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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Bill Husted
Decatur, Georgia
28 January 2006

Interviewer: Steele Hays

Steele Hays: All right, we're on. This is Steele Hays. Today is Saturday, January 28, 2006, and I'm interviewing Bill Husted. We're in Bill's home in Decatur, Georgia, an Atlanta suburb. I'm going to get started by reading this statement. I am Steele Hays interviewing Bill Husted for the [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville] Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. I guess that's what I'm supposed to fill in there. This interview is being held in, as I said, Decatur, Georgia, on January 28, 2006. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, Bill, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is state your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others.

Bill Husted: I'm Bill Husted, and I give my permission for this to be used.

SH: Okay. Great. Well, Bill, let's get started with your personal biographical information. Talk about where you were born and when, and your parents or other family members.

BH: I was born October 8, 1946, in Springfield, Missouri, at St. Joseph's Hospital. My

dad was Harleth, which is a strange first name. H-A-R-L-E-T-H. Eugene Husted. H-U-S-T-E-D. My mother was Peggy Jean Key—K-E-Y—before she married and became a Husted. Just briefly—a nice story how the two of them met. My dad was just out of the Army Air Corps in WWII and [was] walking down the street in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and saw a woman who was very pretty—my mom. But in those days, apparently, or at least as he told us, you just didn't walk up to a woman you didn't know and strike up a conversation. He asked around town and found out that her dad fixed fishing rods and guns—he was a gunsmith and fixed fishing equipment. So he took his best bamboo fly rod, broke it over his knee, took it to her dad to have it fixed, and eventually, he met my mom. So fishing goes way back in the Husted family.

SH: That's great. What was your dad doing in Arkadelphia? Was that his hometown?

BH: Believe it or not, I'm not particularly clear on this because his parents lived there, but only briefly. Really, the hometown I remember was in Memphis, Tennessee, so I have no idea how long they were there, but it was a very temporary thing. My mom's parents lived there their whole lives, but, gosh, I don't think we lived there long at all. Maybe it was something to do with the end of the war and their other children. I don't know.

SH: Okay. So they met, then married after a period of time. How did the family get to Springfield at the time you were born?

BH: My dad took a job with what at that time was the U.S. Rubber Company, and later became Uniroyal, as a traveling salesman. He would carry these briefcases of tennis shoes and other kinds of shoes at that time into department stores [and] lay

them out [and] try to sell U.S. Keds. I think we were transferred almost immediately from Little Rock—they were at Little Rock at first and then sent to Springfield, Missouri.

SH: Okay. Go on about your childhood, then.

BH: I don't remember much about Springfield. If you'll look at a photo album, you'll see pictures of me on a wagon. You fool yourself into thinking you remember. My first real memories of growing up, I guess, would be Arkadelphia, Arkansas, where I started the first grade and finished college. Arkadelphia was a strange place, or it seems so to me now in retrospect, because it was very small. I guess, in those days, 5,000 to 7,000—and I'm making a guess on the population back then—yet, it had two colleges. It had Ouachita Baptist College, now University—Ouachita is spelled O-U-A-C-H-I-T-A—and Henderson State Teachers College, now Henderson State University. It was a small town to grow up in, yet it had libraries and a museum—certainly nothing like a big city, but a little bit different than—and I don't think either one of those would be the "Harvard of the Ozarks," but it was a nice place to grow up as a kid.

SH: Okay. And you went to the public high school, or the one *white* public high school in town?

BH: Exactly. There was a black school. It was called Peake High—P-E-A-K-E—and people used to love to go there for football games and the band. They were much better football players and musicians. As I say that, it sounds very stereotypical, and I don't mean it that way, yet the truth is that the bands were showier. They were high-stepping and the music was livelier. So, for whatever reason, that was

a very [unintelligible] place.

SH: What was the name of the dull high school that you attended?

BH: I attended the dull high school called Arkadelphia Senior High School.

SH: [Laughs]

BH: We were the Badgers.

SH: All right. And what about after high school?

BH: My mother worked in a low-level computing job for Henderson State Teachers' College. And when I say low level, I mean about as low as you can go—punching cards, in those days—that you put in the computer.

SH: Yes.

BH: What would come from that was a half-scholarship to Henderson. Instead of paying \$90 a semester [laughs] in those days, I paid \$45 a semester. So I attended Henderson, and, again, in those days it was a teachers' college before it became a university.

SH: Yes. And [you] studied what?

BH: The first two years I was pre-med, then my advisor, Dr. Adelpia—which is very much like Arkadelphia—A-D-E-L-P-H-I-A—Basford—B-A-S-F-O-R-D—called me in and asked if I'd ever thought of anything but medicine. I assured her I hadn't. And she said, "Well, you need to start thinking."

SH: [Laughs]

BH: I didn't have a great aptitude for science or math, and I became a speech/drama major. I did that simply because it seemed like the easiest way to, perhaps, graduate.

SH: Okay. What was your first job? Or talk about how you got into journalism for the first time.

BH: Well, like a lot of state colleges, toward the end of your senior year there would be various job recruiters on campus in various rooms, so you'd line up. I got into a line which I believed was to teach school or to be interviewed to teach school in Memphis, Tennessee. I was in an "M" line, but it turned out it was Mountain Grove, Missouri, so I ended up taking that job. I taught there for one year. After that year, I knew I didn't want to teach high school. I looked at newspaper ads. In the summer I was staying in a fishing cabin—I think it was Lake Catherine, but I'm not sure. But I was staying in a cabin for part of the summer. I saw an ad for the *Russellville Courier Democrat*. It was looking for a reporter. In those days, I drove an MGB. I got an interview with them. On the day of the interview, the throttle on that MGB was stuck wide open, so the only choice was to go full out or not at all. I wasn't at my parents' home—I was in a cabin—so I didn't have the option of borrowing a car. I drove two hours, and to shift and slow down, I would pull the manual choke out on the car, and it almost killed the car—pushed in the clutch, shift it, then use the clutch to make the engine run smoothly again and go on. It was quite an adventure getting there. I did get the job for the sum of \$90 a week, which was a pick-up, by the way, from teaching high school. That was hard to do in those days. It was hard to make less than a teacher.

SH: Do you remember what year that was?

BH: Yes. That would have been 1969.

SH: Okay. Tell us about the *Russellville Courier Democrat* and your career there.

