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Interview with
Gene Herrington
North Little Rock, Arkansas
16 February 2005

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. I'm sitting here with Gene Herrington. We're doing an interview on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat* for the [Pryor] Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas. This is February 16, 2005. Gene, why don't you start out by telling us your full name, and where and when you were born.

Gene Herrington: My full name is Irving Eugene Herrington, and I always put Herrington with an "e" because half my mail still comes with an "a." I was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, at 8:00 p.m. on March 31, 1920. I came from a very foolish family. I had an uncle, an aunt, and a first cousin all born on April Fool's Day, and I only missed it by four hours, so I'm at ease [laughs] with a foolish family. When I was about four, we moved out to Marsh Fox, which was then western Pine Bluff's city area. A bit later, my dad built a house for us on the front street. That's where I was when I was five years old. At six, I started at Watson Chapel High School, which was a full school from first grade to twelfth grade. It was a county school, not a city school. I started in the first grade. Baby Ray

was the kid in our reader. After I had been there about six weeks, my dad had to move to Magnolia, where he supervised piping of Magnolia for residential [natural] gas. I was so babyish, I wouldn't go to school without crying, so they let me stay home for about a week. Then they took me over to the first grade at Magnolia and assigned me to the first half of the first grade that went in the afternoon. So I went in the afternoon. By some way—I don't know how this happened—I learned how to read before I started school, and I can't remember my parents teaching me. I don't know how I learned. After the first day, the teacher said, "Eugene"—that's who I was in those days—"please come back in the morning." So I made a half a grade at Magnolia in one afternoon. At mid-term I was promoted to the second grade on my first year. At the end of that semester, my mother got concerned that I was going to be off-center by being half a grade ahead and half a grade behind, so she talked with the superintendent. He said, "If he'll read the second grade reader during the summer, we'll let him start in the third grade next year." So that was my spurt into higher education [laughs]—I know I'm talking too much, you'll have to edit out . . .

JM: No, that's . . .

GH: We moved back to Pine Bluff when I would have been in the fourth grade. I went back into Watson Chapel, from which I graduated in 1937. I was the

valedictorian, but there were only twenty-seven students in the senior class. I only had twenty-six competitors. It was at high school that I changed my outlook on what I wanted to be in life. Until about the tenth grade, I had considered looking into engineering because I just loved mathematics, but I couldn't take trigonometry because only two others wanted to take it, and we didn't have enough students to justify having a class. In the eleventh grade I had a new English teacher, and I thought English was primarily for girls, and that boys just took it because they didn't know what to do with them during the time. On the first day, Clinton Bradford, who grew up at Grapevine in Grant County, had the chalkboard filled with his rules that we were going to use in English. I went home that night and told my dad that I wanted to transfer to Pine Bluff High School. [He asked,] "Why?" [I said,] "I have a teacher who is absolutely crazy." My dad had only finished the eighth grade, but had done some teaching himself. I guess he was still calling me Eugene, too. He said, "Let's give him a week, and then we'll talk it over again." At the end of the week I was feeling better, so we decided to go ahead. Clint lacked one year at the university and was majoring in journalism. When I was in the eleventh grade—or maybe it was the twelfth—he started a journalism course for any of those who wanted to take it in lieu of English literature. This was a fun thing. We started a newspaper, *The Wildcat Scratch*. We started out with nothing. We didn't even have a typewriter.

JM: *The Wildcat*—what?

GH: *Scratch*.

JM: Okay. And what was this teacher's name?

GH: Clinton Bradford.

JM: B-R-A-D-F-O-R-D?

GH: Right.

JM: Okay.

GH: He was later a journalism graduate. I'll tell you a little more about him. Anyway, we started, and the smart girl was elected as the editor, and I was the business manager. She didn't like her job, so I ended up doing both of them. We published at the old *Pine Bluff Graphic*, a morning paper that a lot of people don't even know about anymore. They printed the paper for us for \$4.00 an issue. Ads were sold for twenty-five cents an inch, so I had to sell eight inches in order to pay for the [printing]. One day, while I was in my senior year, Bradford asked me, "Gene, where are you going to college?" I said, "I can't go to college. I'm having enough trouble staying in high school because we're in the depression at our house." He said, "I'm going back, and you can go if you want to." I said, "Well, I'd like to." He said, "I've already got a room in Fayetteville, and you can room with me." He suggested that I apply for an NYA [National Youth Administration] job at the university [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville].

JM: Tell us what the NYA is.

GH: NYA was one of [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's recovery [efforts] from the economic depression—it was for youngsters. It was the National Youth Administration. My NYA job was in the journalism department under professor W. J. Lemke. I had a four-year special course [laughs] while I was at the university, in addition to the journalism classes I took . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Gene, here we are again. One thing I didn't ask you that I need to ask you at the start—do we have your permission to tape this interview and put it in the archives of the [Pryor] Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History?

GH: Yes, you do.

JM: Okay. Now, then, pick up. You're at the university, and you'd gone to work for Mr. Lemke. Now, start telling me about what happened then.

GH: Well, going to the university was a real economic test. This was the first time I'd ever been away from home. I was seventeen years old, and I didn't have enough money to even eat. I was living in a house, and we were eating in a boarding house. This sounds like a made-up price, but we got breakfast and supper for \$3 a week. That's without lunch. I'm a seventeen-year-old, and I haven't been used to doing without lunch, but I didn't have any option. In fact, for the first six weeks at the university, my lunch was a five-cent Mr. Goodbar, which at that time was four ounces and was sold in the bookstore just across the hall from the journalism department. Anyway, we were living in a house about three-fourths of a mile from the campus, upstairs. This was not a regular boarding house. In fact, Clint Bradford and Gene Herrington were the only outsiders there. When Mrs. McLemore found out that I was so short on money—I wasn't frugal, I just didn't have it—she was going to let me sleep in the basement for no payment [in exchange for keeping] the furnace fired during the winter. We secured a place to eat breakfast and supper for \$3 a week just two blocks away at Winkleman's Boarding House. This was a pretty good-sized boarding house. I would guess

that twenty-five people ate there. Mrs. Winkleman ran a print shop. Anyway, one night after my big supper—because I made up for not having lunch during the family-style [supper at the] boarding house—she said, “Gene, after supper come into my office. I want to talk to you.” When I went in, she said, “How would you like to come to work for me?” I said, “Doing what?” And she said, “Working in the kitchen—washing dishes and cleaning up and helping in the rooms during the weekends and so forth.” And I said, “Well, what do I get out of it?” She said, “You get a place to sleep and all you can eat three times”— She didn’t say three times a day, but she said, “Your meals and your room will be free.” Well, that was like finding gold. So I said, “When do you want me to start?” She said, “As soon as you can.” So I moved in the next morning. I worked at that job until she sold out to a funeral home in the middle of my junior year. This is another story—do you want more on the university?

JM: Yes.

