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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Mary Lowe Kennedy
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
24 July 2005

Interviewer: Gerald Jordan

Gerald Jordan: This interview is with Mary Lowe Kennedy. [It is being conducted for an oral history project on the *Arkansas Democrat* and *Democrat-Gazette* for the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History]. Mary Lowe, would you spell your name and we'll get some biographical information on tape before we . . .

Mary Lowe Kennedy: It's three words. M-A-R-Y. L-O-W-E. K-E-N-N-E-D-Y.

GJ: Where and when were you born?

MK: I was born in Pine Bluff [Arkansas] on November 15, 1948.

GJ: Did you grow up there? Did you go to high school there, and everything?

MK: I went to high school in Pine Bluff.

GJ: Yes. Did you go to Pine Bluff High School?

MK: I did.

GJ: So you were a Zebra.

MK: I was a Zebra, as it were.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: I graduated in 1966.

GJ: Yes. Where did you go to school?

MK: I went to Bryn Mawr College up here in Pennsylvania.

GJ: [Unintelligible]

MK: Well, that's one way. You calling Gene Foreman was the other way.

GJ: That was fortunate.

MK: Yes.

GJ: I lived near Bryn Mawr.

MK: [That's been so long ago?] [Laughter] There it is.

GJ: Well, now, how did you find out about Bryn Mawr—way away from Pine Bluff High School. Was there a counselor or teacher or any family connections? Friends?

MK: Zero. My parents said I had to go to a girls' school, so I looked in the college book at the Seven Sisters and found the smallest one. And that's the truth, Gerald. At that time, I had wanted to get out of the South, and that's the only reason.

GJ: That must have been quite a time, coming up here in the fall of 1966.

MK: It was. I didn't know anything about anything. The sixties [1960s] just [laughs] destroyed my mind.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: I really didn't know anything. It was just pitiful. Anyway, it was an interesting time. You were there.

GJ: Oh, yes. Tell me about your earliest interest in newspapering and how that developed.

MK: Well, that's the fault of Bill Eddins. He was my boyfriend in high school, for a while.

GJ: I didn't know that.

MK: He worked for the high school newspaper, so I got interested in it. He was a year ahead of me. When he graduated, I became the editor of it. The typographical stuff interested me, for some reason. I got a summer job at the *Pine Bluff Commercial* working in the composing room. They let me have a little internship

there. That was in the days of hot type, so I learned to run a Linotype. Oh, I just *loved* doing that. But then, the next summer, after which was my first summer after my freshman year of college, Gene Foreman gave me an internship at the *Commercial* being a reporter. So that's really the story.

GJ: But it started in high school?

MK: Well, yes. It was really Bill Eddins. Remember him? There's no telling what would've happened.

GJ: That's amazing. Were you also on the student newspaper staff at Bryn Mawr?

MK: No, I really wasn't. I was so out of my depth at Bryn Mawr, I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't try to do that too. But I worked in the summers in Arkansas for the *Commercial*, and then Gene Foreman hired me in the summers when he was working at the *Democrat*.

GJ: Yes.

MK: While we were just talking—I must have been there when you were first there.

GJ: Yes.

MK: I thought I had just worked there one summer, but it must have been two summers.

GJ: Yes. It was the summer of my freshman year [unintelligible] my sophomore year, 1968. That's what I did before my junior year in 1969. And in 1970 I was headed for graduate school.

MK: Yes. Well, we were at the paper at the same time because 1970 was when I graduated from college.

GJ: Yes.

MK: So it must have been—and my memory is, therefore, completely untrustworthy.

GJ: Well, I can't think of Betty's last name. I was interviewed by somebody for this project, too, and I could just remember Betty from Arkansas AM&N

[Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College]. I can't summon her last name to save my life.

MK: Me neither, and I can almost see her, because she was really pretty.

GJ: Remember the house ad? Remember the half-page pictures of house ads?

MK: Oh, yes.

GJ: Quite a show of diversity [laughs].

MK: Well, it was an idiosyncratic place.

GJ: [Laughs] Now, how did you get to know Foreman? Was it also through Bill?

MK: Yes, because he was working at the *Pine Bluff Commercial* and then I got—I knew him there, and through him I got to know Foreman. The story that Gene will remember was that I was working in the composing room and I noticed that the obituaries that weren't written which weren't local—they had datelines on them and had a little agate line that said, "Special to the *Commercial*." So one came through that didn't have this little agate line, and I thought, "There must be something wrong," and I went out into the newsroom and asked him. And, of course, it was supposed to be there, so he was impressed by that. I credit that with persuading him to give me a job the next summer. It was a very "Foreman" sort of thing, the day he called me.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: The main thing I remember about that was I was a dreadful reporter—just awful.