BH: The editor there was named Bill Newsom—N-E-W-S-O-M—and the first thing that happened—I had to change my name because it was a small newspaper—the various city functionaries would call and ask for Bill. They didn't ask for Mr. Newsom, so I had to use my middle name. I was Gordon Husted for my first year in the newspaper business. Gordon. G-O-R-D-O-N. I knew newspapering was going to be an odd profession, and that to write for a paper, it was best to change your name. The other thing I remember about the place—they were very concerned about hours. It was, of course, an hourly job. At night, if you had to go cover a story, they wanted you drive to the newspaper office [and] literally punch in with a punch clock—the only time in my life I've ever used a punch clock—and then go to the assignment, then drive back to the office—even if you were going to write in the next day—to punch out. So [it was] a very odd place. I was in a motel all year because I had no idea that I would stay there very long. It was one of these little residential motels—very seedy place. I remember many nights being disturbed by mistakes I'd made. I had a horrible start. Newspapering didn't seem easy to me at all—and going home, not turning on the light—sitting in a chair and then watching it get dark outside, and eventually going to bed disturbed over my a lack of aptitude for newspaper work.

SH: Well, Russellville was my family's hometown.

BH: I didn't know that.

SH: My great-grandfather and grandfather lived there for many years, anyway. How long were you at the *Russellville Courier Democrat*?

BH: Well, the story about that—when I applied at Russellville, I also applied at the

Arkansas Democrat. Within two weeks of taking the job at Russellville—Gene Foreman, at the time, called me at Russellville and offered me a job, and I said, "I can't do that. I just took this job. It wouldn't be fair. But please mark on your calendar a year away and I'll mark on mine, and if the offer is still open, I'll go to the *Democrat*." So at the end of a year I called Gene, and he still offered me the job. During the interview we talked money, and he was shocked that I was making as much as \$90 a week . . .

SH: [Laughs]

BH: And [he] offered me, initially, \$100, and I cried. Now, I didn't sob, but I knew I couldn't—even in those days—rent an apartment and survive on \$100 a week—I remember tears running down my eyes because I wanted to go there so, so, so badly. It was such a wonderful change from Russellville. He said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you \$105 a week if you won't tell anyone." So we had a secret negotiation, and I got \$5 more a week. I took the job and started at the *Arkansas Democrat*, which would have been sometime in 1970.

SH: Okay. What was your initial assignment?

BH: I was a general assignment reporter. My city editor was Ralph Patrick, the man I had ended up working with at the newspaper—at the *Atlanta Constitution*, where I work now. Anyway, my first assignment from Ralph was to cover a flower show. Ralph saw that it was a very horrible assignment, which, indeed, it was. He told me later that he felt that maybe I was insane because he told me to do that and expected me to react, and I had this great smile on my face. Of course, it was just nervousness. I was smiling because I was so scared to death, but he thought

he had hired an idiot.

SH: All right. Do you feel your year in Russellville had prepared you reasonably well for the eventual larger paper?

BH: The truth is Bill Newsom was a good newspaper editor. Yes, it did. And Russellville—because it was a small paper, I did everything from take photographs—I did delivery at times—delivering the newspaper to other towns—not door to door, but if we missed the bus to go to—is it Dover?

SH: Yes.

BH: You know the area. I think Dover was the little town near there.

SH: Yes.

BH: If we missed the bus, I would literally put the papers in the back of my car and go there. I'll tell you a quick photography story. When I was interviewed for that job, they asked if I could take pictures. Of course, I could. I had a little thirty-five millimeter camera—I thought I could. My first assignment, I was handed a four-by-five Speed Graflex—one of those old, stereotypical press cameras. I got out on a . . .

SH: A four-by-five?

BH: Four-by-five camera that used huge film.

SH: Wow.

BH: This was in 1970—1969. I couldn't open the camera when I got to the assignment. There was a catch. Anyone old enough to remember—under the fabric, where you'd push the little button down to—there was a hidden button, and the front of the [unintelligible] those holes would open.

SH: Yes.

BH: Well, I had to call my editor and say, "Well, really, I *can* take pictures, but I cannot open the camera."

SH: [Laughs]

BH: I was so rattled after that experience that I remember I drove off with it on the top of my car. It bounced along the street. And to tell you how sturdy those cameras were, you couldn't tell that anything had ever happened to it

SH: Wow. Well, go on about your early year or years at the *Democrat* after the flower show. Did you complete that assignment successfully in your city editor's eyes?

BH: I believe I did. I had made amazing progress from really dismal work at Russellville. Bill Newsom was a good teacher. The one Little Rock story—an early days story that stands out—it isn't a newspaper story at all. Remember that I had been living as Gordon Husted for a year. I drove out around Geyer Springs where they had cheap apartments and talked to the apartment manager there about renting an apartment. I introduced myself as Gordon Husted, as I had lived that way for a year, and this woman I had never seen said, "No, you're *Bill*." Well, it turns out she was a person I had gone to high school with. In fact, I remember her name, Thelma Taylor, and I didn't recognize her. And it scared me to death that she [knew] my first name.

SH: How about that?

BH: No, it was a good first year. I enjoyed the *Democrat*. I enjoyed living in Little Rock after living in the smaller town of Russellville. And Ralph Patrick was an exceptional city editor.

SH: And you were able to afford an apartment and food and to pay your bills on \$105 a week?

BH: I was. In fact, I had a roommate—he wasn't in the beginning—a good fellow named Fred Morrow, who was a sportswriter.

SH: Really?

BH: He distinguished himself by dressing like a sportswriter. I remember he would often wear an orange shirt, white belt, white shoes, and multi-colored pants. One time I said—I thought it was obvious that I was kidding—I said, "Fred, you're really a clothes horse!" And he thanked me and proceeded to tell me the various places he bought the clothing items.

SH: [Laughs]

BH: He was very thrilled that I thought he was such a good dresser.

SH: All right. Well, go on about the—did you continue as a general assignment reporter, or did you ever pick up a specific beat?

BH: I never had a beat. Eventually, I became an editor at that paper. But in my reporting, I was always a general assignment reporter. As I recall, we had two general assignment reporters total in those days—a very small staff. I was one. Arlin Fields—A-R-L-I-N—second name, Fields, as you would think you'd spell it—F-I-E-L-D-S—was the other. We would often work six days a week because there just weren't enough reporters. Overtime was just ignored. Sometimes you would take what they called "comp time." If you worked an exceptionally long week, you might take half a day off, but as I recall it, and I believe it's true—and I guess Arlin will be interviewed at some point for this and maybe will have the

same memory—but we worked six days a week in those days.