GH: Okay. I didn’t know what I was going to do when she sold out because I still wasn’t making enough money for room and board, plus university expenses. So Elmo Browning, who’s still living in Little Rock—I don’t know, you may know Elmo Browning. He was a law student, and he managed to get us in the FFA [Future Farmers of America] House. Neither one of us were “farmers.” I had been in the FFA when I was in high school. I think for \$14 a week we got room and board, but there were four fellows sleeping in each room, and we slept in a double bunk. The bunk had metal running down the middle so nobody got off their side. That’s how much room we had. Anyway, I made it through, and by

the next year I was working for another boarding house, so everything went well.

JM: So you got your degree from the university when?

GH: In 1941.

JM: In journalism?

GH: Journalism. I don't think they had a journalism degree at that time, but I majored in journalism—an arts and science degree.

JM: Yes. Then after you got your degree, where did you go?

GH: Well, I could tell you about [J. William] Fulbright getting fired the day I graduated.

JM: Yes, sir. Go ahead.

GH: Fulbright was president of the university. He later became Senator Fulbright. He got fired—I think it was either the day before or the day of our commencement—simply because his mother, who at that time owned the *Northwest Arkansas Times*, had been against the man who won the election. So they decided to fire him. That's my version. I'm not sure that's ever been published, [but] I don't guess I'll be hurting anybody this far down the road.

JM: No.

GH: Anyway, he showed up at commencement, which was in the Greek Theatre at that time. When he walked down, everybody in the senior class stood up, yelled, and clapped. The students really liked him. After graduation, I already had a job. I was to report as soon as I could to the *Marianna Courier Index*. Commencement was on Monday night. My parents were there for graduation. They dropped me

at Little Rock on the way back at about 11:00 on Monday night. I caught a bus early the next morning to Marianna. I arrived about noon on Tuesday. I walked in—I was tired. I was not used to this kind of—Mrs. Jackson, who was the owner, business manager, and everything else, was seated at her desk. When I walked in, I introduced myself. She said, “Gene, there’s your desk.” It was stacked up because the other editor had left for Memphis the week before. The Linotype was through that door, and we came out Wednesday at noon. This was Tuesday at noon. I was in a new place. I didn’t even know the location of the courthouse, which was a block away. The paper made it on time, but it certainly wasn’t the best job—I had a copy of that paper for a while, but I think I finally destroyed it because it was not a work of art [laughs].

JM: What was Mrs. Jackson's first name? Do you remember?

GH: I wish I could, but I can't. I should be able to, but . . .

JM: No, that's okay.

GH: I always called her Mrs. Jackson. I don't guess I ever called her—her husband had been the previous editor and he had died.

JM: So this was a daily paper, right?

GH: No, this was a weekly.

JM: It's a weekly.

GH: Oh, it's the weekly in Lee County.

JM: Okay.

GH: Oh, goodness, I would have died if it had been a daily.

JM: Yes. Okay. I understand. What kind of money were you making up there?

GH: I was hired for \$18 a week. Some people can't believe that, and I can hardly believe it even now. Would this be a good time to tell you how little \$18 was since we were planning to get married?

JM: Yes.

GH: Barbara Stutheit, at that time . . .

JM: What's her last name?

GH: Stutheit. S-T-U-T-H-E-I-T.

JM: Okay.

GH: We had planned to get married. She was afraid I was going to get drafted and go overseas before we could be a couple. She was going to take some courses in summer school, and then she would still lack another twenty hours for graduation. So we had planned to get married in August. I started looking around for a place to stay. When I looked at prices of apartments, even in Marianna, I said, "Well, there's no way we can do it on \$18 a week." The woman at whose boarding house I was staying saw me out in the swing one night, and apparently I was looking rather despondent. She said, "Gene, what's the matter?" I told her, "Well, my girlfriend and I are planning on getting married, but we don't see how we can afford to even get an apartment." She said, "Well, why don't you have her come live in the boarding house with you?" So that's what we did. I was paying \$25 a month for room and board, and she raised it to \$45, I think. So we could make it, but there was no money left over, you can see, at \$18 a week. But shortly after we were married, a two-room apartment in her boarding house became available. The rent on it was only \$14 a week. So we moved in our first \$14 apartment.

See, I don't know whether in newspapers or romance, it's okay.

JM: So how long did you stay there at Marianna?

GH: We didn't stay at Marianna very long. I would guess—I went there the last of May, and I think we probably left about the last of August. I had a friend with whom I had worked on the [University of Arkansas] yearbook, Henry Thane, who was the business manager of the *Razorback*, and I had written the sports copy and some other jobs for him. He called me from McGehee and asked me if I'd like to come to McGehee to edit the paper. I said, "Well, I guess I'd like it. I'm not doing too well here." So I went to McGehee for \$22.50 a week. We were so affluent that we moved—if you can call it a move—from Marianna to McGehee on a train. We put what little we had on the train when we moved there. If it would make anybody feel better, we were married for six years before we had a car.

JM: Oh.

GH: Now it takes two cars before you can even consider getting married. [Laughs] This was another Jackson. What was his name? He's bound to be in the records somewhere.

JM: Yes, I'll find him, I'm sure.

GH: He was a county clerk for Desha County, and his office was in Arkansas City.

JM: Yes.

GH: He kept the books and all that. He had a girl doing society and so forth. He had two Linotype operators and a makeup man, so it was a much bigger operation. In fact, they started [a] publication, an area farm paper. It came out once a month, or

maybe it was every two months. It was printed back there, too, and I did a little help on that. Well, this—I thought, “This is going pretty good.” My wife turned up pregnant. Anyway, one day early in the new year, which would have been 1942, the publisher came by there. He called me to his desk. He said, “Gene, I need to talk with you. You’re a tremendous editor. You’ve done a great job, but you aren’t selling enough ads to help us.” I mean, I didn’t pay much attention to the advertising. I just picked up what was available. He said, “I think it would be better for you and me both if you got a job somewhere where you could be in editorial instead of advertising. I couldn’t fire you. You’re too good a person for that.” So I started looking.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Here we are. How did you leave McGehee?

GH: Well, after he gave me that [speech], I thought it was obvious that I needed to look for another place, so I kept looking around. I was still needing money here and there, so I didn’t just ride buses around looking for things. I heard about a place in Morrilton that might be looking for an editor. I can’t remember—I must have hitchhiked up there because I can’t remember anything else that I did in those days. In fact, I hitchhiked to my wedding in Fayetteville! Anyway, they had either filled the position or they weren’t interested, or something. I had stopped in Little Rock and was walking down Main Street and met Matilda Tuohey, who was working at the *Democrat*. She had been in UA journalism at the same time I was. She said, “Gene, what in the world are you doing here?”

JM: Just a minute. Spell Tuohey for me.

GH: T-U-O-H-E-Y, I think. That's the way I remember it.

JM: Yes, that's right.

GH: Anyway, Tuohey was off for the day. It was in the afternoon, and Tuohey suggested, "Well, why don't you contact Tilden?" Allen Tilden was the city editor. "I think he's looking for a reporter right now." So I said, "Well, I'll give him a call." I called the next day from McGehee. He said, "Come up and let's talk." So I came up. He said, "I'll start you at \$25 a week." He promised a raise in three months. After he told me I could go to work, I walked down Capitol Avenue and found an apartment house that had a vacancy. It was a little old one-room apartment. I told them we'd take it when we were coming up. We moved with a friend who brought us up in a pickup truck for \$5. All we had to move were clothes, a radio Barbara had won at a football contest, and a washing machine. We moved into the apartment, and it was so noisy that first night, Barbara said, "You're not going to work tomorrow. You're going to go with me and we're going to find a place to *live*." It had snowed during the night. This was in February.