GJ: Why do you say you were a dreadful reporter?

MK: Well, because I'm shy, and I really didn't know how to do it, anyway.

GJ: Yes.

MK: But I did learn to drive a stick-shift [automobile]. The *Commercial* had a little fleet of Volkswagens back then, and I had to go out and do a story. They said, "All right, go out and drive . . ." And somebody came with me and explained

how the stick-shift worked, and then they just left me there.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: I finally learned to do it.

GJ: But you liked the inside. You liked the desk better than the reporting stuff.

MK: Yes. I'm an editor. I've had a lot of *Democrat* people [unintelligible] as it turned out. Ray White had been there and Paul Nielsen and, of course, Bill Eddins and Gene and me. And you might know of more who were at the *Commercial*—people who followed Gene Foreman.

GJ: So tell me, then—how did you get from graduation—summers at the *PBC* to the *Democrat*?

MK: That was Gene. He went up there. I don't know whether I called him and [asked if I could] work for him in the summer, or whether he called me and offered, but I knew—Gene was great to work for, from my point of view.

GJ: Yes.

MK: I really learned a ton from him about editing. He had such integrity. Working for him was automatic self-respect because you were working for somebody who had high ideals and great integrity and knew a lot about editing prose. I loved to work for him.

GJ: So after your summers—you never worked full-time at the *Democrat*, did you?

MK: Yes, I did.

GJ: Oh, you did?

MK: I went back after you were gone, but after I graduated in 1970, I did go back there and work about a year and a half.

GJ: I see.

MK: Then Gene got a job at *Newsday*, and after a while, I was one of the last that he brought along with him. I went up there.

GJ: So you went to *Newsday*?

MK: I went to *Newsday*.

GJ: Okay.

MK: I worked full-time at the *Democrat* from—it would have been probably late June of 1970 until about the end of 1971. It might have been the first week of 1972.

GJ: Let me get straight the strike and all.

MK: Well, now, I wasn't—in New York?

GJ: Yes, at *Newsday*.

MK: There wasn't a strike while I was there.

GJ: Okay, so this must have happened earlier when Foreman . . .

MK: You're thinking about *The New York Times*, I think.

GJ: Is that where Foreman went and there was a strike and he had to go back home?

MK: Yes.

GJ: Okay, so that wasn't . . .

MK: I wasn't around at that point.

GJ: That wasn't at *Newsday*.

MK: No, *Newsday* wouldn't have any labor actions while I was there. Now, the *Democrat* almost did.

GJ: At the *Democrat*?

MK: Did you know about that?

GJ: I didn't realize there was a union anywhere within shouting distance of the place.

MK: Well, there wasn't, but during the time I was there—Gerald, I'm not going to remember the details of this very well—the commissions—a group of us began to see—I can't remember what all that we were receiving about the [discord?]. The pay scale wasn't too high, but it wasn't especially pay. There were some other things that were a problem. One of them was—the way I understood it, that

building used to be a YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] or a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. [Editor's note: The *Arkansas Democrat* was housed in a former YMCA building.]

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: You might remember there was a drain hole in the middle of the newsroom floor. It was on the second floor. Every so often, sewer gas would come up. I'm not kidding. I mean, it was bad! [Laughs] There were a number of things like that. Again, I don't know exactly how it started, but a group of us got together and thought, "Well, we'll just organized them. Maybe we'll even have a union." But the first thing we were going to do was present a list of demands to Stanley [Berry] and Marcus [George].

GJ: Yes. Marcus George was the editor and . . .

MK: Stanley . . .

GJ: . . . I guess Stanley was the brother-in-law or something. And [K. August] Engel was the publisher.

MK: You know better than me. I just wanted it . . .

GJ: I think Engel was the publisher or owner. [Editor's note: K. August Engel was both owner and publisher of the *Arkansas Democrat*. Stanley Berry and Marcus George were his nephews.]

MK: Well, we were going to present our demands to Marcus.

GJ: Yes.

MK: So we went and talked. Of course, we scurried around—sneaked here and there and talked in whispers. But we signed up as many people as we could, and went to all the older heads, too, who, of course, scoffed at us. But I don't think they ratted on us.

GJ: Yes.