SH: Yes. What was the most memorable, or a couple of the most memorable stories from the news standpoint, that you covered in those early years?

BH: Well, what I remember very clearly was a sniper up on a railroad trestle bridge. I remember the man's first name was Barry. At that time, I was married to— Amanda Miller now, but in those days, of course, Amanda Husted. In fact, Fred Morrow—the same fellow I had mentioned—the sportswriter and I were eating dinner at my house, and I got a call at about 8:30 at night that there was a sniper on the railroad trestle bridge and that he had already shot at some folks. No one had been hurt, but that he had been shooting at people and was stuck on the bridge. Well, it was a cold winter night, and I brought a leather jacket, which was sort of the uniform in those days of a reporter. It would be a brown leather jacket, blue jeans and a tie. You looked rather like somebody that carried groceries out at Publix [grocery store] today. Anyway, Fred and I left. Fred decided to go with me, and I probably [unintelligible], so we got to the scene of the shooting. There was a police line, and the police said, "We've set up our command post for both the press and the police in this warehouse building right on the river, but you need to crawl along the side of this fence because the guy is taking pot shots, and he has already hit an ambulance and a car." Well, Fred and I were too brave to crawl. About four feet into our walk toward the warehouse, a huge hunk of asphalt ripped out of the road as he shot at us, and we crawled the *rest* of the way.

SH: [Laughs]

BH: So, we set up shop in the warehouse. Fred was a sportswriter, and people couldn't

understand why Fred was there. Fred started the rumor that Frank Broyles [athletic director at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville] was on top of the bridge shooting at people because they'd had sort of a bad season. And I swear this is true. If it isn't true, it's my completely oddest memory. There was one television guy, and I forget his name, who believed it.

SH: [Laughs]

BH: He was very excited and thought he had the story of the century. We thought we'd be there maybe thirty minutes because, in those days, we just assumed that the Little Rock Police would shoot the man very quickly and we'd all go home. But, instead, they called the psychiatrist. I'll never forget the psychiatrist had a very high-pitched voice, and he had a bullhorn to talk to the guy. "Barry!" [BH said this in a girlish voice] Of course, you can't in the transcript tell what I'm doing, but he had a very high-pitched, piercing voice, and the bullhorn made it more so. Shortly after that, the man managed to shoot himself in the stomach with his rifle, and I've always thought it was because of the voice of the psychiatrist. We wrote the story at around 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning, and they were just grateful that we were sent home early because after working all night it didn't even occur to us that that was probably a normal way to live.

SH: Was that a bridge over the Arkansas River?

BH: It was, indeed. The command post was on the Little Rock side of the river, and I'm sure that warehouse is long gone.

SH: Oh. Talk about some of the most memorable people who were on the *Democrat* staff in those early years.

BH: Ralph Patrick is certainly one. He was a fine city editor and also a student of newspapering. He liked to read histories of the great newspaper wars in New York and Chicago. I think without Ralph I may have seen newspapers as a two-year stop. Probably, that was my theory. I thought when I went into it that I'd do that, then I'd get a respectable job of some kind and find honest work. But Ralph loved newspapering so much that it rubbed off a little bit on me, so he would certainly be one of them. A man named Martin Kirby, who I know is going to be interviewed, was a terrific reporter who arrived here from Philadelphia, which always seemed really exotic to me, since I grew up in Arkansas, but here's someone who's not from around here. Martin and I worked together—in those days, civil rights was a huge story. There was a black economic boycott in Marianna, Arkansas, that attracted national attention.

SH: Olly Neal.

BH: Olly Neal and Prentis. I think it's either Olly Neal or Prentis who's now a judge on the second-highest court in Arkansas. We correspond with each other by email. That's starting at the end of the story and working back, but, yes, Olly and Prentis Neal. I think Olly—O-L-L-Y—and I think Prentis—P-R-E-N-T-I-S. It became a huge story. The blacks realized they were the main customers for all of the stores in town, yet they couldn't get a job in any of the stores. So they decided, "We just won't buy from the stores if they're not going to hire us to *work* in the stores." Well, it began to get more and more violent. When I say there were shootings, I'm talking about shooting a window out. It seemed very dramatic at the time, but, as I recall, I don't think anyone was really hurt. The

boycott was doing a great job. The stores were [unintelligible] in the town. I was sent there to do an interview. I remember standing on a street corner interviewing either Olly or Prentis. Frankly, I don't remember which one at this point. A white mob gathered around us, and they objected to me talking to the fellow. I said, "I'll talk to you next. I want to finish my interview." I ended up on the ground because someone pushed me, and I remember they were kicking with their cowboy boots, which is no fun. I was, gosh, twenty-three, maybe—trying to be brave, but I was scared to death. I remember trying to take notes lying on the ground. [Laughter] I was just scribbling marks in my notepad, but I wanted to look as if I wasn't afraid. A couple of them got away, but they really didn't hurt me that much—they kicked at me. I remember I stopped in Forrest City, Arkansas, to use a pay phone—there were no cell phones in those days—and I called Ralph Patrick. I said, "Ralph, I've been beaten by a mob." He said, "They can't do that to us. You get right back in that town!"

SH: [Laughs]

BH: I told Ralph that I wasn't going to do that, that I was going to come back to Little Rock. Ralph proceeded to find the biggest reporter on the staff, who was Martin Kirby and a photographer. It was Steve Keesee—or was it Robert Ike Thomas? I don't remember.

SH: Robert Ike was bigger.

BH: Yes, it was probably Robert Ike. The three of us went back to Marianna. The first stop we made was in the little Marianna newspaper to read some of the clippings. We wondered if the local paper was paying much attention to this

because of the white power structure of the town, and assumed that that might be part of the story—that this thing was being ignored in its own back yard. We looked out the window of the newspaper, and it was like a cowboy movie. You could see a crowd starting to grow—a white crowd. There'd be three people, then there'd be ten, and then fifteen. And we thought, "Well, we're in *trouble*." I picked a fellow who called—I guess, the boy—I guess it was the sheriff—I no longer remember—and the local police and asked for help. I don't remember what they said, but it was obvious we weren't going to get any help from the police. Martin looked—there were things in those days called paper spikes. It had a piece of lead on the bottom and a spike-like piece of metal on it, and you'd put carbon copies in it. Martin moved to pick one up, and said, "When they come in, I'm going to hit one of them with it." I said, "Martin, you'll end up being killed if you hurt one of these people. Don't do it." So he put that down. Sure enough, the crowd started coming in the door, and I won't be overly dramatic. They didn't push the door. They were literally just walking in, but we knew we were in deeper trouble as they did. I'll never forget, the newspaper editor said, "Boys, take them outside. Don't mess up my newspaper office."