JM: What year would that have been?

GH: 1942.

JM: February of 1942.

GH: We checked the *Gazette* for apartments to rent, and trotted all over the place. If we could find one we liked, we couldn't afford it. We finally found one at 16th and Spring, on the second floor. It was a small—well, the first one we had was just a bedroom and a kitchen, and shared a bath with another renter. I don't

remember what the cost was, but it was bound to be reasonable, or we couldn't have had it. At the *Democrat*, reporters had free rides on all the buses. AP&L [Arkansas Power and Light Company] gave us books of tickets to use on the buses. I guess it was a public relations thing for AP&L. Anyway, I had a package of free rides. My first assignment was as an assistant on the state desk. Vaughn Root was an antique when I came there, and he stayed there for quite a while.

JM: What was his name again?

GH: I think it's Vaughn. V-A-U-G-H-N. Root.

JM: R-O-O-T?

GH: Yes.

JM: Okay.

GH: My job was to come in early and open up the mail from all the correspondents and go through what we call "state briefs." They were little items—you probably can't even remember this.

JM: Oh, yes, I remember them.

GH: Oh, you do. Okay. Well, that was my job, to pick out those and check obits and so forth in the state thing. After I would get through with my function over at the state desk at about 9:00, I would work as a city reporter.

JM: A general assignment reporter for the city?

GH: No, I don't think I had a general. I did the downtown circuit—the state chamber of commerce, the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion, the Old State Capitol—two or three other things. Well, that Japanese internment

thing was in one building, and I was to go by and check that. When Tilden hired me, he said, "Gene, I can't pay you much, but I'll give you a free lunch every day." I said, "How's that?" He said, "You can cover a luncheon club every day so you won't have to bring your lunch, or you won't have to go buy one." And, you know, it sounds like a penalty—because you're poor, you're going to have to do it. But it turned out that I met more leaders in Little Rock in one year than some people ever knew in their lifetime.

JM: Yes.

GH: I think it was a big help to me in knowing what was going on and so forth. As the war continued, the *Democrat* started losing people to the [military] service. The fellow who was covering the military for us was Bill Glaskow. I don't remember whether he took another job or whether he went into the service. Tilden decided that I would be the new service man. Since I didn't have a car I went to Camp Robinson every morning and came back every afternoon on the bus. The brass at the camp loaned me a bicycle so I could travel all over the camp. I ate at the staff mess [hall]. My going into the army—I had been offered a job with the United Press in Oklahoma City, and the *Democrat* wouldn't let me go because newspapers were an essential industry, and you had to get approval from your employer if you were in an essential industry to change jobs. So they wouldn't let me go, but it didn't upset me. In February of 1944, I was still Class 3-A in the draft because we had a new child. When the United Press called for the job offer, I called Lee County to make sure I wasn't going into the army the next week. They said, "Gene, we may not even need you. We've got more single men than

we are calling up. We've got a lot of men over here who don't have wives, much less kids!" Anyway, I couldn't go there, but I was still Class 3-A. Then one day I came to work and our capitol reporter Reese Barnsley—does that sound right?

JM: I don't remember him.

GH: I think that's his name. Reese Barnsley.

JM: B-A-R-N-S-L-E-Y?

GH: Yes, I think.

JM: And then R-E-E-S-E?

GH: Yes. Reese was our capitol reporter, and he had four kids. I could not stand to think that I had one little girl and he's got four, and he had been called up. I said, "I just can't stay." So I went down to the induction center and volunteered.

JM: What happened? Did Barnsley get drafted or something?

GH: Yes, he got drafted.

JM: Oh, okay.

JM: He got drafted, and I went down and volunteered for cadet. It was army aviation—the cadet program. About four or five months before, a group came to Little Rock to recruit for a new aviation group to be quartered at Houston. I covered their efforts, since I was the military reporter. Before they left, they said, "Gene, why don't you come on and go with us? We will give you a staff sergeant's rating, and you can be our public relations man." I said, "No, if I go, I'm going to do something to *help*." Anyway, my only troop command was from Camp Robinson to Shepherd Field, Texas. There were eight of us in this, and I had made the highest test scores. We got to Shepherd Field for basic training, and

only four of us passed enough of the test to stay in the program. The other four had to go to gunner's school. So the four of us, after basic [training], went to Randolph Field, Texas. At Randolph, they didn't know what to do with us.

JM: That's Randolph Air Force Base?

GH: Yes. It's about fifteen or eighteen miles out of San Antonio.

JM: San Antonio. Yes.

GH: Anyway, they really didn't know what to do with us, so they used us to work on the line. We'd clean the airplanes and did KP [Kitchen Police duty]. On one occasion, we had a notice on the bulletin board that said, "Aviation students as such have no rank, they are outranked even by privates." So we were the servants. Later we were transferred to other facilities. I went to S.A.C. [the Strategic Air Command]—not to take pre-flight training, but because they were bringing people in to start training on B-29s. That was the new bomber the U.S. had developed, and they were going to train at Randolph, so they had to get rid of us so they'd have a place to stay. I got over and they assigned me to the newspaper, *The Tailspinner*. The editor was transferred and I became the new editor. I almost started laughing at myself. I passed up being a staff sergeant to be a nothing for doing the same thing.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, so you're working for *The Tailspinner*. Where did you go from there?

GH: I went back to Randolph Field. They didn't know what to do with us again. People were coming back to be processed from overseas. So I went into public relations at Randolph Field covering sports and anything else, but mostly I was

doing sports. We had an eight-team league in that area. Then in late 1945, I was returning from furlough, and one of my friends met me as I was getting off the bus at Randolph. He said, "Gene, did you decide to take 'early out'?" I said, "I don't even know what you're talking about." He said, "Well, we had this meeting this morning and they said all of us who were in cadets and hadn't been trained had the option: we could either get out, or we could go ahead and go for our regular commission in the army." It was an easy out for the short time I had been in. So I came back—you want me to get back to the *Democrat* now?

JM: Yes.

GH: I came back. It was hard finding a place to live in Little Rock at this time, so we were staying with my parents in Pine Bluff and driving up in my dad's car to try to see what we were going to do. My boss, Allen Tilden, had gone into the army as a captain in something in the entertainment field, and I beat him back home. Veerhoff had been city editor for about two years. Do you remember Veerhoff?

JM: No, I don't remember him.

