North Little Rock somewhere, I think. I had done a review about how awful it was. They came out and, in one case, [and] dumped our newspaper honor box in a dumpster. And at the other place [they] took it and turned it around so it faced the wall. They couldn't get in it. And I remember Starr's column at the end of that week saying, "Well, I hoped that by doing this they made a way to make their food better because I can't imagine grown people doing that for spite." And I thought, "How neat that he took up for me." And he also said, "I've been to those places, and he's right. It was awful. I hope they finally make the food better by doing that." How childish it was. We didn't see a lot of each other, even though my desk was right by his office.

CS: Yes, it was.

EH: Basically, I didn't hear from him unless I screwed something up, and I tried not to

screw anything up any more than I absolutely had to. It's funny. When he left, the whole idea was sort of like the Godfather; he was the wartime consigliere [adviser or counselor], and when we weren't in a wartime situation, they changed the way things were done. It was sort of like the difference between "Star Trek" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Captain Kirk was a big, pushy, adventurous guy, and when we went on to a more peaceful era, we had a guy sitting in the captain's chair with a number-one guy to do his hard work for him. That's been kind of the setup since.

CS: [Laughs]

EH: We've had Griffin in the captain's chair saying, "Make it so." And everybody else goes out and does the labor.

CS: [Laughs] I've never thought about that. Who would you be in that scenario? In the first one, who would you be? And in the second one?

EH: Well, I guess in the first one I would have been—I don't know if I've ever been a principal character, but I probably would have been the guy Scotty turns to and says, "We've got half an hour to make this work." In the second circumstance, I don't know if I'd show up on screen at all.

CS: But you wouldn't be a red shirt.

EH: No, I'm not the guy who dies in the first reel!

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I'd probably be the assistant navigator or the guy with . . .

CS: You mean plot the course?

EH: Yes. Or you'd see him in the hallway between one thing and another kind of

holding things together. It's funny. Even in the heart of things, when I was writing that section, I always kind of viewed myself as a staff sergeant or a second lieutenant rather than a line officer. Basically, I guess the situation now is that I'm kind of the old sergeant telling tales in the company bar. Who knows?

CS: [Laughs]

EH: I think I have an embarrassing amount of seniority to be a foot soldier.

CS: You're such a professional.

EH: Thank you. I've been at it long enough.

CS: Now, in a completely different vein, I've often wondered when you were writing the entertainment stories, we would get to the bottom of the story, and the prose structure would be a thicket of clauses. And I've always wanted to ask you if you did it on purpose so it would be impossible to cut so we'd have to rearrange things to fit it in.

EH: I don't think so—at least not consciously. I suspect it's possible I did it subconsciously. But, see, I had been taught from the early beginning—I learned a lesson [very quickly?] in Baltimore that if you wrote a twenty-eight-inch story and there was only a twelve-inch hole, they were going to lop it off at twelve inches no matter what you put after that. And when I finally had my own hole to play with and had a consciousness of what I was going to put in it—again, I may not have done it deliberately, but I think it was probably a subconscious idea that if something had to be cut, I was going to cut it. It may have made it harder for somebody to look at that and [say], "I can't deal with this; you do it." I don't think it was ever anything deliberate or conscious, but I suspect that there was the subconscious de-

sire of "If you need it cut, you come find me. I'll find what's expendable." In a way, that's a lot of the way I write now. I tend to write large and cut down to a hole, rather than the other way around.

CS: Really? Tell me what you mean.

EH: Well, I'll give you a good example, because the last thing I did for Karen [Martin] on sprinkler systems, I had ninety-some-odd inches worth of copy. It wasn't all . . .

CS: On sprinklers?

EH: It wasn't all written copy. A lot of it was basic information imported from somewhere else. But what I'd do is say, "Okay, the story is going to be about thirty-five inches. I'm going to go through and start chucking stuff." On High Profile interviews I'm terrible like that. By the time I get all my notes transcribed, I've got a hundred and twenty-five inches worth of stuff, and I know I'm not going to be able to use a hundred and twenty-five inches worth of stuff. So I have to go back through and literally sometimes trim half the story out. I like to think that when I'm done with that trimming process, what's left is going to be gold because I've winnowed it until this is the stuff I absolutely have to still be here. Like any writer, you make the choice of, "This is essential; this will go by the wayside." Frequently, I will put stuff in a separate file as I'm cutting or as I'm going through it and saying, "I will take this and that and put it over here, and if I absolutely can't live without it, I can always pick it back up and put it back in somewhere." But I find that on any kind of large-scale thing—sometimes things flow naturally. Sometimes you write until you're done, and you discover it's the same length it's

supposed to be. But some things have to be—you have much more stuff than you're ever going to be able to use, and it's a self-editing process that you go through until you get to bedrock. If I've gotten things down to bedrock and I give it to you and it's still too long, it's still going to be my process to pick out what's expendable and what isn't.

CS: Yes.

EH: I learned the inverted pyramid style in some newspapers is rigid, and in some places it's conical. Stuff can flow out the bottom if you let it.

CS: Yes.

EH: We've always been very lucky at this paper since the publisher made the conscious decision that he was going to keep the news hole large for this paper regardless of what it meant for his advertising revenue. If you look at what has become of the Memphis paper or the New Orleans paper in monopoly situations where they cut them down so that they're only about eight pages and there's nothing in them to read—we've always been very lucky as writers for this paper to have a lot of room to work in. Sometimes you get spoiled with that. It's too damned hard—it's harder sometimes not to cut than it is to cut. If you're told you're only going to have twenty-five inches--that's all there is--and you have to make do. I come in here at nights to do reviews. Since time immemorial, I've set it up so that they tell me, "We have a hole that's twelve inches," and I will write twelve inches. Seventy percent of the time it fits to the letter. Sometimes we've got to juggle it a little bit. But I'll stay here until the thing shows up on the page so that if we have to cut it or we have to make a change, I'm making that decision

and it's not Joe Copy Desk who says, "Well, I don't understand this phrase, so I'm just going to simply cut it out." Or, "This information is less crucial to me than that information, so this is not going to make it."

CS: He wasn't there.

EH: Yes. If I'd made the mistake and I didn't write close enough, I'll be there to fix it. I think that's part of my job. That's part of what I do.

CS: You see it all the way through.

EH: Yes. There are times when I can't do that, or I'm just too tired and beat up, and I'll say, "I'm just going to leave it with you. It's yours now." But most of the time I've given enough of a damn to say, "I want to see it work out." If it doesn't work out, I'll make it work.

CS: You're a pro. Is there anything else that we really ought to talk about that we haven't spoken about?

EH: I can't think of much. We've been at this two hours and forty minutes now.

CS: I wasn't watching the clock. You were! [Laughs]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]