SH: [Laughs]

BH: And they did. I think the worst that happened to us that time was getting pushed around, and they stole the photographer's jacket and his camera. They later gave both back, as I recall. The thing that was remarkable, even to a kid—you looked at those people—they weren't tough-looking people. For the first time I saw what a mob meant—what ordinary, people that—even—and I'm certainly no giant—

that wouldn't have been threatening to me one on one, all of a sudden became very brave because they were part of a mob.

SH: What was the outcome of the story of the Marianna boycott?

BH: It was very successful. Joan Baez [a famous folk music singer] eventually came and did concerts in Memphis [Tennessee] to raise money for them, and it's the one time when I lost my objectivity. But I'm not—I hope that what I wrote—but I did this—there were instances of violence, and it [unintelligible] really personally. I gave my personal camera to either Olly or Prentis Neal because they needed one to document those things. And, truthfully, a [unintelligible] man—I don't think I've ever done anything like that because that's, in many ways, the wrong thing to do, but it was such an obvious wrong, what was going on in that town, that I still worry about it.

SH: Well, it was an important story. What other—have you talked of Martin Kirby—what was Martin's career at the *Democrat*? Did he stay or leave while you were there? What was the outcome of that?

BH: As I recall, Martin married Peggy Kirby, and as I understand it from Jerry McConnell, who's heading up this project, they're no longer married. But Peggy had a PhD in physiology and was teaching at the medical school in Little Rock [reference to University of Arkansas Medical School]. Then, as I recall, they moved. In fact, Martin is here now at the Medical College of Georgia, so he left sometime before I did because you moved to the Medical College of Georgia, which is in . . .

SH: Augusta.

BH: . . . Augusta. I was trying to think.

SH: Is Martin still a newspaper man?

BH: I think he is retired, but I do not know.

SH: All right. When did you move from being a reporter to an editor at the *Democrat*?

BH: I think I was twenty-seven at the time, so that would have been after—I think I was at the *Democrat* eleven years in all, so five or six years. My work there—I became Ralph Patrick's city editor. I remember him asking me to do it, and I didn't particularly want to be an editor. I enjoyed reporting. He asked a couple of times. I finally did it, and then—and I don't think it was a long time after I became an assistant city editor—Ralph left to start the *Arkansasan* magazine. I think that was the name of it.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

SH: We've just turned the tape, so this is the continuation of our interview. Bill, you were talking about Ralph Patrick moving up into a new position. You became a city editor. Go ahead and please tell that again, since we missed it on tape.

BH: Well, when Ralph left, I did become the city editor, I think, just by virtue of the fact [laughs] that I was his assistant. One problem there that I had that stands out even to this day is the fact that when they announced to the staff there was applause. It was a terrific feeling to be there that day. All of a sudden, as I told you earlier, I was very reluctant to be an administrator. I really love reporting. But that fired me up. That made me want to do a good job as city editor.

SH: Yes. And you were recalling the transition in ownership from the previous owners of the paper to the Hussman family, or also the Palmer family—I guess that Walter Hussman's mother's family, the Palmers, owned a number of papers in south Arkansas. You mentioned that there was some trepidation on the staff's part about the family business as having a reputation of paying frugally or paying relatively low to some other papers. Was that issue addressed when the new ownership came up, and was there a meeting with the staff?

BH: I'm sure there must have been a meeting with the staff. I don't recall it, but I don't—and, of course, it's funny because we were making slave wages to begin with, so I don't know why we worried so much. But, yes, we feared that things as far as our pay would get even worse. There was a famous story in those days—and, again, it may be true and may not—that one of his newspapers—probably in south Arkansas—when the required minimum wage went up, all the staff got notices that "through our great generosity, we're going to increase your pay," and, of course, the pay was increased to the amount required by the minimum wage.

SH: Were there any changes that became evident as a result of the new ownership?

BH: Yes, dramatic changes. There was the feeling right from the beginning that that newspaper was going to go after the *Arkansas Gazette*. You would have to be there in the sense of both being in Arkansas at that time and being a newspaper reader, but the atmosphere before that was clear that the *Arkansas Gazette* was a great newspaper; and, indeed, it was for Little Rock, Arkansas. And the *Democrat* was sort of a scrambling, more entertaining newspaper, maybe, as far as the writing, but certainly not of the stature of the *Gazette*. I think everybody

who worked before that at the *Democrat* just accepted that as fact. I cannot recall anyone thinking, "Well, we're going to put the *Gazette* out of business. We're going to be a better newspaper. We're going to be more respected." It just wasn't going to happen. All of a sudden, when the Hussmans took over—and shortly after that, I believe, John Robert Starr was hired—I think that it was almost immediately—as the managing editor. It became apparent that they believed, at least, that we were going to go head on with the *Gazette*. It also became apparent that they really thought that we could—I don't think in the very beginning that it was an expressed thought that we would put them out of business, but that we were going to at least fight them toe-to-toe. I'll never forget meeting John Robert Starr. He joined the newspaper—he had been the bureau chief for the Associated Press in Little Rock, and sitting down with him—he said, "What do we need to beat the *Gazette*?" I thought of it in terms of bargaining with a car salesman, so I gave him an overly inflated list of things we needed, as far as the number of reporters and some other changes. In what must be a really great management technique, after I gave him that long list, he said, "Okay, it's all yours. Now you've got to beat them. You have no excuses." So, starting that day, every morning when I came to work, I would have to create a list of all the stories that the *Gazette* had that we didn't have, and there was no place on that list for "why?" He really didn't care why we didn't have them; it was just *whether* we had them. A different era. He was a vain, egotistical man with a lot of faults, but as far as the man for that particular job—whether it was a good thing to do or a bad thing to do—but for fighting the *Gazette*, you couldn't have picked a better person.

SH: How many staff positions did you add? Do you recall?

BH: Steele, I don't recall even at all. I just know that my list of how many we needed was way beyond what I even thought we needed, but I assumed there'd be a bargaining process.

SH: Sure.

BH: For instance—and this certainly isn't true—this is an example—had I asked for ten more, I would have assumed—I would hope to get five, but I got every one of those staff positions.