GH: I can't remember Veerhoff's first name. We all called him "Judge." Veerhoff was still city editor. He had moved up when Tilden left. When I came by, he said, "Gene, it's sure good to have you back." I said, "Well, let's talk about money." He said, "Well, you'll come back just like you were." I said, "Judge, let's push it up some." He said, "I can't do it." So I took a job with the state. I was making \$50 a week when I left. I got \$55 a week at the state job [laughs], which was with the Employment Security Division, and this was rather short-lived. After Tilden came back, I went up there, and he said, "Gene, why in the world aren't you here

where you're supposed to be?" And I told him, "\$5 a week?" And he said, "What are you talking about?" And I told him. He said, "Will you come back if I can get you the \$5?" I said, "I sure would." I wasn't having any fun there. He said, "Well, I can get it." I knew he was going to put more hours on it or whatever it took. So Floyd Sharp—you didn't know Floyd Sharp.

JM: I knew who he was, but I didn't know him.

GH: Okay. Floyd Sharp had been a friend for a long time. Floyd Sharp was head of the War Manpower Commission during the war, and it was kind of an overlap of the Arkansas—whatever it is. Anyway, he was in charge, and I went back and told him, "I'd like to let you know that I want to go back to the *Democrat*. That's where I think I ought to be." He said, "Well, when would you like to go?" He said, "That's up to you." I said, "I don't know." He said, "How about in the morning?" He knew me and I knew him. I said, "That's great." So I went back the next morning. I can't even remember what I started out doing. I know that shortly after that, Tilden moved two of us up to assistant city editors. I was one and George Douthit was the other one. George was a great reporter, but he didn't do well as an editor. In a short time I was promoted to assistant city editor. Joe Crossley—did you know Joe Crossley?

JM: Yes, I did.

GH: Joe Crossley was one of the smartest newsmen I ever knew, I believe, but he had one bad habit that held him back. He still made it as a telegraph editor. Joe taught me more journalism than most people learn anywhere else.

JM: Let me stop you just for a second. Crossley is C-R-O-S or S-S?

GH: I think it's S-S.

JM: That's what I thought. C-R-O-S-S-L-E-Y. Is that correct?

GH: Yes. When I was working on the state desk on Saturday nights and didn't have too much to do, he'd pitch his telegraph copy and let me edit it and write the headlines. Then he'd tell me what I'd done wrong.

JM: What was his title? What was he doing?

GH: He was telegraph editor.

JM: Okay.

GH: Anyway, I became the assistant city editor with the job of assigning reporters to what they were going to cover the next day, and trying to catch the *Gazette* for things they ought to look at and see what's going on, and so forth. I came in at 6:00 and worked usually until about 1:30 or 2:00. I'd get to work Saturday night, too. [Laughs]

JM: You were working a six-day shift, weren't you?

GH: Yes.

JM: Monday through Saturday.

GH: The Saturday was two shifts. [Laughs]

JM: Oh, you had that? I had that for a while, too. So you were actually—were you doing seven shifts a week?

GH: Yes.

JM: Okay.

GH: Now, when I was a reporter, I got a day off.

JM: Yes.

GH: After I got on the desk, I didn't get any days off. But we could skip onto that—when I became city editor, I lost money because I had been working so much overtime when Tilden was off. Some weeks I made considerably more than I made when I became city editor.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Tell me a little bit—you're back from the service. You're assistant city editor. Tell me what the newsroom was like at the *Arkansas Democrat* at that time.

GH: Well, it wasn't quite as neat and orderly as it is in today's newspaper. The chaos was partly all of our undertaking, I guess. We had paper on the desk. It looked like we had ninety-nine stories under construction, I guess. I don't know whether we had one when you were there or not. The paper was "planned" without dummies. We didn't know where it was going or where it was going to be. I mean, I still say the *Democrat* was a miracle.

JM: You said you didn't have dummies. You're talking about page dummies?

GH: [We had] page dummies. I mean, we knew we had some things for sports. We've got more space in today's sports section than we had in the newspapers for several days in those days. I think we may have learned to write a little more [laughs] meaningful.

JM: Concisely, you mean?

GH: Yes, concisely. That's the word. [Laughs] In fact, during the "civil war" at Central High we didn't have enough people to really cover the crisis. [Reference to the integration crisis at Little Rock Central High School in 1957]. Everybody on the news staff was working on that story, I think. That's one of the few times

that I wrote a memo for the editorial room. I wrote a one-sentence bulletin that said, “As long as the situation at Central is with us, please be careful with your adjectives.”

JM: I want to get into that—your coverage out there and all that a little bit later. Tell me a little bit more about what it was like to work for the *Arkansas Democrat* in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Give me a little bit more of the flavor of the place.

GH: Well, I think it was a good place to work, even though we might not have been winning Pulitzer Prizes, or being rewarded financially. I think Mr. [K. August] Engel probably made more for his investment than some of the other people did, but I liked what I was doing. To my knowledge, I didn’t have anybody up there I didn’t like. I felt sorry for them sometimes, but that was not a dislike for them.

JM: What kind of fringe benefits did you have?

GH: I’m looking for them. [Laughter] When I left after twenty-eight years there, they gave me a little attache case.

JM: They didn’t have health care, did [they], at that time?

GH: No health care.

JM: No sick leave.

GH: No retirement.

JM: No retirement. Right.

GH: In fact, after my twenty-eight years—this is the retirement program I have from the *Democrat*.

JM: Still zero? And no air conditioning.

GH: I think Keith Fuller was with the AP [Associated Press] at this time, and Keith went down and talked to Engel about air conditioning their room, which was just back behind the news desk. I don't think Engel would even talk with him. He said we didn't need it. I think we may have been the last downtown Little Rock business to have air conditioning.

JM: I've heard that.

GH: But the newsroom did have a big fan that blew across the room, doing more editing than some of the editors.

JM: It blew grit all over your forehead. We're talking about K. August Engel, who was the owner of the *Democrat* at that time.

GH: Who is a story in himself.

JM: Yes, I understand. Who at that time—say, the late 1940s and early 1950s—who were your top hands? Who were your good reporters?

GH: Well, I think Roy Bosson was one we'd have to put there.

JM: B-O-S-S-O-N. Is that correct?

GH: Right. And Roy was so dependable and total, and he recognized a story when he saw it. He didn't mind working. You know, you probably knew he became national—what is it?

JM: With the beer distributors. He was the top PR [public relations] guy.

GH: Yes. Maurice Moore was a good reporter. Moe worked part-time, helping over on the state desk, but he was so good a reporter he should have never been tied up on little trivial stuff.

JM: Well, you changed it whenever you get the copy back.

GH: Yes. Moe wrote more stories. I went with him into northwest Arkansas one time. We went up in the morning and came back at night, and I think each of us got about four stories.

JM: I knew Maurice. I know Moe. He was a good guy.

GH: He really was.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

GH: Do you remember Ramon [pronounced "RAY-mun"] Greenwood?

JM: Oh, yes!

GH: Well, I think Ramon was a good reporter.

JM: I did, too.

GH: He didn't give you any problems about what he wanted to do. He didn't try to get his idea into the story, and he did a thorough job.

JM: Like a lot of good people, he didn't stay long.

GH: Yes. Well, I'm so proud—we [had] so many good people at the *Democrat*, it was unreal. I mean, it was unreal the number of good people who came through there.

JM: Ramon, as I remember—and that was R-A-M-O-N—I believe that's the way he spelled his first name.