MK: We were pretty sure they would. We took our list, including "repair the drain hole in the middle of the floor" to Marcus, and we all waited for an ax to fall, but no ax fell. A few days went by, and then they called a meeting of all the staff—not in the building, but in a hotel nearby. I've forgotten which one. It was in a conference room there. I swear, the only thing I can remember about that meeting was we all went there [and] we sat in the folding chairs, and Marcus stood to speak to us. And, to break the ice, he told a "dead baby" joke.

GJ: Oh! [Laughs]

MK: He did! "How do you make a dead baby float?" et cetera—at which point, I nearly fell out of my chair laughing—not at the joke, but at the fact that he told the joke. [Laughs]

GJ: That's just amazing.

MK: I've thought about it ever since because people probably thought I was laughing at that joke, but he *did*. I loved that because that was the *Democrat*. [Laughter] That just was the *Democrat*. Stanley, of course, was the one who—they had done a—was it Patsy? There was a young woman named Patsy. She was a friend of mine, and now her last name is gone. But she had taken over as work editor. There was a big book right around 1970 or 1971 called *Vaginal Politics*. She ran a review of it. He killed the name off the page when he saw it on the composing room floor.

GJ: Is this the one who chiseled the . . . ?

MK: Yes, that's what I'm told. I don't remember seeing it, but she was in a *state* about it.

GJ: [Laughs] Well, what was the upshot of the demands?

MK: Very little. They did fix the drain hole thing, and they did a few of the other things we were asking for. And that was it. We weren't exactly a bunch of bomb-

toting Trotskyites. [Laughter] Our demands were so modest, whatever they were. So that all just sort of simmered down and went away.

GJ: [Laughs] You said you took it around to some of the older heads—who can you remember among that group?

MK: Well, the main one that I remember was Lelia Maude Funston, who was the religion editor.

GJ: I remember Miss Funston.

MK: I have—but I found what James Scudder sent us—what he sent to Gene and me. I'll show you this. You can just have one. [Sounds of papers being shuffled] That's Scudder's note on top. This piece of copy was very typical of the sort of thing Miss Funston would send for the religion page, which ran on Saturdays.

GJ: [Laughs] It reads: "The Reverend John Yhugm, a former cannibal in a jungle between Peru and Brazil, will speak at 9:45 a.m. Sunday at Rose City Church of the Nazarene, 4611 Lynch Drive, North Little Rock. Before his conversion to Christ ten years ago, Yhugm was a savage stalking a primitive jungle, eating raw white men, snakes, and chickens. He was garbed in wild animal skins, his long hair hanging down his back." [Laughter] "Like the rest of his tribesmen, the little savage always walked crouched downward, waiting to intercept an attacking animal. He claims the tribe was cannibalistic, eating only the raw meat of white men, wild animals, fish, snakes, or chickens. He walked a power line to the United States" [laughs] "and whipped mountain lions. At the age of twenty-three, the Peruvian Indian wears a dark suit tailored especially for his four-foot, six-inch, ninety-pound frame. He travels in the United States as a non-denominational missionary." [Laughter]

MK: And that was Lelia Maude. [Laughter] This woman was kind of special. That's why James Scudder . . .

GJ: And that would have been as late as, what, the early seventies [1970s]?

MK: This was—well, the envelope says 1972.

GJ: My goodness! [Laughs]

MK: Isn't that wonderful?

GJ: Oh, boy!

MK: I was the religion page editor for a while, which meant I edited Miss Funston—trying to take out the really excessive stuff and put them on the page.

GJ: Well, that whole . . . [Laughs]

MK: Is that amazing? That was her—you *never*—you just *never* knew [laughs] what there was going to be because—of course, we were in the Bible Belt, and there were people who made—who had, I guess, as their career, would go around to revivals and things, and Miss Funston would write them up and run it.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: I understand she once told Gene Foreman when he was attempting to do something to her page that he was kicking the word of God around like it was a football.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: But she told me once—I once ran into her in the ladies room. She was combing her hair or something, and we conversed a little bit, and she told me that her parents had been missionaries to somewhere in the Far East—maybe China—and that they had given her to God when she was born. So I sort of think her life was—well, there's just no imagining. I think she felt she had to do what she did.

GJ: Yes.

MK: But she obviously would have nothing to do with our—Democratic Editorial Employees was the name of our proto-union. Lelia Maude wouldn't have anything to do with it. And I think older heads were—you know, some of the

sports writers and older columnists, if I remember—they didn't hold with it. You know, people in Arkansas—probably still today—thought unions were Communist, evil things.