SH: Do you recall, then, devoting much of your time to hiring more reporters for a period of time after this?

BH: I didn't. John Robert Starr did. I did very little of the hiring. Sometimes, I would talk with the person, but, as I recall, that was really more what he did. It didn't occur to me that it was something I wanted to do.

SH: Yes. Could you tell a difference in the quality or the breadth, I guess, of the *Democrat's* coverage, based on those added resources?

BH: You know, you really could. There were some very bright people who joined the staff who were very capable writers. One thing the *Democrat*—even before all this—had that the *Gazette* didn't have, at least in my opinion, was a brightness of the writing. It was a little wittier. At the *Gazette*, the writing was a little bit staid, a little bit conventional. It saw itself as the "Gray Lady of Arkansas," and that's not at all a criticism. It was more of a textbook newspaper, and it was a newspaper of record. Every sparrow that fell was recorded someplace in those pages. The *Democrat* was a little more—not in [the] mechanical side, but in the

tone of a tabloid-kind of a newspaper. The writing was brighter. And some of the young reporters took great chances, at least for those days, in how they wrote, and did it successfully.

SH: Yes. How did you feel participating in that effort to beat the *Gazette*, or to match their coverage and beat it as much as possible? How did that feel at the time?

BH: That's a good question that—the truth is, I can remember, at least in the time I'm describing, I didn't think of it in terms of putting the *Gazette* out of business, but it felt great because we had been the ugly sister of the two. It was my newspaper, and all of a sudden, we had parity, at least, in the number of people that we would send out on a story. We had parity in the budgets, to send someone out of town or, gosh, even out of state. So there was an excitement to it, and there was an excitement in people and watching that happen. Now, I'm not sure that the quality of the work really was the key element in the eventual outcome of the newspaper war. I think that might have been more a function of the free classified ads. But the newspaper was definitely better, and there was a huge sense of pride in that.

SH: Yes. Do you have any particular memories beyond what you've described so far of those days—any moments where you felt you beat the *Gazette*, particularly, on a major story? Did you see any evidence as a result of the improved coverage? Was circulation going up or just—any recall of what the results were of the resources and the effort and the energy?

BH: There is no one story. It was a gradual process. But the perception was matched by fact. For instance, people who would have never called us to alert us of a

story—state officials began calling us. John Robert Starr cultivated many of them, and he wrote a column that was very controversial. He was certainly not objective in the way he viewed the government and the way he viewed the state, and that attracted deep partisans and people who were equally passionate against him. All of that amounted to, all of a sudden, the newspaper mattered—whether you hated it or loved it. And, truthfully, in my earliest days there, it didn't seem to matter. It wasn't part of the college structure. If you wrote an editorial about an issue in the state, you had no thought that that editorial would carry weight. So what happened isn't so much one story, but the fact that the newspaper mattered all of a sudden. It was an enormous change.

SH: All right. As I recall, John Robert Starr was very critical of Governor Bill Clinton at the time, and made very close coverage and critical coverage of Clinton a big part of the paper's efforts and his own editorializing or his column. If you don't want to call them editorials, they were op-ed columns. How did you feel about that? How did that affect your work, or the paper in any way?

BH: That I didn't like it—that it bothered me. It's a great question. It's almost a two-edged sword. On one hand, I was embarrassed, almost, at times by the partisanship it showed. On the other hand, there was something about the fighting spirit—the fact that he did fight so hard, that you had to admire, in a way. So, you had two faces. On one side, you thought, "This is wrong. This isn't how newspapers operate. This guy is running the show. He has made his feelings clear, and the readers have to think that that's going to taint our coverage. How could we ever be objective?" On the other hand, without that kind of attitude, I'm

not sure the newspaper would have prospered. He was the right man for the job, if the job was to eliminate the other newspaper. As a newspaper man, I wouldn't have that happen. I wanted to beat the *Gazette*, but there was no thought in my mind that it would be a good thing to put it out of business. It was as sad for me as for anyone else who watched it.

SH: Did you work closely with Starr every day? Was there a budget meeting every day on stories going into the paper that you were in with him? Talk about your relations and your working relationship with John Robert Starr.

BH: This is going to get a little bit personal. Starr sort of enlisted you into his army. As I said, I was married to—Amanda Miller now—Amanda Husted then, who ran the copy desk of the *Democrat*. We were two key employees for John Robert Starr. He began a friendship with us. Looking back, it's hard—it was an awkward time. Though he was an interesting person—on the other hand, he was also your boss. So, if you said—for instance, as he would—"I think I'm going to come over for dinner"—that he would literally invite himself over for dinner. He'd say, "We need to talk about this matter and that matter. I want to come over for dinner." And he started doing that. Then, along the way, he would say, "Let's go to the horse races in Hot Springs." Well, whether I wanted to go or not—I guess I did because it [was] better than being at work, maybe. You couldn't say, as you could with someone else, "Well, I have to work." So we would take off and go to the horse races. I'm going to follow this drift, since this is a logical place to do that—that the friendship grew. We spent more and more time together. Then, toward the end of the time I was at the *Democrat*—I was there

eleven years, so this would have been ten years plus—I applied for a job at a company in Medford, Oregon, called Bear Creek Corporation. And because I regarded John Robert as a friend, I told him up front before I even flew out to interview for the job months ahead—things you probably wouldn't do without the friend relationship. I said, "John Robert, I'm going to fly out to Oregon and interview for this job running the writers for this corporation." Primarily catalogs—junk mailers. Well, John Robert saw that as a great betrayal, and I think people who knew John Robert would understand that as part of his personality, that I was his guy. I was not only his guy as an editor; I was his guy as a friend. Within weeks of that, I was sitting there after about a fifteen-hour day, and I had my feet propped up on the desk. Now, remember, I had been at work fifteen hours easily at this point. John Robert walked up and said, "Husted, if you're going to prop your feet up on the desk, why don't you get on home? You're not doing any good to us down here. You're lazy." It was within a week of that, John Robert called me in and fired me. And here's the great part of the story, I still didn't have the job in Oregon. This is a wonderful example of John Robert Starr. He called in Amanda, my wife, and tried to convince her to stay. He said, "Now, Amanda, I fired Bill because he's going to Oregon and he's also goofing off, but I'd like for you to stay on at the newspaper," which she didn't. I can't think of a story that illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of the man so well.

SH: What did he say his basis was for firing you?