GH: Yes. It didn't have a Y.

JM: He wound up being really high up in American Express, isn't that correct?

GH: I think he was one channel below big.

JM: Yes. I think so, too. I think he was a vice president or something.

GH: Let me see if we've got anybody else.

JM: Who were some of the other really talented people who came through there who maybe didn't stay long, but moved on?

GH: Well, we talked about Roy Bosson. He worked with the Brewers Foundation. Well, Charlie Allbright.

JM: Yes.

GH: Charlie Allbright—[laughs] I'll take responsibility for Charlie being a good feature writer. Charles was working in the sports department, or did you know this?

JM: Yes, but go ahead.

GH: Engel had told me once, "Gene, we don't have anything on our front page but things to make us feel bad. I want you to have something to make somebody smile every day." So I came up with "funny boner." Somebody had it—Marvin Balding wrote the thing, and he married some dance instructor and left us. So I looked around, and Charles was working with Jack Keady. I went over and said, "Jack, I think I need Charlie to come over and help me." He said, "What?" I said, "I need somebody to write that little "funny boner" again." Incidentally, Balding had done an excellent job. Balding was a photographer! Did you know that?

JM: No, I did not know that. I remember him, but I didn't know that. B-A-L-D-I-N-G, correct?

GH: Balding. Yes, I guess.

JM: I think that's right.

GH: Anyway, Charlie came over and started writing it. Then he went into the service, and when he returned he decided to go over to the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

GH: I still like Charlie. He's good.

JM: Yes.

GH: Let's see, I thought of somebody else I thought . . .

JM: You had Bill Secrest for a while.

GH: Yes. I know you have Bill's name down here. I'll tell you a guy I thought did really good here for us on the desk was John Newell. John went down to San Antonio, and I don't know whether he got to be managing editor, but he moved up the ladder.

JM: Yes.

GH: And we'd put you in there, you know, anybody who gets to be the big wheel.

JM: Right. Charlie Rixse was there for a while.

GH: Yes. Well, Ken Francis was there.

JM: Yes.

GH: Ken was a good reporter.

JM: Yes.

GH: Of course, Ken grew up in the newspaper business. He worked at Pine Bluff when he was just a kid. Like Robert McCord—McCord was fifteen when he came to work at the *Democrat* in the summers. He and I—I don't know how we got started doing it, but we started the first thing that resembled a "morgue." I mean, we had a place where we just threw everything. Under our system I would mark the stories in the day's paper while I was assistant city editor, and he would put them on an index card with the date and context noted. What we came up

with was primitive, and I don't know when they got to a real system.

JM: Yes. During that time, how did you feel the *Democrat* compared with the *Gazette*?

GH: I thought the *Gazette* did a better job on many of the things they did, but we had the advantage of getting it when it happened. Most of the stories occurred in the daytime, and I don't know whether that's making sense or not, but I think we had more news. Today's readers don't want an afternoon paper. They want to watch television because they're going to see what's happened and they don't have to turn the page. They don't know whether this word means what I think it does. And the *Gazette* had a larger staff. I think we did a good job with what we had, but I think the *Gazette* did a top-notch job too.

JM: Yes. Let's get you up to—were you city editor when the Central [integration crisis] happened and everything?

GH: Yes. I had one thing that happened over New Year's Day when I was assistant city editor. Crossley told me, "Today you became a newspaperman." This was the day Martin, the policeman—the chief of detectives—one of them shot the other one and then killed himself, but I don't know who it was. Do you know who I'm talking about?

JM: Yes, I think. That wasn't Gene Smith—he wasn't one of them, was he?

GH: One of them was named Martin.

JM: That might have been a little bit before I got there. It seems to me like I heard it.

GH: Yes, I think it was. Tilden had gone to the Cotton Bowl [football game], and I was editing the thing. The first report came in at about 9:30. Martin—I can't

remember his first name. He was the head of detectives in the Little Rock Police Department. I don't remember whether it was his right-hand man—it seemed like it was—they were both found dead in the Lakewood area, I believe, but I'm not sure. I don't even remember who was working with us and so forth, but we had pretty good coverage in a one-issue paper. I think we turned out, by the time we had it . . .

JM: And this was on a Saturday night or . . . ?

GH: No, it was on New Year's Day.

JM: Oh, okay.

GH: It was New Year's Day, and I don't even remember what year it was.

JM: Okay.

GH: But it was while I was still the assistant city editor.

JM: Okay.

GH: Tilden had gone to the football game. I had been off Christmas—people with kids got off for Christmas and then they had to work New Year's. Okay.

JM: Yes. Okay. So then you were assistant city editor, and then Tilden departed, and you became the city editor. Is that correct?

GH: Yes.

JM: Do you remember about what year that was?

GH: Let's see, I was city editor for five years and managing editor for ten. I left in 1949-1950, so I was city editor for—this is [approximate]—I'm just guessing—about 1954 to 1959.

JM: Okay, you're right. That would cover the Central crisis. Okay. And then from

about 1959 to 1969 you were the managing editor, right?

GH: Yes. After Liske's death.

JM: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, so you became the city editor in about 1954 and stayed there about five years. Obviously, the big story during your period as city editor was the crisis at Little Rock Central High School. Is that correct?

GH: Right.

JM: Can you tell me about that and how you covered it and what happened during that time?

GH: Well, let me tell you, since newspaper editors are supposed to know everything that's going on, no one was as surprised about what happened as I was, and I thought I knew what was scheduled to happen. Before the school session started for that year, I had talked with Virgil Blossom. After Roy Bosson and I had gone over plans, he said, "Gene, I think you ought to talk with Blossom so you can see what they've planned in order to take care of this order to integrate." Blossom explained, "We've got these nine black students who we've worked with to try to get them where they can tolerate some things that would not be pleasant, and so on and so forth." Then, on the first day at Central, a crowd reacts with a little flare-up. I was surprised. I really was. I mean, I grew up down here. I grew up in Pine Bluff where I was a minority. I thought we were going to be a model for the nation, you know? We did it, and I still think that much of it was *political* and not *people*. I think [Governor Orval] Faubus was one of the best politicians I

have known during my time. I didn't agree with him on a lot of things, but he was a politician deluxe. I don't think Orval Faubus cared one fiddle about what was going on in this situation, but he had supporters who did.

JM: You think he saw it as a good way to get reelected, by him taking this [stand]?

GH: Oh, I don't know, you've got to do what makes—this is a story—I've got two stories—I don't know whether I ought to even put them out or not.

JM: Go ahead. You can cut them out later if you want to. Go ahead and tell them.

GH: One of them involves a group of farmers from southeast Arkansas. There were about four or five or six who came up. Edward Liske [managing editor] wasn't there, and I talked with them in his office. This was after the situation had started burning. They said, "We are disgusted with the *Gazette*, but we need a morning paper because that's when we need it. We would like for the *Democrat* to put out a morning edition." Have you heard this story?

JM: Just yesterday.

GH: From whom?

JM: Marcus George had a story that they had done about Engel, and they were quoting you about it in that story that the paper did in 1998, I think, about Engel, but I had never heard it until then. Go ahead and tell me what happened.