GJ: [Laughs] I'm thinking of Jack Keady; he was sports editor.

MK: I don't remember him.

GJ: Who was city editor? I remember Fred Petrucelli. Do you?

MK: I do remember him. When I came back from college and worked here it was Ralph Patrick.

GJ: Oh, okay.

MK: He had become the city editor.

GJ: Gene, of course, was managing editor. And Marcus George was editor.

MK: Right. And Paul Nielsen and [unintelligible]. Oh, Bob . . .

GJ: Bob McCord was the editorial page editor.

MK: That's right. Editorial page editor.

GJ: Right.

MK: That was a good paper.

GJ: Yes. In fact, it was McCord who, I think, was the mover and the shaker behind my getting an internship there.

MK: Oh, was [he]?

GJ: In the journalism department. He graduated from Fayetteville.

MK: Had you been planning to be a journalist all along?

GJ: Yes. Yes, that was pretty well settled. It was just a question of how far to push it.

MK: Yes.

GJ: This—Miss Funston's column—I'm glad you showed me that. [Laughs]

MK: I'm glad you thought that was funny. You look at something like that, and you think, "Is it only *me* that would think this is utterly nuts?"

GJ: You look at it and you think, "This is a joke. Nobody offered this for print." But I remember her walk-through—when she would walk through sports and go toward the city room, and the sports kids—all hooligans—would do things to try to make her look because as she'd walk through she'd throw her chin up in the air and her head back and she would ignore it. And you could say, "Good evening, Miss Funston," or whatever, and she wouldn't even look in your direction. So one day the guys decided they were going to make her—they were going to startle her. So they got trash cans and Coke bottles so when she walked through they just beat these Coke bottles inside the trash cans—wham, wham, wham—and she never batted an eye.

MK: Oh, she wouldn't have.

GJ: She kept that pace and walked right on through. [Laughs]

MK: Lelia Maude knew her own mind, I think. She really did. After I had that one talk with her, I sort of respected her more. She wasn't a joke to me. She was very difficult to edit.

GJ: Oh, to say the least. I don't know how you got *anything* out of there.

MK: Well, I don't have—it would be interesting to see what Jim Scudder did with that one. But, basically, that's what you would do for her page was she'd give you a million of these little, short things like that—some of them perfectly straightforward, and others really, really [unintelligible], and you would try to kind of fit them all together into a page.

GJ: Yes.

MK: And sometimes they didn't fit very well. [Laughter] But she was really a *character*.

GJ: Now, do you remember Jackye Shipley?

MK: No, I don't. Who was that?

GJ: She was a staffer on the women's page.

MK: That's right. I remember [her] name.

GJ: She graduated from the university and came over and introduced herself when I was there. I'm trying to think of what her—I think she did features and stuff.

MK: Yes, I remember her name. I just can't remember where—and Bill Terry was there, and at some point. . .

GJ: Do you remember Ashley Higgins?

MK: Yes, I do. He had a little moustache, didn't he?

GJ: Yes. Yes.

MK: And a great name, I always thought. Ashley Higgins. What happened to him?

GJ: I think—and this is *really* foggy in memory—but I think he went to seminary, and I think that it was probably more that he was interested in it than he was trying to dodge the draft [for the Vietnam War].

MK: Yes. Right. I think I remember him.

GJ: He impressed me as somebody who was headed for—if I remember him correctly, he was [unintelligible] headed toward being sort of an erudite minister and not a wailing, screaming, thumping preacher.

MK: Yes.

GJ: Do you remember Bob Starr before he was John Robert Starr?

MK: Yes, I remember him. We used to have to go over next door where the AP [Associated Press] office was and pick up copy from them. Actually, I think we did some duplicates of the *Democrat* copy for them.

GJ: Yes.

MK: It must have been delivering rather than picking up. But I remember him. And there he was. He was pretty large and he was cheerful. Well, it was sort of a down-beat cheerful, but there was no sign that he was going to turn into what he

turned into—did you think?

GJ: [Laughs] None at all! None and all! I was surprised—all that's evolved. I can remember him from the *Democrat* and AP before that.

MK: A lot of strange evolution has occurred in the *Democrat-Gazette*.

GJ: [Laughs] So what sort of things went on on the desk for you? Was it as structured as the [*Philadelphia?*] *Inquirer* later on? Was it early Gene—training and manuals and guides and policies?

MK: No, Gerald. [Laughter]

GJ: Not just yet.