BH: Steele, I think it was based on—it started with that incident where after fifteen

hours I had my feet propped up. I think he believed I was getting lazy. I don't even think he—now, here's one good thing about John Robert Starr—I don't think he pulled any punches, as I recall. I think it was obvious to both of us he was firing me because I was at least interviewing for a job that, thank God, I got in Oregon—that I wasn't on the team. I can remember another story, and I wish I could remember the particulars—one of our capitol reporters went to some sort of a party for one of the Clinton people, and I can't remember if he was fired, but I remember he was in enormous trouble with John Robert Starr. The trouble wasn't that he had violated any sense of objectivity, but that he had partied with "the enemy."

SH: Did you, indeed, accept that firing and walk out and that was end of your *Democrat* career?

BH: Yes. And my wife, Amanda, said, "No, thank you, John Robert. I will be going, too." Yes, that was the end of my *Democrat* career and what I thought was the end of my newspaper career at the time. I assumed that that was the last newspaper for me.

SH: Well, how much longer was it before you found out whether or not you *did* have a job offer from the Bear Creek Corporation?

BH: Steele, I think it was a matter of a month, at least. I know even after I had the job offer, it was another month or two before it was actually time to move out to Oregon. As I recall, however, that was a wonderful time when I was assured that I was going to have a job. It wasn't that that job paid so much. When I tell you that story that the *Democrat* paid so little—I literally tripled my salary moving

from the *Democrat* to the Corporation. Amanda was able, almost immediately, to find a job at the local newspaper in Medford, Oregon, at the *Medford Mail Tribune*. Her salary was at least equal or perhaps better, even though it was a smaller newspaper, than what she made in Little Rock. All of a sudden, there was this feeling, "Gosh, we're almost prospering. We're making more money. We're going to live in a different part of the country." It was a fun two or three months waiting to go to Oregon.

SH: Yes. Well, I know you were in Oregon for several years.

BH: Yes.

SH: You did move back to the South. I believe you moved to Memphis to work for an advertising agency. Is that correct?

BH: Yes.

SH: Archer Malmo?

BH: Yes.

SH: What pulled you back to the South from Oregon?

BH: Amanda's parents began to fail in health to some degree, so she had—her parents were in Wynne, Arkansas, which, as I recall, is maybe forty minutes from Memphis, Tennessee. She felt it was important to get near that area. She applied at the [Memphis] *Commercial Appeal*. And I was ready to go. The Corporation had changed. When I worked for Bear Creek in the beginning, it was a family business. It was listed on NASDAQ [The National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations system], but the family owned forty-nine percent of the stock. My boss was the CEO [chief executive officer] of the company. I

could walk down the hall to his office and get a decision made. During the time that passed, it became acquired by R. J. Reynolds—or Nabisco, in those days—when Tylee Wilson was there. The atmosphere changed and was a much more bureaucratic place. You'd go in to work on a Saturday just so you could walk past your boss's office, whether you needed to know him or not. It became like having a city job in a small town. So when Amanda decided she would like to be closer [to her parents], it was fine with me. It wasn't something that we worried much about. Indeed, [we] did move back [and] she took a job at the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*. I worked for an ad agency called Malmo Advertising. Later, the name changed, but in those days it was John Malmo Advertising.

SH: M-A-L-M-O.

BH: M-A-L-M-O.

SH: And how long did you do advertising writing there?

BH: I think it was two years. If it was more than two years, it was very little more than two years. Ralph Patrick—sort of like in a bad movie—pops up again. This time, [he] contacted Amanda, and the [National] Democratic Convention was going to be in Atlanta. The copy editing job at the *Atlanta [Journal-] Constitution* had changed. It had become more computerized. It's a very specialized, technical craft. She was very good at that craft, and still is. So she was recruited by the *Atlanta Constitution*. Well, at the *Commercial Appeal*, she was working 'til 2:30 or 3:00 each morning, and she also had split days off. I think one was Sunday and one was Tuesday, and she was *miserable*. So, at least—and, by the way, at the same time I was really happy at that ad agency. I

loved it. It was, again, a small family operation, very much like the Corporation was when I started with Bear Creek, so I felt right at home. But it was hard to argue with the fact that it was unfair for her to work until 2:00 or 3:00 every morning, so she moved. I stayed in Memphis for four or five months as I looked for a job. When I found an advertising agency job, I moved to Atlanta.

SH: All right. And who was the agency you worked for in Atlanta?

BH: It was McCaffrey and McCall. It was what they called a field office.

SH: Yes.

BH: We had Electrolux, Royal Oak charcoal—I think those were the two—oh, [unintelligible]. Indeed, we did. We had some packaged goods brands. Malmo had been very good at packaged goods. That's how I got the job there.

SH: When did you get back into the newspaper business?

BH: That field office, McCaffrey and McCall, was acquired by what was called the hotshot in those days, Earl Palmer Brown, in Atlanta. The deal was made that most of the employees couldn't make the move at all, but they negotiated that I would go, the creative director would go, and I thought, "Well, great. I've still got a job." Well, I got over to Earl Palmer Brown, and Kurt Pauche—P-A-U-C-H-E, I believe, was the creative director. I remember he told me—and I think [these were his words?], not to [unintelligible] out, "Well, they agreed to take us over there. They didn't really see that they needed us long term." I remember just in the second week of that job, they brought their human resources person in who explained the Right-to-Work law—that we could be dismissed for any reason—that they didn't have to have any particular reason to do that. So you knew—I

remember at the time that the creative director and I used to take walks at lunch and wonder when the ax would fall. And, indeed, it did. The top guy one afternoon around 6:00 walked into my little cubicle and said, "You know, Bill, I think you're one of the best writers here. I'm going to fire you." Then we talked for thirty or forty minutes, and I remember asking him if it was all right [for me] to go home for the day because I was so rattled. I was unemployed for several months after that. I remember Amanda would give me an allowance—I was a smoker in those days—to buy cigarettes. I can also remember one pitiful day when I put on a sport coat and a tie and walked around a mall shopping area here just because I wanted to *look* like I had a job.

SH: [Laughs]

BH: Eventually, Amanda arranged an interview at the *Atlanta Constitution*, where she worked and was well thought of. I did go to the interview and I did get the job. All of a sudden, I was not only back in a newspaper, but back in a newspaper where Ralph Patrick works now—my first city editor.

SH: How long have you been at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*?

BH: It was fifteen years last August.