GH: Anyway, they came and I said, "Look, I don't have authority to do anything. Liske is not here. I'll be glad to talk with Mr. Engel, who owns the paper." So what they wanted us to do—they were going to assure a certain amount of circulation—I don't even remember what it was—to help us get started. I figured, "Well, it wouldn't be much trouble. We get out six editions now. One more is not

going to take too much trouble. We can just [print it] in the morning.” Anyway, I went down and talked with Engel . . .

JM: They wanted you to put out a morning edition to compete with the *Gazette*?

GH: Yes.

JM: And they were going to help bankroll it. Okay. Go ahead.

GH: Well, I don’t know whether it was—of course, I don’t know—it doesn’t look like much bankrolling is needed. You’ve got the press—it’s not doing anything at night, and all you need is somebody to push the button.

JM: Yes.

GH: Anyway, I went down and talked with Engel the next morning, and he said, “Gene, you never treat a friend like this when he’s down.” That helped me to like Engel as much as anything he ever did while I was seeing him every day for ten years.

JM: Yes. Okay. That’s a great story, and I’m glad to hear that one. Tell me about the coverage—how you all covered what was going on around Central while all this was happening, and then I want you to tell me what you think about your comparison with the *Gazette* coverage. Just tell me . . .

GH: I’ll tell you one that’s even better than a comparison with the *Gazette*.

JM: Okay.

GH: If you’ll tell me who the AP man is who won a Pulitzer Prize for—the guy who was here . . .

JM: Was he working out of this office or was he somewhere else?

GH: Yes. He was working, but he was from New York.

JM: From somewhere else. Okay. Was it [Relman Morin?]

GH: He won the Pulitzer Prize.

JM: I think so. Yes.

GH: I kidded him that he won the award for rewriting the *Democrat*.

JM: Well, go ahead and tell me about the *Democrat* coverage.

GH: We had so few reporters, and the story was of such importance it got to where everybody was covering the story. See, we probably didn't have what, ten or twelve reporters? There were more than that many facets going on here. And here's another story I wouldn't want to put—unless you know about this from some other source. When the 101st [Airborne] was sent down here—supposedly, if this story is true—that's the reason I don't want to . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay. Go ahead.

GH: Ron Burnham was covering city hall. Mann was mayor.

JM: Woodrow Mann.

GH: Woodrow Mann—this is the story he shared long after he left the *Democrat*.

They had talked about the situation, “Looks like we need some federal help to get this thing going—get it shut down before we have a real mess.” And Ron told me that Mann wanted to call the president, but was afraid the president wouldn't give him a [good response]. So Ron said, “I called the president.” He didn't get the president, obviously, but he got high enough up that it would make sense, and apparently—he didn't tell me this when he was working. This was years after we'd both left. He said, “I think I told you [about contacting the president] ” I

said, "I don't think you've told me this. I think I could've written a story about *this* after the thing settled down." [Laughter]

JM: He was trying to call [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. Eisenhower was the president then.

GH: Yes.

JM: So he called him in lieu of Woodrow Mann.

GH: Well, I think he told him he was Woodrow.

JM: Oh, okay. All right.

GH: That's the most surprising story I have ever had at the *Democrat*.

JM: That's an interesting story.

GH: Yes.

JM: I remember Ron Burnham.

GH: And he was capable of doing it.

JM: Yes, he was. He had a lot of guts.

JM: Okay. Go on about your coverage of Central High.

GH: You know, obviously, everybody was in on it. In fact, another one of the good stories—and you may know about this one—you know Phyllis Brandon?

JM: Yes. Dilaha then?

GH: Well, that's was her maiden name. She keeps reminding me of this story, and I can't remember assigning it to her. She went into the high school dressed up like a student because she was fresh out of college.

JM: Yes.

GH: I can't even remember if she told me that once or twice. I don't remember what

she got or how things were going or whatever. Well, you know, Daisy's husband—whatever his name was . . .

JM: Daisy Bates's husband, you're talking about?

GH: Yes. Daisy Bates's husband, L.C. Bates,—you know, they put out the black paper. He used to come down, and I'd give him all the engravings he wanted, if we had any that he wanted to put in his paper. You know, I was just surprised, I guess, and I'm not sure how he was during that thing anyway. I wasn't acquainted with Daisy, but I knew him.

JM: Yes. Who were your top reporters covering that—was Bobbie Forster? Was she involved in that a lot?

GH: Well, I'm sure she was. Bobbie is good on anything. I mean, Bobbie would've made a sportswriter. She's a little overzealous sometimes. She covered a story up at Fort Smith when the president came through—I guess it was [John F.] Kennedy. I'm not sure who it would've been. When was Kennedy president?

JM: 1960 to 1963.

GH: Yes. I think he was coming up through Fort Smith, and she went up there and was so complete. She even told about the fact that some of the paint—part of the preparation for the president's visit—was still a little sticky. I think Bosson might have been a person on that, too.

JM: I thought he was gone by then.

GH: No. He was the one who said I ought to go over and talk to Blossom.

JM: Okay.

GH: At least that's my memory of it.

JM: Okay. Douthit—was he involved some? Oh, he was covering the Capitol.

GH: He was in on the Faubus end.

JM: Let me ask you this. The *Gazette* won a Pulitzer for its coverage out there. How did you feel the *Democrat* coverage compared with the *Gazette*'s coverage?

GH: Well, I think the *Gazette* really won it on their editorials, didn't they?

JM: They won two. They won one for the editorials, and they won for coverage—are you suggesting they got the coverage one because of their editorials?

GH: Anyway . . .

JM: Is that what you're suggesting?

GH: No, I don't know that. I know after the awards were made, I went down to Engel that morning. I said, "Man, I sure would like to win one. We won one on pictures. We had a better picture than anybody ever had, from Counts. Do you know that picture?"

JM: Will Counts.

GH: Yes.

JM: Yes, I do.

GH: Anyway, I said, "Mr. Engel, I sure wish I could win one." He said, "Gene, there's two ways you can do it." Don't put this in. Oh, it might be all right. I don't know.

JM: Okay. Go ahead.

GH: He said, "You can either violate the South or leave it."

JM: Hmm.

GH: I think the coverage was as good as the *Gazette*'s. I mean, we had to be. We

were there when it was happening.

JM: Yes. So you had people out there all the time.

GH: And we had the side that the *Gazette* couldn't cover. They couldn't cover Faubus.

JM: Why not? He wouldn't talk to them?

GH: Well, you remember that!

JM: Yes. I've been through the same thing with Faubus.

GH: I think that in spite of the fact that we had coverage from Faubus, we didn't really lean toward Faubus all the time. I think we tried to keep it where it was supposed to be, but I really—I thought that picture Counts had, we ought to at least get some consideration.

JM: That was the one of the white girl screaming at the black students?

GH: Yes.

JM: Yes. I remember that picture. That was a great picture.

GH: See, we've had two great pictures: that one, and the one that Robert McCord made accidentally on a different occasion.

JM: With Harry Truman and Sid McMath?