MK: No, it was that way because it was an afternoon newspaper. We'd come in—we'd get there at, what, 7:00 in the morning? I can't remember, but we were supposed to be publishing a newspaper by 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon.

GJ: Oh, yes, the deadline was about noon.

MK: It was *really* fierce. So the first thing—one of my duties was combing the *Gazette* for obits [obituaries]. Then we would—there was a woman on the desk, I believe, named Mabel. I think she was a clerk or a secretary or something. She became very unhappy with me because I wanted her to confirm what was in the *Gazette* obits. The *Democrat* had just been picking them up [laughs] and putting them in. [Laughs] And there were a lot of them, too, so it was hard to confirm them all. I can't remember what the upshot of that was, but I really thought we audited them. That's what we had done at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

GJ: Yes. Make sure that these people are dead and they are who they say they are.

MK: Well, yes, and that the dates of the services and everything were correct, and all that. So that was an early duty in the day, to take care of obits. And, of course, we had some that were called in to us. They didn't all come from the *Gazette*. There was an "Answer, Please" kind of column.

GJ: Yes, I did that at the tail end of my internship.

MK: Well, I got responsible for—this is a terrible passage in my history that I'm ashamed to admit, but there wasn't any time to do that thing. I wound up making up questions [laughs] so I could get the answers because I just didn't have any time to go and report things for this 1:00 in the afternoon deadline, or whatever it was.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: It was just terrible. And I know Gene Foreman will someday see this and will just be so appalled.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: Even I am, looking back on it. But there was *no time*. Anyway, there were many things you had to do to get that paper out.

GJ: Yes.

MK: I can't remember too well, Gerald. I may have blotted them out of my mind.
[Laughs]

GJ: Well, that's certainly the tale of an afternoon newspaper. We learned to turn stuff around in a hurry because, as you were saying, some of the desk people, like wire editors and all that, might get there at 5:00 and stay until 1:00, but most of the folks worked either 6:00 [a.m.] to 2:00 [p.m.] or 7:00 [a.m.] to 3:00 [p.m.], and they might have one or two 8:00 [a.m.] to 4:00 [p.m.] people to segue into the evening.

MK: To wrap things up.

GJ: But that was it. You got there at 7:00 [a.m.] and you started cranking.

MK: You really did. Do you remember in the copy desk how they got stuff to the composing room?

GJ: The conveyor belt? Yes.

MK: That conveyor belt—and there was a spiral staircase you'd walk up. That's the only place I've ever seen that had the composing room above the newsroom. The paper would come falling out of that thing [laughter] or get stuck up there. I remember Paul Nielsen standing on a chair trying to get stuff unstuck from that conveyor belt. What a thing.

GJ: [Laughs] What do you remember about the layout of the place? How did it look? Did it have a real newsroom feel to it?

MK: Well, I thought it did. It was, in fact, a newsroom.

GJ: Yes.

MK: You know, I can't remember what you saw when you walked in the door off the street because we had to go upstairs to the second floor.

GJ: Yes, the first floor was business.

MK: I don't even remember what it looked like. But then you'd come—there was a little landing place.

GJ: Yes. It looked like—I'm trying to remember—did you turn left at the landing and . . . ?

MK: Did [unintelligible] come off the landing?

GJ: Yes, the room would open up to you [unintelligible].

MK: Yes, there was a door with a—I'm remembering it having a window in it, but that's probably wrong.

GJ: No, I think I remember that, too.

MK: It was at Capitol and Scott Streets. And I think when you walked through that door off the landing, Capitol Street was on your left, and you were facing Scott Street. And then newsroom was to your right.

GJ: Yes.

MK: And right straight across from you was Marcus's office.

GJ: Yes.

MK: Then McCord's office and then Foreman's, I think.

GJ: And Foreman. Yes.

MK: Then there were the desks for reporters and then the city desk . . .

GJ: Yes. And go around the corner to sports.

MK: . . . under which was that drain hole.

GJ: And all the way around to the women's department.

MK: Yes.

GJ: For some reason, I can't remember what would've been in the middle, though. Maybe something to do with the composing room or what have you.

MK: I can't remember, either.

GJ: But you couldn't go straight across, you had to go sort of around.

MK: The photographers had that sort of lair in-between.

GJ: Yes.

MK: There were a few older heads there, too. And also Steve Keese, who I thought was just the *best* photographer. Now, Steve is still—I still see his name when I'm at home and looking at the *Democrat-Gazette*. He's still around taking pictures.

GJ: Yes.