SH: And you currently, I think it's fair to say, are something of a local celebrity, based on your regular Sunday articles as "The Techno Buddy," advising people on how to deal with all the problems they would have with their personal computers and their hardware or their software. Have you enjoyed that work?

BH: I've enjoyed it very much. The column appears in other papers, although—it's syndicated, but in a sense that the syndicate that owns it, not me. So it appears in

some very large newspapers, but I'm sort of like the fellow at Bell Labs who invents transistors that are owned by Bell Labs. It's high profile in some ways, but it's not exactly like, say, Louis Grizzard when he was there. It's nice, but not particularly lucrative.

SH: Well, quickly, what are some of the other major newspapers that carry your column or your—what's the right word? Is it column?

BH: Yes, it is a column. I think—and this changes from moment to moment—I'm not manager and editor—the *Kansas City Star*, the *Denver*—I'm not sure if it's the *Rocky Mountain News* or the *Denver Post*—one of those. And the reason I don't know with the certainty that a real columnist would know is, again, I'm not receiving checks from these places . . .

SH: Sure.

BH: . . . so it's not of the same urgency for me to know where—but many newspapers.

SH: Looking back on your days at the *Democrat*, what things we haven't talked about? Does anything come to mind that was important about your experience at the *Democrat*? We talked about the newspaper war—some of your early interesting stories of transitioning to being an editor. What haven't we talked about that is memorable or . . .?

BH: Just the great people that came through there. You would be—and I'm not saying this because you're standing there—you would be one of them. Bob Lancaster, whom I literally stood in awe of, wrote a column in the early days for the *Democrat*, [and] now works for the *Arkansas Times*, as I understand. I can remember literally asking him if it was okay to bring him coffee in the morning—

that I thought his writing was that good. Fred Morrow, who I have mentioned, was a *terrific* sportswriter. And I think I said that earlier—just the fact that we had so many young reporters who were so good and that you would literally have to run them out of the newsroom late at night. I can remember one Lisa Hammersley, who worked for what was the *Charlotte Observer*—and I think is out of business now. I remember her moving her desk and hiding behind a post so I couldn't see her to send her home. Just the sense of going to war. People say that if you have an ugly sister, you love her more than a beautiful sister because you feel protective. Maybe there was some of that in the early days—that the *Democrat* was the ugly sister in town, and maybe because of that, you fought for her more and cared for her more.

SH: Yes. Other than Ralph Patrick, who had the most significant impact on your career at the *Democrat*—either your writing or your abilities as an editor?

BH: Gene Foreman, early on, who was later at the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, number two to Gene Roberts. Gene Foreman was just an enormously gifted editor who was someone who scared the hell out of me. I remember doing a poor job on a story one day. You had little mailboxes in the newsroom—and still do—where you get interoffice mail. I walked over to mine the day after writing that horrible story where it was just a mish-mash. It was a horrible job. I found this crumpled up piece of newspaper in my mailbox. I unraveled the crumpled paper, and in red ink—well, really, red crayon that we used in those days to mark up copy, Gene's total note—it was my story, and his total note was, "This made us look stupid."

SH: Oh! Let's change tapes.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

SH: Okay. We've just put in the second tape. Let's continue. Let's see, you were talking about Gene Foreman as a great editor. What about your own ability or your own experience in terms of cultivating younger reporters, or any reporters? Does anybody stand out that you feel like you had a particularly positive effect on in helping them improve as a reporter?

BH: As I said earlier—and there's no modesty intended. I'm not a particularly modest person. I was not a great administrator. I think one of the terrific things that happened to me on the city desk we hired a fellow named Garry Hoffmann, and he became the assistant city editor. There were others, but he was my primary assistant. While I was sort of known as a flighty, seat-of-the-pants person who often would forget—during a tornado, I might send three people to three different places and forget where I sent them. Garry Hoffmann was this very precise, logical person, and he was the perfect balance. And I'm sure it's the only reason I was able to hold that job. I can literally remember him—of course, tornadoes were big stories. Anyone who has lived in Arkansas knows that it's a really frequent occurrence in the spring, and often, many people are killed. I can remember many nights sending people out in the state to cover a tornado, and Garry Hoffman quietly walking behind me making notes of where I had sent people with the full realization I would have no idea five minutes later. So Garry Hoffman, for sure, was both highly competent and a perfect balance, and also a very good newspaper man.

SH: I remember that. I think one of the things I'll contribute as an interviewer—my comment is that I think one of the distinguishing characteristics of the *Democrat* in those days was that as people came and went and the newspaper grew or changed, not infrequently, younger people without too many years of experience, without the opportunities to rise to positions that larger or more mature or more stable, perhaps, or bigger markets—it wouldn't have been the case.

BH: Yes.

SH: But at the *Democrat*, often younger people had the opportunity to move up fairly quickly, and many, I think, shone or thrived in it. Garry was in that category. Is that accurate, do you think?

BH: Oh, yes. And the same, with the reporters—all of a sudden, the people who were a year out of college or two years out of college were out covering the governor. You're right, they thrived at it. I remember very few instances of people failing under those circumstances. I think the reason for that—I think whoever did the hiring—whether it was John Robert or whoever was hiring at that moment—we picked very bright people who wanted to be in the newspaper business so badly [that] they didn't mind working long hours at low wages. And, again, I think the personality might be a little different than the typical *Gazette* reporter. They were a little edgier, a little—certainly not working any harder, because I'm sure they worked as hard at the *Gazette*, but driven people who were young and ambitious. When you hired a person, you never thought this was the end of their career—that the *Democrat* wasn't seen as a place—this is an important point that's just

occurring to me as I talk. At the *Gazette*, I think people did often see that as a career. There were the Bill Lewises—there were the people who . . .

SH: The Bill Sheltons—Ernie Dumas.

BH: Who covered the county courthouse? The fellow was there . . .

SH: I will tell you in a few minutes.

BH: Okay. Well, we both know.

SH: George. George. Anyway . . . [Editor's note: George Bentley covered the Pulaski County courthouse beat for many years for the *Gazette*.]

BH: The point is, the *Gazette*—if you had to paint a picture of the two newspapers, was often seen as a prestigious, last place to work for those who didn't want to leave the state of Arkansas. In very, very few instances, even early on or later, when it changed with the Hussmans, did you think that when you hired a bright, young reporter, that they'd be there longer than two years. Looking back, that might have been a wonderful thing that you got a caliber of person that you couldn't have hired if that was going to be how they had to support themselves and their family and take care of their ego for the rest of their lives. It was a place where we offered them a forum, and, as you said, a chance to do things they couldn't do at that age. And they offered us, sometimes, brilliance.