GH: Yes.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] I remember that one.

GH: And he wasn't even assigned to do that one. He came up and asked me, "Gene, can I go down and take a picture?" Listen, he must have been still going to high school.

JM: I think he was still at—no, he was probably in college, but he was probably still a teenager.

GH: Anyway, he took a camera and went down and shot that picture. I said, "Good gravy! Accidents."

JM: How was the *Democrat's* editorial stance during that time? What do you remember about their editorial stand on the Central High crisis?

GH: Well, I can't recall they ever were really out there. Truthfully, I didn't think—I don't want to say this.

JM: Go ahead and say it. We can take it out later if you don't think it looks good.

GH: I don't think we got involved in the editorial like [the *Gazette*]—and, see, that's difficult, too, you know? It's hard to be a reporter because if you're not careful, you're going to be [doing] editorials. And some of them today are not even careful.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] I know that. So they sort of played it low key. They didn't really crawl out on a limb or anything.

GH: Well, when you stop to think about it, what can you do when it's already boiling? I mean, I don't know what Engel's policy was. I think he was for law and order, and I think he was for doing right.

JM: Yes.

GH: I don't know that we ever did anything that was less than in the middle. Now, it may have appeared that way because coverage of some things will look like that.

JM: Yes.

GH: But, see, I think Blossom was probably the most—Blossom was not an integrationist, and he wasn't a segregationist. Blossom had come down here from Fayetteville, I think.

JM: Yes, I think you're correct.

GH: I think he was a pretty honest guy, and I think they did what they thought they could get started on.

JM: During that time when all this was going on—of course, you told one story that showed a lot of whites got upset with the *Gazette*. Now, during a period there, the *Democrat* was catching up with the *Gazette*, or even passed them at one time in circulation, didn't they ?

GH: I don't know.

JM: But the *Democrat* did make a lot of big gains. Some of the advertisers boycotted the *Gazette* and, I assume, ran ads in the *Democrat*.

GH: Yes, but I really don't have any facts on that.

JM: You didn't keep up with that.

GH: No.

JM: That's leading up to one question that I want to ask, though. I have kind of tracked that a little bit, and I know the *Democrat* did make some pretty good gains. In fact, I think they were ahead on Sunday for a little while, and got ahead in the city zone, and then may have gotten close in the state zone.

GH: I don't really remember.

JM: But my question was, did Mr. Engel ever—he apparently could have been doing very well at that time financially and everything—did he ever take that money and plow it back into the paper, or do you remember him ever expanding or doing anything?

GH: Well, you know, I don't remember what year this was when he bought that new

press. He bought it from Atlanta. I said something about it, and he said, "Well, I got a good deal on it," or something. I said, "Well, it's going to cost us a lot of money." He said, "We've got it taken care of," or something like that. [Laughs] I think he paid cash for that press—a million dollars, I think.

JM: Is that right?

GH: I don't know what it was. He didn't discuss that kind of information with me.

JM: Yes. Okay. But, needless to say, he didn't have really big [laughs] salary benefits and everything.

GH: No. And no really big salaries in the newspaper business were just all over the place.

JM: Yes, anywhere.

GH: Yes. But I have people today who still don't believe I worked for \$18 a week at Marianna after I edited the *Arkansas Traveler* as a managing editor.

JM: So in 1959, you became the managing editor at the *Democrat*?

GH: Somewhere in there, I think.

JM: Did Marcus George become the city editor?

GH: Yes. He was the assistant. He had been assistant city editor to me, and just moved up.

JM: Okay. And then you were there about ten years. Do you remember any significant developments in the paper during [those] ten years, or stories that you covered or anything?

GH: Well, it's kind of hard to think of one after you go through Central, you know?

JM: Yes.

GH: I guess I've been pretty proud of the fact that the *Democrat* was pretty close to getting involved in what was going on. I've got one story that may not be worth putting here. I can't remember whether—the reason I don't want to remember what it was is because I don't want to libel the guy I'm fixing to talk about.

JM: Okay.

GH: Bob Trout wrote a story for one Sunday paper about gambling in a place in North Little Rock. Do you remember that? Oh, you probably don't remember that stuff.

JM: I remember Bob Trout. I'm not sure I remember that specific story.

GH: Well, I was in the managing editor's office. The prosecuting attorney came up and said, "You've put me on the spot!" I said, "What do you mean?" He cited this story. He said, "That put me on the spot." I said, "Now, I didn't ask you to run for prosecuting attorney, and I don't think I voted for you, but you said you wanted to be when you announced for the office. Now, you may have put yourself on the spot." I don't think he ever came back to see me again.

JM: Who was the prosecuting attorney?

GH: I don't remember.

JM: All right.

GH: And I usually don't talk to people like that.

JM: Yes. Okay. Were you there or do you remember—this would have been earlier—well, I'm not sure what year that was—do you remember a story about Wintrop Rockefeller moving to the state, and moving in with three truckloads of liquor?

GH: [Laughs] I sure *do* remember that!

JM: I don't know—this is the story I'll tell if somebody interviews me. Joe Wirges got a hold of the story, and the *Gazette* wouldn't print it, and I got a hold of the story. I came running up to the *Democrat* office, and Frank Newell and all of Rockefeller's buddies were in the *Democrat* office at that time.

GH: I didn't know you were the one who brought the story in. See, that's the only time I've ever gotten mad.

JM: What happened on that?

GH: Well, Engel—I don't know whether Engel talked to—I guess I was still city editor at that time.

JM: I believe you were assistant city editor then.

GH: Okay. But somehow I got involved in that time, or maybe it was Liske who told me, "We're not going to run that story." I said, "What do you *mean*, we're not going to run that story?" I never talked to a boss like that. I think Engel had told him we weren't going to run it.

JM: Yes. I think Rockefeller's people made the pitch that it was this great event that was going to happen to the state, and he might not come if they ran that—if he got all this bad publicity or something. But I know he didn't run the story. [Laughs]

GH: Yes. That's the only time I know—if Engel did that, that's the only time of his saying what we were going to do on a story.

JM: Yes. That's the only time I'm aware of.

GH: And it may have been that somebody really put the bee on him.

JM: Yes. I think they had some people come up there. I think maybe Frank Newell, who was—wasn't he the one who was Rockefeller's big buddy?

GH: Yes, Frank Newell was in the army with Rockefeller.

JM: I think he came up there and maybe some others. I don't remember who—maybe some other businessmen, or maybe Tom Downie. I don't remember.

GH: Frank was in public relations out at Camp Robinson when I was covering, before he went on. I didn't know Frank when he was working at the *Gazette*, but I met him at Camp Robinson when I was covering the military out there. Then he went on with Rockefeller in the service somewhere. He's the one who got Rockefeller to come down here, or that's the story I got.

JM: Yes. So then you left the paper about, what, 1979?

GH: No, 1969.

JM: Yes. Okay. 1969. And then you went to work—what did you do then?

GH: I went with AP&L, which is now Entergy.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Gene, who were the photographers during your time? What do you remember about the photographers?