MK: He was a *great* photographer. And somebody named Robert Ike Thomas. Do you remember him?

GJ: I don't remember him—probably because I bet he shot a lot of news stuff. I got to know some of the guys who have shot sports better because I was around them more. And there was one—I'm trying to think—was it Owen [O. D.] Gunter?

MK: Oh, yes! Go ahead.

GJ: He seemed shell-shocked to me. He just sort of walked around the newsroom muttering to himself. [Laughs]

MK: Yes. I liked him, but he *was* . . .

GJ: Yes, he was likeable, but he was [wounded?].

MK: Do you remember Ralph Baldwin? Was he in sports?

GJ: No. John Lammers—did you know him?

MK: No, I don't think I did.

GJ: John Lammers was in sports. In fact, he was the golf writer. Just a few years ago, he was teaching [English] at UCA—University of Central Arkansas—and got into a *big* flak over academic freedom and what he was allowed to say in his classroom.

MK: Oh.

GJ: I think they parted on a bitter note. But I remember Lammers used to cover a lot of golf tournaments. This was before I even vaguely was interested in golf. He had a seat on a charter [airplane]. He said, "Do you want to go to Texarkana?" So we flew down there and we covered a tournament. I enjoyed a ride on a little twin-engine Aztec or a Piper or whatever. And we got back late that night.

MK: Oh. Another person just came back to me, too. His name was Van Tyson.

GJ: Yes.

MK: He was one of those Tysons from the Tyson Foods place, I think, and part of that family.

GJ: Could be. I don't know if he was. [Editor's note: Van Tyson says he is not related to the Tyson Foods family.]

MK: Well, he didn't talk about it, I just heard that he was. So it might not be true. And he was friends with Bob Lancaster. I can't believe I was forgetting Bob. Van Tyson would write, too, and he would write about sitting on his porch way up in the north of the state somewhere playing a trombone in a storm.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: Do you remember anything about that?

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: I wonder what happened to him. [Editor's note: Van Tyson just retired after teaching journalism at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville for thirty-three years. He and his wife Ginnie own the *Atkins Chronicle* and *Dover Times*, both weekly papers in Pope County.]

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: Of course, Lancaster was such a good writer, and still is.

GJ: Yes. He's writing a column, I guess, for the *Arkansas Times*.

MK: Well, he has written it for many years. I used to subscribe to that and then I let it lapse. He was always such a good writer.

GJ: So you did your year and a half, then, and you went to *Newsday*?

MK: Yes, I just went up to Long Island [New York] and worked there until the middle of 1974. Then Gene came down here to Philadelphia, and after a while, he hired me.

GJ: Yes.

MK: I came down here and worked at the *Inquirer* about ten years and then I quit working. My husband worked there, too, and his sister. And her husband works for the *Daily News*. I quit because of children, basically. We were both working at night and it started to worry me to have no parent home in the evenings. But that meant I was afoul of nepotism policy as far as going back.

GJ: Oh, yes. Right.

MK: I freelanced there a little bit when they needed a spare editor, but I've never been back to the *Inquirer*.

GJ: Yes. Tell us what you're doing now.

MK: I work for the Vanguard Group, a large mutual fund company, as an editor,

editing corporate stuff and some marketing stuff. Lots of stuff. It's amazing how much a mutual fund company publishes.

GJ: [Laughs] Do you miss the newspaper business?

MK: Oh, yes. All the time.

GJ: Yes. But it has changed so much. So much of it now has evolved into online stuff. If you saw verification of stories and stuff today I can't believe I trusted him.

MK: How do you mean, verification?

GJ: Going to [Internet] websites.

MK: Oh, yes. Well, you know, it's great, though. We use it, too, where I work. I think you have to be so careful, but what a resource.

GJ: It's a wonderful resource, but it gets so overused that less-experienced reporters and editors tend to go to websites for information, so you'll ask somebody, "Where did this come from?" "This came from a website." "Which website?" And you find out that it's an advocacy group or something.

MK: Do you think there are really reporters who will do that?

GJ: Young kids, probably.

MK: I can imagine this happening with your students, but it's horrible to think of reporters out in the world not knowing that isn't . . .

GJ: I know. Just like the ones who will verify phone numbers by saying, "Well, it was in the press release." "Well, *dial* it!"

MK: Yes, I know! [Laughter] You know, there's some kind of basic human reluctance to dial a phone number and check it. I run into that even where I work now. We have problems with phone numbers that get printed. People don't want to call them.

GJ: [Laughs] Now, Foreman taught me that.