SH: Do you have any idea where Garry Hoffman is? Where did he move on to? Was he still at the *Democrat*? In fact, didn't he move into your position when you were fired by John Robert Starr?

BH: The last time—in fact, I've only visited the *Democrat* one time after leaving there in my entire life, and I think that was about three years ago that my wife—I was

remarried. My wife now is Mary Donovan. D-O-N-O-V-A-N. My wife and I were in Little Rock, and she encouraged me—she said, "I'd like to see where you worked. You've talked about the *Democrat*." We walked in. There was Garry Hoffmann sitting at a desk and looking not particularly different from my own eyes, at least, as when he did when I knew him. Meredith Oakley was at the newspaper. Eric Harrison, who covered arts and entertainment, was still at the newspaper. Now, this is accurate to three or four years ago when I visited. I have no idea of the accuracy of this now. Alyson LaGrossa, who may have a different name—I'm not sure how to spell LaGrossa—but was still there. So the thing struck both of us, and maybe given that we just talked about how the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* were different, and the *Gazette* would have been a destination newspaper—maybe the two papers came together—the personalities also melded, and all of a sudden, now the *Democrat-Gazette* became the same sort of destination paper. I think it's interesting to think about.

SH: Yes. Any—let's stop just for now.

[Tape Stopped]

SH: All right. Let me ask you a few additional questions, Bill. As an editor, think about—you described sending the reporters out to cover tornadoes and how to cover stories where there was a lot of management, kind of, of the news coverage itself. Do you have anything that stands out that you initiated—a story assignment or the coverage of an issue that you were particularly proud or you think was important in the *Democrat's* history or as a news event itself that you initiated or played a key role in?

BH: I really don't, Steele. I remember—and maybe this sort of illustrates my personality and the fact that I like writing so much. The thing I remember best is that John Robert let me write a weekly column that was on, I think, the op-ed page. That's probably my best memory of the fun I had. Now, I did have fun watching the people develop and grow, but I quite honestly cannot think of any single great project of mine. I will not be listed among the great city editors of all time. I think if I gained anything at all, it might be that there was a reporter named Pam Murphy. We worked together. After about a month, she came up to me and said, "You know, you're sort of a Zen city editor." And maybe I was. Maybe if I had any gift at all, it was as sort of a free-wheeling, allowing experimentation, not being so conventional, letting people sort of fly. I don't know whether that was the fact that I was lazy and didn't particularly want to mold them, but I let them take shape on their own. And I think maybe she was right. Maybe I was a Zen city editor.

SH: You had mentioned the coverage of the Marianna boycott, and that was an important ongoing story for some time. Let's go back in time a little bit—and I'm quite aware that this was before your or my time in the newspaper business—to the fifties [1950s] and sixties [1960s]. At one time, the *Democrat*, based on its ownership or management or both, especially in its competition with the *Gazette*, when the civil rights struggle and the school [integration] crisis at Little Rock [Central High School in 1957] and other civil rights-related issues—when those were most intense for a long period of time, the *Democrat* was seen as being more protective of the status quo which, in those days, of course, was the segregation—

separate but equal. By the time you were actively part of the *Democrat's* management, both as a reporter and then in the management role, did you ever see the coverage of stories influenced by a certain perspective about civil rights, or perhaps other political considerations otherwise?

BH: Let's start with civil rights. No, I didn't. We talked earlier about the Marianna situation. If it was a bias—remember, the reporters—while the management was very conservative, you're right. The views on the editorial page were very conservative, although, in those days, not racist that I recall, but conservative as far as being certainly right wing—but the reporters were young. They were twenty-two, twenty-three—if we erred at all in straying from objectivity, I would think we strayed on the left, and, certainly, there's no left or right in the civil rights. We very much thought of ourselves as fighting as best we could to write stories that advanced that struggle. And, again, that's probably, if you look back, too partisan, but that's how I recall it and, certainly, how it was when I covered the Civil Rights Movement.

SH: As a reporter, did you ever find or object strenuously to the way a story or stories were edited related to that issue?

BH: No. And think back to some of the names I've mentioned—Gene Foreman, Ralph Patrick—other editors—Jerry McConnell, Robert McCord—none of these people—you wouldn't have to know them very long [to know] that they're not going to inject bias into a story. There were very few sacred cows that I can recall. I'm sure there were some because that's just how the world is, but I do not recall at any particular moment where I felt that they'd changed the story to inject

their views into it. I don't think it happened.

SH: Okay. You mentioned two names we haven't talked about. Talk about your recollection of Jerry McConnell as a manager and an editor at the *Democrat*.

BH: Jerry McConnell brought humanity into the newsroom in a big way. If you could think of John Robert Starr on one side of the equation—this hard-driving, biased in many ways, opinionated man that—I'm talking about John Robert now—who literally had a bottle of Maalox [an over-the-counter medicine for indigestion] on his desk and would swig from it as he talked to you. Jerry McConnell was this wonderful sportswriter and then later an editor at the *Gazette* in sports who came over. He was a very likeable man, and also someone who would fight for the reporters and was very much on the reporters' side. When I say fight—in those days the important things to fight for would be salary and the way the job was conducted. He was very honorable man. My memories of him are of laughing at the jokes he told, [and] of the way he pulled the newsroom together with his personality. And we talked about Robert McCord—I think during that time he was president of Sigma Delta Chi—I think that's the name of the newspaper fraternity—the national president was someone who was seen in town, justifiably so, I think, as a thinker. Also, he's a very sincere and honorable man. [He was] also a conservative, and even in the conservative South, was striking as a conservative, but was one of those very southern things, a very intelligent conservative where it doesn't translate into racism, doesn't translate into any sort of hysteria, but was a well-reasoned conservative position—agree with it or not agree with it.

SH: Well, Bill, this has been great to talk to you about your recollections of your eleven years at the *Democrat*. Are there things that you'd like to talk about—put on the tape that we haven't covered?

BH: No. I truly look forward to reading it, though. What great memories, and if I had all the money in the world, I could think of nothing better than to gather everyone together someplace in Little Rock, maybe at the Peabody [Hotel], for a wild, long weekend where we'd drink beer and talk about it. This is the next best thing, since I can't do that.

SH: Good. Well, thank you for your time and your many good stories. This will be helpful in the record of the *Arkansas Democrat's* history and the history of Arkansas.

BH: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]