GH: Well, I remember McCord, obviously, who was also a newsman rather than just a photographer. He was a top-notch. Even though the four that I probably remember as well as anybody else are Rodney Worthington, Will Counts, Glen Moon, and O.D. Gunter, they were not news people. They were pretty good photographers, except I have one story to tell about Moon. It was when North Little Rock had got its first hospital. It was the old Baptist Hospital up on the hill. I was over here talking to somebody—there was something they were going to do right there in that room. I said something to Moon about, "We ought to get a

picture of this.” He said, “Yes, but my camera is in the car!” [Laughter] I guess he already had some shots. I don’t know.

JM: And O.D. Gunter was who you were talking about. You said O.D. O.D. Gunter, right? G-U-N-T-E-R.

GH: Yes.

JM: And Rodney Worthington.

GH: You know, Rodney is still around. He’s a volunteer out at St. Vincent’s Infirmary. He’s out there every morning.

JM: Is he really? Was there any particular time when you became aware that the afternoon newspapers in general, and maybe even the *Democrat*, too, were beginning to struggle for circulation because of changing conditions?

GH: No. I guess I was unaware of that. I mean, it was obvious. Everywhere they were clipping off, you know, and going—and, of course, I don’t see how—if it wasn’t for the convenience of advertising, I don’t see how a newspaper can stay in business.

JM: TV made a big difference.

GH: Yes. But, you know, TV is just kind of—the newspapers nowadays may overwrite, but the ones on video—if it’s not a crime, it’s hard to have anything on them, and—so I don’t know. Old codgers have a hard time thinking things are good.

JM: Yes, I understand. Going back to photographers—in fact, he came a little bit after that, but then Will Counts came along sometime in the 1950s.

GH: Yes. Now, Will was really a professional compared to the rest of them. Rodney

and Moon were clerks down at Junkins—that's where I hired them, from behind the counter. [Laughs]

JM: I didn't know that. Tell me a little bit—one of the other big stories I think that would've have been in that time—the tornados in 1952. How did the *Democrat* handle that, and what do you remember about that?

GH: 1952. Was that the big one we're talking about?

JM: Yes, this was the big one that went across from Dierks all the way up—southwest to northeast.

GH: I don't know how I got involved with assigning the people. I don't know whether Tilden was out of pocket or whether maybe he had gone somewhere. I guess I was just assigning people almost haphazardly from my home. It got down to nobody [was] left, and I decided I'd better go. Then it was obvious that we had overdone it because nobody was putting things together.

JM: Yes.

GH: Maybe it was too big for us. I don't know. Maybe if we'd had a plan we could've done it. And that was a pretty unusual tornado route. I mean, the route was the same, but the fact it kept on battering was difficult to keep up with.

JM: Yes.

GH: Most times you have some time to draw up a plan, but you just didn't have that in this event.

JM: Well, it just kept hitting, as I remember. The tornado started down at Dierks and just sort of kept going from southwest to the northeast, and kept hitting a place, then thirty minutes later it would hit some other city, and forty-five minutes or an

hour later, it would hit someplace else. You didn't know all this other stuff was coming when you made your first assignments.

GH: Yes. The normal thing about tornados—they apparently like the freeway.

[Laughs] I mean, they get close to it all the time, it looks like.

JM: So you wound up going out, and the coverage then—you said the next day that you had trouble getting it all in the paper.

GH: Well, yes, it was a Saturday paper, and a Saturday paper in those days was ten pages or twelve—can't hardly find them. There was no such thing as letting out.

JM: Yes.

GH: You know, every day's sports section now is eight pages full of nothing—and I like sports, but . . .

JM: Yes. So you had trouble getting it all in the first edition. You got it in later editions, but you . . .

GH: I'm sure we did, but . . .

JM: But you'd had trouble handling it all.

GH: Oh, I know one thing that might be worthy here—you know, the AP [Associate Press] Little Rock, Arkansas, office in the daytime was at the *Democrat*. Do you know where their office was? Directly behind the news desk, and we had a carbon spike—every time we wrote a story, we hung it on there. I don't think they've got that kind of service anymore.

JM: I don't think they do either.

GH: I think that was good for everybody in the newspaper business, not just for the originator.

JM: Speaking about the AP, you said you had a story about John Robert. I'm assuming you're talking about John Robert Starr.

GH: Oh, yes. John Robert came to see me for a job. He's dead, so I can't libel him.

JM: Yes. Okay.

GH: He came to see me for a job when he graduated. You know, he is a character. He was going to school at two different schools and working for the Memphis paper to pay—and he came over and said he'd like to work for us. I said, "Well, Bob, it sounds great." I think he told me how much he was making. I said, "Now, Bob, you've got a lot of experience, and I'd like to have you. I think you're a good newsman from what experience you've had, but I think you'd be better off working for AP. They've got an opening right now, and they can pay you more than I can get pay for you. I think I'd do you a favor if I told you to go through that door behind the *Democrat* news desks and talk to them about getting a job."

[Tape Stopped]

JM: You were in the newspaper business a long time, and you had the two competing newspapers here in Little Rock. How did you feel the newspaper business in Little Rock compared with some other towns of this size, or maybe even larger?

GH: I think both papers had bragged a bit on the fact that we were one of the few towns that had competing newspapers, and neither of them was a part of a chain. We weren't talking about fighting newspapers, we were talking about making sure that we worked hard enough that everybody knew what was going on. And even though—I probably shouldn't say this—even though the *Democrat-Gazette* is a bigger and more inclusive paper, I'm not sure that they cover *everything*, even if

they've got long stories out of something over in some mountains over there.

JM: You're not sure that they cover as much stuff as the two did.

GH: Yes, it's covering more, and not using a much bigger type. [Laughter] I can't tell by looking at my paper what story is important anymore.

JM: You think that competitive journalism was good for the town.

GH: I think it's more fun [for] the people, don't you? You were in the paper. You know that getting it out is important, not holding it until next week.

JM: What about Jack Keady? What do you remember about Jack?

GH: Oh, Jack was one of my best friends.

JM: Was he?

GH: Well, Jack was one of the few people that I thought really believed what he was doing and was doing it honestly all the time. And he wasn't flamboyant. Some people didn't get along with Jack, but I thought he was great. I think he was one of the best friends I had. In fact, just to show you what a great friend he was, he gave me a baby bed for our second baby.

JM: Is that right?

GH: It was one he'd had. We used to drink coffee together down at Walgreens. We used to discuss Christianity—you know, Jack was a Church of Christ and I'm a Baptist, and they don't really fit together too well. Finally, one morning he said, "Gene, you're not going to change me. I'm not going to change you. Let's not talk about it anymore." [Laughter]

JM: And he had Fred Petrucelli back there.

GH: Yes. Petrucelli is still working in newspapers.

JM: I heard. Yes, up at Conway or something.

GH: Yes, up at Conway. His second wife was a teacher up there. Oh, I'll tell you somebody we didn't talk about—John Ward. John Ward has written two books on Rockefeller. He's writing one on the history of UCA [University of Central Arkansas]. It formerly was the Arkansas [State] Teachers College. He served as vice president before retiring.

JM: Oh, UCA.

[End of Interview]

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