MK: Yes. Oh, he was rabid on the subject.

GJ: If you run a number in your publication, you *dial* it first. Don't presume that whoever gave you that number has it correctly.

MK: Well, at the *Inquirer*, he finally—this was something made possible by computers—I'm sure it's completely different now, but at the time I left, you could write in something called notes mode and it wouldn't print.

GJ: Oh, yes.

MK: Do they still have that?

GJ: Yes.

MK: So I'm sure it's the same. The reporters would have to put a verified note that each phone number and address [had been checked].

GJ: And oddly-spelled names.

MK: C-Q. Yes. [Editor's note: CQ is news jargon for "checked."]

GJ: [Laughs] So when you were at the *Democrat*—do you have any recollection of big stories or how the paper handled stories? Was there a sense of competition with the *Gazette*?

MK: Oh, heavens, there was a *lot* of competition with the *Gazette*. You know, I don't remember so much about big stories. I remember mistakes I made. I remember when I worked there in the summers, I was a reporter—doing a terrible job—instead of a writer. There were some of the civil rights stories still going on at that late date. Gerald, I can remember being sent to interview a man, and I cannot remember his name, but he was the first African American ever appointed to head of a state department by [Arkansas Governor] Winthrop Rockefeller.

GJ: Yes.

MK: I was still a college student in the sixties [1960s], and I was trying to do everything right. So I went to see this man in the capitol room. I asked him

something about being the first black something-or-other. And he turned around—he *did not like* that word because that was new back then . . .

GJ: Oh, yes.

MK: . . . to use the term "black." And I was trying to do what was right, but I insulted him. He had mercy on me. He could see that I was three years old, basically, in terms of knowing anything. But he felt insulted by that. There were so many things that were changing then.

GJ: Sure.

MK: In terms of how the newspaper handled things, I don't remember anything that struck me as unusual or especially good.

GJ: Yes.

MK: It was just such a scramble all the time. I'm sorry. I wish I had something I could say.

GJ: No. Don't worry. I can just remember early years at the *Kansas City Star*. I thought that the paper took a pass a few times on Watergate, but, then, I guess, in retrospect, a lot of papers around the country did. I'm also thinking of the time that—well, just last summer, the *Lexington Herald* apologized for not covering a lot of the civil rights demonstrations and things that took place in those days. They just thought, "If you don't write about this, it doesn't exist." And I didn't know whether the *Democrat*, in your estimate, was missing stories that should have been in the paper. I know that the *Democrat* was widely viewed as a conservative paper and the *Gazette* was widely viewed as liberal paper, coming out of [the events surrounding the integration crisis at Little Rock Central High School] 1957.

MK: Well, heaven knows that that has to have been true back then. [Laughs] When I was there Gene Foreman was there.

GJ: Yes.

MK: He intended to do things right. And I'm absolutely sure we did not cover [some] stuff that needed to be covered, but that would be because we all didn't know about it.

GJ: Yes.

MK: We weren't conscious enough of this or that. Another thing I have a memory of—I will not get the details of this right—if there was an AME [African Methodist Episcopal] college in North Little Rock.

GJ: Yes, Shorter.

MK: Shorter. Thank you. The name wouldn't come back to me. Well, there was a conference there for—African-American groups all over Arkansas were going to get together—and this would've been in about 1969—to try to find ways to pool their muscle and be effective and all that.

GJ: Yes.

MK: So here's the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* sent to cover it. It was me and George Boozey from the *Gazette*. You know, I look back at that and think, "Duh!" [Laughs] What did I know about how to cover a thing like that? And what I think, basically—everybody who was involved in it from all sides was news. One thing—do you remember? I can't remember what year it was, but there was a takeover in Columbia—they took over the administration building at Columbia University.

GJ: [I was here for that?].

MK: And there were some very militant students involved in that. Well, one of them was at this conference, and I shot over there and sat down next to him and said, "So, tell me"—and this guy looked at me like, "What in the *world* sort of animal are *you*?" And at a certain point they were trying to make plans, and they kicked

George Boozey and me out of there. So we had the drama of being thrown out of the conference. But, prior to that, some people came around and showed me literature. Horrible racist stuff. These people handed me, like, "Justify this to us." There wasn't anything to say. Well, anyway, this comes up partly just because I remember it—but also Gene Foreman, when I called him to tell him what was going on, he said, "Well, do you think this is important enough that we should put it on page one? And I said, "Oh, yes." So he did. He put it on page one, and I thought about that later, too, because I can't remember ever hearing of the group doing anything else.

GJ: Yes.

MK: But it was just another—you know, so many things were happening back then.

GJ: Sure.

MK: And that was Gene also wanting to give proper play to whatever was going on.

GJ: Well, step by step. Do you remember on the desk any discussion about when it was proper to identify people by race or anything like that?

MK: Well, you probably could go back over there and tell them. Back to the time at the *Pine Bluff Commercial* when they finally integrated the—I can't remember whether they integrated the obituary page or the hospital admissions—because they were running separate . . .

GJ: Yes.

MK: I think at the *Democrat* when I was there—I think we had quit identifying people by race, but I can't remember exactly. I'm pretty sure we just didn't do that.

GJ: Yes. Maybe that would've been around 1970, or so.

MK: They were still doing it when you were there?

GJ: Yes, and at the *Star*, too. We had some nice discussions about that.

MK: Oh, really?

GJ: Now, here's one thing I remember about the *Democrat* that, I guess, if I had been a little more self-assured or just gutsy, I would've come in the door asking, "All right, when are you going to stop running this thing called "Hambone's Meditation." Do you remember that?"

MK: No!

GJ: Oh!

MK: "Hambone's Meditation."

GJ: Maybe Foreman stopped that. Maybe you never saw it. But there was some caricature of a rural African American—straw hat, big eyes, big lips, the whole thing—and every day he'd have some stupid aphorism. It was called "Hambone's Meditation."

MK: Oh, Gerald!

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: That's *terrible*!

GJ: I think Gene stopped that.

MK: He must have because I don't remember that.

GJ: But it was on page one every day down in the lower right- or left-hand corner.

MK: Oh!

GJ: Oh, yes, it was amazing. It was absolutely amazing.

MK: Yes, I know. I have no memory of that. [Laughs] That's so bad. I'm glad I have no memory of that. The stuff I *do* have memory of is bad enough. I'm glad I don't have memory of that.

GJ: [Laughs]

MK: Geez, that's bad.

GJ: Yes, that was pretty hard to take. And the reason that I knew about it was because I grew up reading the *Democrat*. Now, you would've thought that an African-

American house would have been a *Gazette* house, but somehow or another the *Gazette* carrier did or said something that our family said not only, "No," but "Hell, no, and don't you ever come here again."

MK: Wow.

GJ: So the only time I saw the *Gazette* was at school.

MK: So all you had was . . .

GJ: The *Democrat* and a lot of other papers from around the country: the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Arkansas Baptist Voice*.

MK: You all were a big newspaper family.

GJ: Yes. I never really thought about it until my little sister pointed it out. We were talking about how I got—she said, "Well, you were always in the kitchen there behind a pile of newspapers." I was reading sports and—it never occurred to me that we had all these papers coming into the house.

MK: Wow, that's really something. Where did you grow up?

GJ: Malvern.

MK: Malvern. Okay. Which is where I work now.

GJ: Yes.

MK: Malvern, PA.

GJ: Yes. [Laughs] Well, anything else that comes to mind that strikes you as—the *Democrat* was quite a place to learn or quite a place to grow up? I think I'm trying to remember the folks I saw in two summers—I thought that the staff—they had several young kids and a lot of experience. And by that, I'm using that as a euphemism for old—experienced staffers. I don't remember—of course, I guess I probably couldn't guess at people's age.

MK: Well, . . .

GJ: But I'm thinking that we had a lot of World War II-vintage folks around there and

a lot of whipper-snappers.

MK: Well, I think that's right. It probably changed some the longer Gene was there because some of the people were really old enough to be close to retirement.

GJ: Yes.

MK: And the copy desk had some older guys on it, too. I can't remember. There was one named Leon that we all liked a whole lot and something dreadful happened to him. He had a stroke. He was one of those people that it changed his personality, and he became really unpleasant.

GJ: Really?

MK: Yes. He had really been just as nice as anything. Really, really likeable. And he became just *mean*. He was ugly to you. His wife was desperate because her husband was basically gone, in a way. I can't remember his last name. But I think that might be [one] of the mature ones.

GJ: I remember that if you really messed up something, they didn't pull you aside or take you to some conference room and talk about [it]. They'd go off on you in the middle of the newsroom. [Laughs] And the *Star* would do that, too. "You can't write this stuff! What's the matter with you? You can't do this!"

MK: Geez.

GJ: So you just sort of sank or swam there right away. I think it was a good place to learn.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of Interview]

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